Jeremy: Hello and welcome to Proles of the Round Table where we sit down, have a few drinks, and talk Marxist history. Check out our website at prolespod.com where you can find our back catalog, links to all the resources we talk about, and a whole communist ebook library, along with a few recipes. If you want to extra support us, check out our Patreon where you can give your hard earned wages to a bunch of sectarian tankies in exchange for bonus episodes, clothes, and content, find out more at patreon.com/prolespod. We wanted to thank this episode's primary sponsor who enabled us to pay the mortgage on the luxurious Proles pad. Big thanks to our sponsor, the Democratic Socialists of America. Today with us, we have Colette. Thanks for coming on, how are you doing?

Colette: I'm doing really, really well today. Thank you so much.

Jeremy: Good. So I guess you want to give the people at home rundown of what you're going to be talking about today.

Colette: Yeah, so today we're going to be talking about, broadly speaking, democracy in a socialist context. So we're going to go from understanding democracy from a historical materialist perspective, and then we're going to go into how proletarian democracy has been implemented in revolutionary states and within parties in the form of democratic centralism.

Jeremy: Nice. So as always, I'm Jeremy and I'm drinking Death Before Disco Porter from Left Hand Brewing, employee owned Left Hand Brewing. It was actually started as a capitalist company and then the owner, when he retired, basically gave the company to his employees, which was nice as far as like what capitalists can do. Pretty solid move. Also, to my left, I have...

Drew: I'm Drew and I'm also drinking Death Before Disco.


Drew: Yeah, so, quite the coinkydink, if you will. (laughter)

Justin: Alright, this is Justin and I'm drinking bourgeoisie tears.

Jeremy: Also known as water. So Colette, are you are you drinking tonight?

Colette: Oh, yes, I am. So I have I have with me a Washington gold cider. It was the only cider made with Washington apples available at Walmart at in the morning when I do my grocery shopping. And I am not going to go on Proles of the Round Table and drink cider made from inferior New York apples. I'm going to drink cider made from good hearty Washington apples.
Jeremy: You’re gonna split the listeners of Proles of the Round Table, we’re gonna get death threats from New York. So I guess just where do you want to begin?

Colette: Right, so in order to understand democracy as it has been implemented by revolutionary states throughout history, we first have to understand democracy in a historical materialist framework. So I’m not going to give an intricate history of what democracy is from Athens to now, because we could be here for hours. So broadly speaking, democracy as a word means “controlled by the people,” or “run by the people.” Right? So factored from that you have bourgeois democracy and proletarian democracy, because those are the two classes that run shit, right? So, with any bourgeois democracy, the dominant tendency within that is what is most often referred to as liberal democracy or parliamentary democracy. It’s the dominant form of government in most bourgeois capitalist states. It is control of a state by the legislature and how that legislature is elected varies from state to state, but broadly, it’s a representative form of government, which means that it's not going to necessarily be proletarian. On the proletarian side, there's a couple of different ways that that is branched out over the course of history. And that's what we're going to be focusing on. So, liberal democracy, we're not going to really go into that much, because that's a whole history. And this isn't the history of bourgeois democracy.

Jeremy: And most people are pretty familiar with, you know, bourgeois democratic, liberal democratic states, as most of us live in those places, you know.

Colette: Yeah. So, democracy from a socialist context is, the proletariat runs shit and not the bourgeoisie. Oh, boy. The first example we really had of this system being developed in a real life situation outside of a theoretical situation is in the soviets of pre-revolutionary Russia, little ‘s’ soviets. So soviet in Russian just means ‘council’ or ‘assembly’. Like, it doesn't necessarily imply explicitly leftist usage, just... it just means council, and the purpose of soviets in the 1905 revolution, when they first had their big trial by fire, was they were essentially glorified versions of Trade Union councils, where you would have representatives from the different factories and farms and unions kind of congregate in an assembly in, say, Petrograd or Moscow or whatever city and they essentially operated as a parallel government. And in the 1905 Revolution, the aborted January revolution, they directed strike actions. And even though that revolution failed, it was a perfect test to kind of hone the skills of the soviets. And then when 1917 rolled around, they were ready to actually take the final push and basically carry out the world's first socialist revolution.

So at this point, Lenin has pretty thoroughly laid out in What is to be Done? And, around this time if I’m remembering correctly, in Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder, kind of what his idea of democratic control looks like. Not just in a state or in a local assembly or whatever but within the organization and this is where we get democratic centralism from. So democratic centralism and Soviet democracy come around at around the same time and they're heavily influenced by each other.

So this might be a good time to pause on the history and go towards the theory aspect of democratic centralism. So, democratic centralism is the application of Marxist method to the question of how best to organize the working class in the revolutionary transformation of society. It embodies two elements: democracy and centralism. There is no formula for the perfect proportion of these two things. That is to be determined by the communists of that time and moment and place, that’s on their shoulders to kind of determine like, “Okay, what’s the level of centralism we need? What's the level of democracy we need?” So the democratic aspect ensures effective decision making, right. So it includes thorough discussion of all questions, full airing of minority viewpoints, collective decision making,
periodic reviews, reports from the membership, criticism of all aspects of political organizational
theoretical practice. It rests on the principle that collective decisions made by majority vote after a full
informed and frank discussion are more likely to reflect the interests of the working class than
decisions made without such a discussion. So this kind of lays to rest the really popular idea among my
non Marxist-Leninists that democratic centralism is inherently oppressive, that there's this sort of
tyranny of the party line, and that there isn't really any discussion and that if you voice any sort of
opposition, you're expelled from the party. That's completely counter to the purpose of democratic
centralism in the first place. Lenin explicitly makes it clear that the minority viewpoints need to be
heard, in order for the discussion to truly be democratic, everyone needs to be able to voice their
opinion. The difference between this and what I will discuss later with horizontalism is that once the
decision is made by the assembly, it's expected that everyone follow that decision. Debate stops once
a vote is taken. And that's where centralism comes into play. Centralism is necessary to ensure unity in
carrying out decisions to provide strategic and tactical flexibility, to create the basis of social practice
for evaluating the organization's line. It basically means that leadership needs to be active, efficient,
not bureaucratic, always listening to the other members, and responding decisively to guide the
organization and the working class through the twists and turns of revolutionary struggle. So those two
things put together form democratic centralism and Lenin lays this out as like the basis of organizing in
any revolutionary party, and that gets taken into the real world and applied as soviet democracy.

So, soviets operated on a very similar practice; that decisions were thoroughly debated, the idea that
soviet were these tyrannical, almost dictatoral, I mean, they were dictatoral, but not in the way that
people think they were, these sort of like oppressive assemblies, where no one really got to voice an
opinion or anything is completely false. And we will see that later when we talk about how the USSR
operated under Stalin. So that's the guiding principle behind revolutionary organizing.

So there's a couple of places where democratic centralism can go awry. These two tendencies are
more Maoist terms, but they're very, very convenient to explaining the two problems that can occur
here. So the first one is called Commandism, which is what happens when you have an extremely
bureaucratic leadership that basically takes the place of the membership when it comes to making
decisions about the party. Leaders command, members become employees. “Don't ask me to take any
responsibility, I just work here,” kind of mentality. Commandist parties quickly tend towards
dogmatism, party congresses become rubber stamp affairs. The democratic aspect basically withers
away. On the other hand, there's what's called ultra-democracy, where there's basically no guiding
leadership, where the membership just kind of always is in a state of debate, and always in a state of
discussion but never really makes decisions. And the decisions they do make aren't ever really
effectively carried out. So you have to balance the democracy and the centralism so that you don't
tend towards commandist bureaucracy but you also don't tend towards anarchistic ultra-democracy.

Jeremy: Do you feel like the transition to the theory of democratic centralism made the soviets more
effective in terms of being able to respond to the revolution conditions in 1917, as opposed to 1905?

Colette: Oh, yes. And we will see during the Civil War, that that's what ended up pushing them towards
being successful. Enter 1917. The next year begins the Russian Civil War. And the Russian Civil War
really sees two models of proletarian democracy, not pitted against each other, but their feet are held
to the fire. You have the democratic centralism of the Bolsheviks and the anarchist democracy of the
Makhnovist Black Army. And it could not have been a more divergent tale of two systems. The soviets
miraculously weathered the Russian Civil War despite the fact that we're in a period of War
Communism, so all surplus food and resources are going straight to the Red Army, going straight to the
war effort. So there's severe rationing, there's, I mean, there's a lot of starvation, not because of problems by the Bolsheviks, but because they're in a period of war against 18 imperialist countries. And then you have the anarchists, who are bunkered down in the southern parts of the Ukraine. And for this, I'm going to turn to probably the most unlikely source that I would have ever found for a good look at what the anarchist Ukraine was like, which is an article from the International Socialist Review. (Laughter)

Jeremy: Heyyy.

Drew: You know, worse things have happened.

Colette: Yeah. “Clearly conditions were not right for egalitarian socialism, let alone the statelessness of communism, but anarchists ignore the objective difficulties facing the revolution and proffer Makhno as the valid alternative. The Makhnovists made two attempts at organizing production along anarchist lines. Both were centered at their base of operations, Gulyai-Polye. The first, in February 1918, lasted three weeks before the Austro-German invasion destroyed it. We know little of this experiment; Makhno’s own memoirs barely touch on the political and economic organization of the communes. Instead, he spends most of the time discussing eating arrangements.” (Laughter)

Jeremy: That’s basically what I do too, so. (Laughter)

Colette: Makhno ignores all the key issues for describing his society’s workings. Dark writes, “There is nothing on social relations of production, on the division of labor, on crop selection, on the labor process, on marketing, on the distribution and surplus, simply 300 undifferentiated anarchists and peasants in a communal canteen, taking a day off whenever they felt like it and these few weeks in spring were to serve as the basis for a social revolution.”

Jeremy: Damn. That was harsh.

Colette: There was a second attempt, which lasted a bit longer about six months, and they were run a little bit better. But the problem with the second round was that they were very, very small, and represented a very small proportion of even Ukrainian peasants. And the thing to know about the anarchists was that they were almost entirely peasant based. Makhno was extremely disdainful of workers and especially of cities. He had some really nasty things to say about cities. He called them a poison. His vision for worker and peasant relations was based on barter between the two. And the Makhnovists also relied heavily on just plain old banditry, which leads us into kind of an interesting confrontation that happened between Trotsky and Lenin. Because Trotsky is the Red Army Commander at this point.

Justin: Never heard of him. (Laughter) (Mocking voice) Low energy.

Colette: And he has a divergence of opinion with Lenin over the Makhnovists. Lenin wants to maintain the tenuous alliance that, I mean, the alliance between the Black Army and the Red Army was never very solid in the first place. It was always extremely tenuous. Lenin wanted to maintain that because he saw the anarchists, as flawed as they were, as a bulwark against the White Army and the Ukraine which was making some really pretty amazing progress. So he wanted to maintain that alliance because he felt that the Red Army needed all the help it could get in Ukraine. Trotsky wanted Makhno arrested and shot, because Makhno was leading basically pirate raids on Red Army supply trains,
stealing loads of bread that were meant to go to the front. Makhno, because the communes were failing, just simply resorted to simple banditry, to help maintain his army. They eventually flip flopped several times in terms of who they were supporting. They were allies to the Reds, and then went to the Whites, and then neither, and helped both. The thing I want to draw away from the Makhnovists is that their idea of democracy absolutely failed. And as scientific socialists, if we’re to believe that revolutionary theory needs to be practiced and tried and experimented with, and then have some modicum of success for us to update our theory to include it, that doesn’t work when it comes to the Makhnovist experiment. The Ukraine was, compared to the Soviet model, a complete and abject failure. And that’s an important thing that I want to make clear. Because even today, we’re still kind of dealing with this battle between Marxists and anarchists, and the anarchists are still very much clinging to this immediate statelessness, that has been tried before and hasn’t worked. We have definitive evidence, primary source evidence, that this was an abject failure. And yet we’re still having this discussion. (Laughter)

Jeremy: It’s sort of like, you know, anybody who’s arguing for entryism or people who are arguing to, you know, try to steer the democrats to the left or engaging in electoral politics, fighting for, you know, a bourgeois party but trying to get left-wing candidates elected, these are things that have all been tried in the past and they have all failed repeatedly. It’s not…yeah. There are successful revolutions. You can look at those, follow their patterns.

Colette: The Russian Civil War is also a really good example of the failures of entryism, in that the Mensheviks outright just sided with the Whites. So back when the RSDLP, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party split into the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, when the civil war came the Mensheviks just outright sided with the imperialists. There was, I mean, it was pretty much immediate. There was a party, though, called the Socialist Revolutionary Party, that also had a split into Left SRs and Right SRs and the Right SRs joined the Whites, but the Left SRs kind of formed this tenuous relationship with the Bolsheviks in the interim government and they were essentially trying to do this kind of DSA type shit. And it didn’t work. And then when October rolled around, most of them just defected to the Whites. Some of them sided with the Reds, but a lot of them just went to the Whites. So this idea of, “Well, if we just participate in bourgeois parties, and try to effect a revolution from that...” that’s been tried before, and that didn’t work either.

So like, the Civil War, the Russian Civil War is really interesting because there's not a lot written about it, the bulk of Lenin's writings are from before 1918 and after 1921. So, there's kind of, in terms of primary source theory, the Civil War is kind of a blank spot, which I guess kind of makes sense if you're leading a war against 18 other nations. But in the sources that we do have, it's really interesting because it's the moment when all of these diverging ideas of how revolution was going to be effected, were experimented and were tried, and the only one that came out not worse for wear was Soviet Democracy.

So when we enter 1923, we have the first Soviet constitution. So after the Revolution, the constitution was sort of ripped to shreds. There... it was a mass undoing of all of these Tsarist laws, but that wasn't really a new constitution. The first new Soviet constitution was in 1923. And the way it was written and the way it was structured had a lot to do with the political atmosphere of the time. So there were people who were explicitly delineated as... the word doesn't translate well into Russian and I don't have the word in Russian off the top of my head, but it's something along the lines of “people who didn't have certain privileges.” These were mostly people who had been members of the bourgeoisie before the revolution, members of the nobility, members of the clergy, people who had been cops,
literally people who were Tsarist police officers were explicitly listed. And actually, the term ‘police officer’ was so hated that they just end up making a new word. And post-revolution, police officers were called “militia men”. ‘Police officer’ was not outright banned, but like it was extremely verboten to call someone a police officer because that was the tsarist term for that, right. So these people didn’t just lose voting privileges, they also couldn’t be members of communes, they were restricted to what jobs they could work, they had basically a reduction of rights. Which, again, is another point of “Well, so much for you know, socialist democracy if we’re just going to start excluding people based on their class on their class relation.” Well, post- any revolution, would you want to give the people who you just overthrew back their power? (Laughter)

Drew: Probably not, in my personal opinion. I mean, you’d definitely want to keep an eye on these people, because they have a vested interest in, you know, overcoming their very recent, shall we say, bitterness about the situation and returning to, you know, their original class position, which I think is, you know, kind of sort of somewhat understandable. So, yeah, you should totally, you know, keep an eye on them, in my personal humble opinion.

Colette: So, part of why the constitution delineated these people was that these were also the NEP years. So there was sort of this seven-year long experimentation with a mixed market economy that allowed for some very minimal privately owned business. Most of them were state-owned private businesses, if that makes any sense, or partial ownership, a lot of private co-ops because the purpose of the NEP was to basically infuse the USSR with foreign investment cash, because they were trying to rebuild after an apocalyptic civil war. And when I say apocalyptic, there were people in Leningrad, not then Leningrad, it was still Petrograd, who were ashen gray from only eating like 350 calories a day. So there was a lot of rebuilding that had to be done, so they had to do kind of this mixed market experiment for a couple of years, and because of that, they put certain restrictions on who had what rights. Because they didn't want this artificially created capitalist class to get too out of control, which...

Jeremy: And they did to some degree. I mean, we saw a bit of that in the Soviet cinema episode that Ethan did, all of the production studios and directors and whatever, they kind of dicked around and stole a bunch of money from the Soviet government and yeah.

Colette: So the NEP was very much a mixed bag. It did what it needed to do. And from that perspective, it was a success, but at the same time, it meant kind of this artificial recreation of a petty bourgeoisie, that ended up having to be liquidated a few years later. (Laughter)

Jeremy: Heeyyyyyy (laughter)

Colette: We're getting there, We're getting there. That's going to be a bulk of this episode. So the system of soviets, little ‘s’ soviets, in then 1923 constitution was pure, middle, and indirect. So in 1923, the various SSRs, the various (mockingly) ‘satellite states’... I kind of hate that term because it kind of implies that they were kind of like colonies. I just refer to them as like...

Jeremy: Sure, allied republics, neighbor states.

Colette: Yeah. So, before 1923 during the Civil War, the Russian Civil War, calling it Russian is kind of a farce, because every one of these republics had its own civil war, and in some places it lasted for longer than others. So, in 1923, a lot of these new Soviet republics were like “we're really small, and we're
really militarily weak. We just came out of fighting a brutal civil war. And we really don't have the resources to put up with a counter revolution. So let's assemble ourselves into a union, and that way we can all kind of mutually benefit each other” and hence the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was born. It was a completely voluntary union of 15 autonomous states that decided we’re going to form this sort of mega-confederation for mutual benefit. So most of the republics comprising the USSR were, for a period after October 1917, they were independent, completely, but in 1923, elected to associate themselves with the other states to compose the USSR. Simply because they felt themselves in danger of attack and wished to pool their economic and military resources, so that way the smaller republics, like Armenia and the Caucasian republics and some of the more sparsely populated SSRs, like the -stans, they could benefit mutually from the military and economic support of larger states, like the RSFSR and the Ukraine and Kazakhstan and whatnot.

So, the book that I'm... it's not really a book, it's more like a pamphlet, that I'm drawing a lot of this information from, is one of the best finds I have ever found on the internet. It is a pamphlet from 1943 written by a British guy who was living in the USSR at the time and he wrote this book basically explaining the entirety of the Soviet system in about 60 pages for the contemporary British audience. And it's extremely easy to read, extremely relatable and so during this pamphlet, he's relating, he's comparing and contrasting the USSR and the UK and what they do different, and what they do similar. And it's amazing. I can't believe more people haven't read this and it's definitely going to be a resource that should go on the show notes.

Jeremy: What's it called?

Colette: It is called *The Soviets and Ourselves: Two Commonwealths* by K.E. Holme, which is a pseudonym, I don't know who K.E. Holme actually is, but that's who it's by. And he basically explains everything. He explains how the constitutions work, he explains how the Soviets work, he explains how planning works... so this is going to be my big primary resource for the nitty gritty of certain parts of Soviet democracy. So the 1923 constitution outlined the rights of the Union republics, they acquired the right to diplomatic representation overseas, to organize national military units, to have their own flag, to have their own culture, to have their own anthem. And Stalin was really big on this. Can't imagine why. It's not like he was from a tiny Caucasian republic. He was really big on the right of these nations to national self-determination, and during the NEP, there was a strong push towards fostering these local cultures. That was scaled back during most of the 30s, mostly because centralization was required to prepare for the war effort. So the Union republics lost... I mean, I wouldn't say lost because they got most of it back, the kind of... a lot of those, “Let's foster national culture and identity” were kind of scaled back in favor of “We are a union together,” kind of, because they needed to foment unity, in order to prepare for the inevitable war against fascism. So, in that regard, there was some oscillation between how much leeway a Union republic had with where it could develop, but the Union Republics other than that were relatively autonomous and actually so were most soviets. The more I read about how soviets functioned in both the 1923 and 1936 constitutions, everything that every libertarian socialist ever has said that they want in a system existed in the USSR, which is really strange.

In the 1923 constitution, soviets, local village soviets could basically do anything they wanted, as long as it didn't go against the decision of a higher soviet, which gave them lots of autonomy, lots of autonomy that to municipalities in bourgeois capitalist states would be completely unthinkable. And so in the only difference between the 1923 and 1936 constitutions in terms of the pyramid structure was the method of voting. So 1923 was indirect, your local soviets elected the representatives to your
Oblast soviet or your Raion soviet or whatever the next highest stage was, and then the members of that soviet elected higher, then the numbers that Soviet elected higher. So it's this indirect voting system. The 1936 Constitution, which again, was encouraged by Stalin, took away that. Universal suffrage was instituted, which abolished the categories of people who had restricted rights that was in the 1923 constitution, and it also made all voting to soviets direct. So everyone in a local soviet would elect their members to their Raion soviet all the way up to the Supreme Soviet. So, Stalin made things more democratic almost every turn. No matter where you look, at some point Stalin was trying to figure out some new way to make the Soviet Union even more democratic and give even more rights of determination to the local assemblies. There's a document by one Grover Furr from 2007.

Jeremy: What was that name again? Grover Furr?

Drew: One Grover Furr, gotcha. (Laughter)

Colette: No idea who this guy is. Never heard of him before.

Drew: Sounds like a street name. When you say it like that. (Laughter)

Colette: So he wrote this article in 2007, called Stalin and the Struggle for Democratic Reform. When I put it all into a document, it's about 57 pages long, which is pretty, which is pretty sizable. And it basically outlines the history of Stalin trying to further democratize the USSR and how he was constantly rebuffed at every corner.

Jeremy: Sounds authoritarian.

Colette: Yeah. Which is the polar opposite picture of the one that we get, right? This idea that Stalin was this brutal autocrat that... there's no basis, there's no basis for that. And of course, it being Grover Furr, it's meticulously sourced and all of his sources come from the Soviet archives, or the secondary sources he cites got their information from the Soviet archives. So there's nothing left up to chance here. And it's just the wildest saga, you had Stalin advocating for multi-candidate elections, which was thoroughly rejected by the first secretaries because it would have encroached on their power. And it was those first secretaries that would like seek to further submit their control in the party. And I bet you can I bet you can name who one of those first secretaries was.

Justin: It wouldn't be a Khrushchev would it?

Colette: It would.

Justin: Oh, wow.

Colette: He was one of the most staunch opponents to all of Stalin's democratization reforms.

Jeremy: That's weird.

Colette: Which is a portent of things to come. And so Stalin, after the 1936 constitution, kind of gave up the fight until the last years of his life. So the 1936 constitution didn't have multi-candidate elections, but it did have direct voting, and it did have universal suffrage. The universal suffrage aspect was also incredibly unpopular with the first secretaries, but they were the ones who lost out on that
battle. So to give you an idea of how... taking an issue that would have been extremely common in the USSR in the 1930s, the easiest one that comes to mind is “How does central planning work?” This is the biggest conundrum for a lot of people who aren't well versed in Soviet... haven't studied the Soviet system much, because the idea of central planning is that there's a bunch of people in a dark room who come up with a bunch of numbers and just spit it out and tell people, this is what you have to do or else. So planning was an extremely laborious process. What essentially would happen is Gosplan, the state Planning Commission, would come out with a preliminary draft of what they thought, you know, the different soviets were capable of doing. And this document would be like 1000 pages long, literally, and it would get sent down the ladder from the Supreme Soviet all the way down to the factory and collective farm assemblies and at every stage along the way, the assemblies would get together and make edits to this document and say, “We think we could produce this, we don’t think we could produce this.” And then they would pass it down the next rung on the ladder. And then it would go all the way down to, as I said, the collective farm and and factory assemblies. And then when they were done with it, it would go all the way back up doing the exact same thing. So it would go back to the local soviets and then the Raion soviets and then the Oblast soviets and all the way back up to the Supreme Soviet until Gosplan would get back this ginormous document which they would then digest into the five year plan.

Jeremy: That sounds really democratic...

Colette: It is.

Jeremy: And unlike anything in liberal bourgeois democracy.

Colette: It is so democratic. Yeah, they made sure to get the voices of damn near every worker in the Soviet Union before they came out with this plan, and that was obviously intentional. The universal electorate in the USSR did a great deal more than just elect. It had incessant meetings for hours, it would pass resolutions by the hundreds of thousands. It would have endless debates, and I mean, it was the hotbed of democracy in the world at that point. And it's just the peak of privilege, I guess, to say, “Well, that’s not true democracy because it doesn't work the way that I think it should.”

Jeremy: Yeah.

Colette: So how workplaces work, so workplace democracy, the IWW would have loved the Soviet Union. (Laughter) Workplaces were owned by the workers, not in terms of the workers literally owned their workplaces, but the workers had control over their workplaces. They could fire their boss, which is the most mind-blowing thing to me ever. If a worker had a problem with their boss, they could write to Pravda, and it would get published in Pravda, and then the onus was on the officials to investigate that, every accusation against a foreman or a boss had to be investigated. And if a worker was fired, the other workers could retroactively reverse that firing. They could say “we think that's wrong, we're going to, like, reverse your decision,” which is kind of like a popular veto.

Justin: Nice, yeah, that's cool.

Colette: Collective farms operated somewhat similarly, obviously a little bit different than a factory would because you're growing food and not necessarily producing material. But essentially, you would have your quota from Gosplan, and you would kind of divvy up among yourselves what you thought each worker was capable of producing, and then that's how you got paid. You were paid not
necessarily by how long you worked, but how much you produced versus the amount that was set for you. So if you produced twice as much as what was benchmarked for you, that was really cool. And you would get a little bit of a bonus for that. You got to keep all of your surplus; this idea that you know, “They’re destroying food, they had to destroy all of their surplus,” that’s capitalism. It’s capitalist agriculture that has to destroy its surplus.

Jeremy: The dairy farms did that a couple years ago.

Colette: And they do it with fruit all the time here. The orchards in the Cascade Mountains, there’s just piles of rotting fruit that’s the most depressing thing known to man. But in the Soviet Union, surpluses were divvied back to the collective farms. So you could divide that produce among themselves, or you could sell it on the open market and then take the proceeds and distribute that equally. So there was, your surplus was going to benefit you in some way. Whether it was food, or whether it was going to be cash for new amenities, new whatever. So there were farm meeting assemblies at least once every two weeks and determined by majority vote how much of its produce will be distributed as dividend after delivery to the state have been completed and how much should be put into capital investment or cultural amenities like a club, a library, a children's crèche, and we have agendas from these farm meetings.

So in the Timiryazev collective farm in the province of Gorky, the following items appeared on the agenda of the collective farm meeting during 1941 and the first six months of 1942: “Rate of payment of members - 15 times, day to day organization of work on the farm - 14 times, personal needs of collective farmers and supply problems - 13 times, raising labor discipline - 12 times, stock breeding and fodder - 12 times, training and an appointment – 11, acceptance of new members – 8, long term planning of working contracts with state organizations – 7, checking up on fulfillment of Gosplan orders – 6, protection of crops and collective farm property - 5, finances - 5, by-industries - 5 sheep rearing - twice, cultural work – twice, and miscellaneous - 6 times.” So, we have agendas of these meetings and we can tell exactly what they discussed, how they voted on things. There were nearly 250,000 collective farms in the USSR. And that produced basically all of the USSR’s agriculture. And they fed people. We have, as has been mentioned on many a Proles episode before, CIA documents saying that Soviet citizens ate better and more than Americans. So this system worked.

Jeremy: So what you’re saying is basically the USSR was good actually.

Colette: Yeah. Amazing. (Laughter)

Jeremy: In every way.

Drew: Wow, okay, statist. (Laughter)

Colette: No, this pamphlet and reading how the Soviet Union actually functioned just cemented for me personally how well this system works. Finding primary sources on how these things worked is really hard to do, partly because that information is intentionally kept from people. It’s a miracle I was able to find this. I found this on the web archive and it was in a half readable format. And it took a lot of editing for me to get this into a state that I could give it to people and people could read it. So if it was so hard to find this, imagine how much harder it is to find like anything else about how the Soviet Union functioned and that’s because, it’s intentionally kept from people.
Jeremy: Yeah, I mean, if you Google Joseph Stalin, Grover Furr’s works are not going to come up, you know, it’ll be...

Colette: It's gonna be Kotkin.

Jeremy: Right. It's gonna be Wikipedia, and then it's gonna be Time Magazine, and then it's going to be articles trying to compare Donald Trump to Stalin, then somewhere down the line, you'll find a Kotkin biography, an Applebaum... (groans)

Colette: So, payment is made on lines as similar as possible to the piecework system that prevails in most factories. So the system was similar but had to be adapted because they're producing different things. The basis of this system is the labor day. So the labor day was how much you could produce in a day, and then your payment was determined based on if you went above or below that, and an idle or unskilled worker may find a labor day a comfortable day's work. So a worker who has problems, who has physical issues and can't work as much, or a worker who gets tired easily, a labor day is, “Oh, this is something I could do in a day,” and they'll be comfortable getting paid for a day's work. A good worker may be able to perform two or even more labor days a single working day and he'll be paid accordingly.

Drew: Wait a minute. Wait one goddamn motherfucking second here. (Laughter) So what you are trying to tell me is that socialism actually rewards hard work.

Colette: Yeah.


Jeremy: Sounds like a meritocracy. (Laughter)

Colette: And for the workers who went above and beyond, like really above and beyond, they even had their own name attached to them. They were called “Stakhanovites”, named after a coal worker that may have actually existed or he may have just been kind of like a John Henry/Paul Bunyan type character, who purportedly filled his... over-fulfilled his quota for the day by 256 times or something like that.

Jeremy: (Singing) Stakhanoooo! (Laughter) I really want one of those 1960s cheesy Hanna-Barbera-style animated cartoons about this worker who did 256 times...he’s just like (mimes machine noises)

Colette: We need more communist animation. Unironically, though. So, because of Stakhanov, workers who went above and beyond their quotas were called Stakhanovites and they were considered paragons of society. They were held up above... not held up above everyone else, they were not treated as, you know, better than everyone else. But they were kind of celebrities and this is a good example of a good worker, someone who goes in and does the work that they can for the benefit of our USSR. And that's really beautiful to me.

Jeremy: Sure, yeah.

Colette: So the reason I say that the Wobblies would have loved USSR is that unions in the USSR were organized industrially. So every industry had its own union, it was not craft unions like basically
dominates unions here, and unions are incredibly important in the USSR. In the USSR in 1940, of about 30 million wage or salary earners, over 25 million of them were organized into unions, which is like, most.

**Drew:** Sorry, could you run those numbers by me again?

**Colette:** Of about 30 million wage or salary earners, over 25 million were in unions.

**Drew:** That's, that's, that's about 83%. Wow.

**Colette:** Yeah, partly because union membership in the USSR was incredibly important. Unions were how you got a lot of your work benefits, in terms of, if you wanted cheap theater tickets, you would join a union. If you wanted cheap vacation spots, you would join your union. It's not like those things were inaccessible, if you weren't in a union, but being in a union made life a little easier. And those things were kind of incentives to get people to join the union. The more important functional role of unions in the USSR was that unions were who would negotiate how much wages were. So, wages, as we've already kind of discovered with collective farms, wages in the USSR do not mean what wages mean here. Wages are not, “we're going to give you so many rubles per hour.” There's a pool of money that the state sets aside for wages, and then the Central Council of Trade Unions negotiates with the government the wage pool for each industry, and its distribution within the factory is negotiated by every factory's union committee. It's rather like sharing out a dividend. So it is kind of like, the USSR’s economy did kind of function like a giant fucking co-op.

**Justin:** Call Richard Wolff! (Laughter) He’ll wanna hear about this, he’ll want to know.

**Colette:** Hold up, hold up a minute. (laughter)

**Jeremy:** Did they just say? (Mockingly) The Bolsheviks are right wing! (Laughter)

**Colette:** The factory committee supervises and controls managerial costs as well as looking after the conditions of work of its members and inspecting workshops for safety and hygiene. Its most important job is again one that seems odd to British trade unionists, the administration of social services. There is no Ministry of Labor or national insurance in the USSR. All labor legislation is drawn up in consultation with the trade unions: sick relief insurance, free holidays, maternity and funeral benefits, crèches, canteens, cheap theater tickets, all of these are administered by trade unions for their members.

**Jeremy:** How did that work for those who were not part of a union?

**Colette:** It was harder. So those things weren't impossible to get, everyone had health care, if you lived in the USSR, no one went without healthcare. The unions just made it easier to get on the health care plans. Old age pensions are granted at 60 years of age to male workers who have been in an employment for 25 years and at 55 to women who have worked for 20 years. These pensions amount of 50 to 60% of previous average earnings. Workers who do not wish to retire at pensionable age do not thereby forfeit their pension. So if you wanted to work longer, you totally could and there's no penalty to that. There's no means test, sickness benefit during absence from work is 100% of your average earnings unless the worker is declared totally incapacitated, in which case he receives a pension calculated as a proportion of his previous wages. Medical treatment is free for all. And then I
love this quote, “There is no unemployment benefit as since 1930 there has been no unemployment.” (Airhorn noises). Yeah, real airhorn hours. (Laughter)

Drew: What you are trying to tell me...

Colette: That everyone had a job.

Drew: Everybody had a job? Wow. So, but I thought socialism made people lazy.

Colette: See, the funny thing is that when you get 120 some odd million people to all get on board with the idea of working together for the benefit of everyone, people aren't really as lazy as you would think.

Drew: Wild. So basically what you're trying to tell me here is that when you actually, when people work for the benefit of their society, they directly see that benefit in their communities and in their own lives. As opposed to just, you know, basically making sure that your boss can buy a better Maserati next year, you're gonna work harder? Wild. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know about all this. (Laughter)

Colette: I know it's some really, really radical shit going on here.

Drew: Yeah, wild. I don't know. Anyway, my apologies. (Laughter)

Colette: No, hearing, reading all of this for the first time was a really big thing for me. Because this was like the first time I was reading a firsthand account of how the USSR in the 1940s actually worked. And it was like holy shit. Yeah, it was really a galaxy brain moment. This was, I think for me this tiny pamphlet was one of the things that finally pushed me towards becoming a Marxist-Leninist after a year of being this weird, right Bukharinite kind of thing. This was, seeing how beautifully this functioned is what made me, yeah, I'm on board with this 100%, this is good, this is good kush.

Jeremy: And that's kind of how it's been for me with a lot of things, a lot of little things sort of opening doors and giving me little insights into things that I previously believed being completely wrong. And you know, I think Lenin’s Letter to the American Working Man was a really big one for me, because at that point, I still considered myself a libertarian socialist or whatever. And, there were lots and lots and lots of little tiny... because it's a very short document, I think 10 pages or 15 pages or something, and there's a lot of little tiny points that really undermine the notion of democracy within a bourgeois country within a bourgeois nation and how, you know, the media within a bourgeois nation will call, you know, what goes on it, he was referring to the ‘Red Terror’ and he said, you know, the bourgeois media will refer to us as “terrorists.” But, you know, what of their terror? What of their imperialist terror? Their wars, you know, in which all of these working people die? How is that not terror? How is that not terrorism? And I was like, (mimes brain exploding), you know, and things like that. But there's lots and lots and lots of those points that I've hit, and I'm looking forward to reading this document to be honest, because it sounds enlightening.

Colette: The author is no principled Marxist-Leninist, he makes a couple of points, he's very idealistic, he makes a couple of points that, when I was editing I'm like (groans), because he's an Englishman from the mid-20th century. And that comes with everything you would expect it comes with. His conclusion made me cry, because it's just so poisonously optimistic. He's just so convinced that the
post war is just going to be this glorious future for humanity, because the UK and the USSR teamed up
to beat up fascism and they did and now they're best friends, and we're going to go into this with an
enlightenment and it's just going to be a glorious future for humanity, and everyone has so much to
learn from each other. And the last couple of paragraphs, and he closes out the document with a
quote from Gerard Winstanley, who was an English communist from the English Civil War in the 1600s,
that's really inspiring and poignant and I'm like, “This is this is gonna make me cry.” So those things
taken aside, it's a very well put together document.

Drew: Voting just worked basically by a secret ballot, right?

Colette: Yes and no. Originally, no. Back when soviets were these sort of ad hoc worker assemblies,
voting was done by show of hands, which was replaced by secret ballot in the 1936 constitution. So the
1936 constitution is really the maturation of Soviet democracy. It's taking all, it's saying, “So we're
going to move to this more structured stage of democracy rather than this sort of ad hoc stage that it
was previously.” And a lot of the democratic processes, as I mentioned before, thanks to Stalin, who
really, really, really pushed for the most democratic parts of this constitution. Democracy and the right
of the Union Republics were his two biggest pet issues. And he was pushing for further
democratization in the USSR, literally up until the day he died. And so in the power vacuum between
Stalin and Khrushchev, you had Beria, who I personally detest for reasons that I'm sure many people
know, that I don't really want to bring up right now.

Drew: Yeah, I think we're all aware of who they were.

Colette: Yeah, but Beria took over in the power vacuum after Stalin died. And for a very brief moment,
he undertook a lot of the democratic reforms that Stalin had been wanting to do, and then Khrushchev
undid all of them. So it doesn't really end up mattering in the end. But there was this weird year and a
half, if even that, where we saw some of what Stalin was pushing for become reality. So the last thing I
want to talk about before I move on to other examples of socialist democracy is the relationship
between the Communist Party and the state, because this is a huge topic of misunderstanding. There's
very much this idea that's been pushed in the anti-communist bourgeois media that in order to be
anyone in Stalin's Russia, you had to be a member of the CPSU, you had to be a Party member, you
had... the party was it and to be anything you had to be in the Party, which, under Stalin, is not true at
all. So the relationship between the Communist Party and the state was what I would
describe as tied together but also parallel, if that makes any sense. They were intrinsically connected to
each other, but they also operated parallel to each other. The Party was a separate apparatus from the
state, but the Party had influence on the state and the state had influence on the Party. There was like
a symbiotic, dialectical, if you will, relationship between the Communist Party and the state apparatus.
So being a Party member was big shit, because Party members were expected to be the leaders in their
workplace, the most upstanding people in their communities, the role models you looked up to, the
people you could go to if you had a problem.

Drew: Basically, my apologies, but basically from what I understand, it was actually more of a burden
to be a member of the CPSU then it was a privilege.

Colette: Oh yeah. Privileges were scant. That makes the idea that the being in the Party made you part
of this new elite clique, this new caste, is just full of horseshit because there was more pressure put on
you to be a member of, as a Party member then any benefits you got in return. If anything, Party
members were limited in pay to the average earnings of their workplace, because they were expected
to be the example, and they didn't want their members thinking that they were some higher kind of worker. They were just like everyone else but they were kind of also meant to be a leader. And to do that, they had to live by... there was a strict kind of, not like a moral code, but also kind of... yeah, there were certain, they were expected to not be drunk, they were expected to not carouse. They were not...

Jeremy: We’re fucked. (Laughter) I think I’m gonna delay that application to the party...

Colette: So there was a very, very intense understanding of what being a Party member was. And it was, and you had to have recommendations and you had to go through a probationary period, it was big shit if you became a Party member, not in the way of like, you get all these cool perks and benefits, because you didn't. But because that meant that you were now expected to be a leader, you were expected to be an important leader that people could look up to and trust in your community and your workplace. So because of that being a Party member was not for everyone, by any means. There were a lot of Party members but also the percentage of the population who were members of the Communist Party was not anywhere near as high as people think there was. And because of that the relationship between the Party and the state was not as unilateral as people think it was, because it wouldn’t make sense for a Party that was extremely hard to join to also have massive influence over how the state functioned. So it was more of a symbiotic relationship. The Party had a parallel structure to the state. So the state had soviets, had the pyramid of soviets, the Party had a pyramid of its own, and so they were parallel to each other and they also worked with each other. They informed each other, they helped guide each other, because the Communist Party is the vanguard party, so the Communist Party helps lead and inform the direction that the state takes.

Enter Khrushchev.

Jeremy: Oh, no! (Drew boos)

Colette: Yeah, lots of booing. Khrushchev does away with this, Khrushchev unifies the state and the Party apparatus. So in order to participate in the state functions, you had to be involved somewhat with the Party. And that does a lot of damage.

Drew: Sounds like it almost kind of bureaucratizes things, doesn't it?

Colette: Oh yeah, Khrushchev heavily bureaucratized everything. All of the things that people accuse Stalin of doing, the over-centralization and the over... the authoritarianism, was really under Khrushchev. Stalin was more about decentralization, if anything. He was probably the most pro-decentralization premier that the Soviet Union ever had. He was all about giving more power to local soviets and to the Union Republics. Khrushchev did away with that.

Drew: So basically you're telling me that I've been lied to my whole life.

Colette: Yeah.

Drew: Whack.

Jeremy: Shocking.
Drew: I’m shocked.

Colette: Yeah.

Justin: You should listen to Proles of the Round Table. (Laughter)

Colette: Khrushchev also did away with, as has been mentioned on I think two previous Proles episodes, made operating a collective farm a lot harder, mostly because he instituted mono-cropping, which I mean, if you go to Iowa now, go see how successful mono-cropping is there.

Drew: Not very.

Colette: Yeah. And then he also did away with the state-owned agricultural equipment co-ops. So under Stalin, collective farms could rent out machinery for cheap and/or free, and they could do it for their work, and then they could return it to the state run surplus co-op. And that’s how they, and so that relieved them of a massive cost burden, because that machinery was obviously expensive. So it was more efficient and effective to let the collective farms borrow that machinery for their individual usages, and then return it and then just use it as they need it. So Khrushchev did away with those. So now suddenly, every collective farm in the USSR has to supply their own heavy machinery, has to supply their own threshers, their own tractors, their own whatnots and production craters because of this. So in combination with bad production shifting, with over bureaucratization, anti-revisionism becomes way more appealing. (Laughter) Because you can really see a lot of the basis of these arguments that the USSR under Khrushchev really took a nosedive, not just in terms of quality of life, but how democratic living there was. Whereas previously you had... your voice had magnitudes of say in how the state was run, during Khrushchev and after your voice got minimized and minimized and minimized. And probably the next greatest blow to Soviet democracy was under Brezhnev.

Drew: He was the fellow with the eyebrows right?

Jeremy: Yeah. Gold phone, hairy chest, eyebrows, lounging by the pool. (Laughter)

Drew: Styling. I just love to point out those eyebrows, they’re amazing.

Colette: He basically nerfed the autonomy of the Union republics.

Justin: Did you just say nerfed?

Colette: Yes.

Jeremy: You’ve been revealed as a nerd. (Laughter)

Colette: I make no bones about that. Khrushchev had kind of been whittling this away, but at least under Stalin, the culture and the people of the Union republics were highly valued and measures were undertaken at every point possible to encourage the Union republics to develop their own cultures, to develop their own traditions, to kind of foster national identity. Brezhnev encourages the implementation of a new reading of the national question pretty much for the first time since Stalin, and it prioritizes Russia, the RSFSR, over everyone else. And this was in direct confrontation with Stalin and especially with Lenin. Both of them wrote many, many times about the dangers of Great Russian
chauvinism and how any sort of union with the Union republics needed to minimize that. And Stalin actually struggled against this during his tenure, there was an attempt in the late 30s, early 40s, and then again after World War Two to move the capital of the RSFSR from Moscow to Leningrad, which would have inflamed this Great Russian chauvinism. And there was, I don’t know if there was necessarily a purge, but there was a lot, there was a confrontation over that. So even Stalin was struggling against this. Brezhnev inflamed it, and it’s during Brezhnev’s tenure that really transforms the Soviet identity from one of proletarian internationalism, to Russian nationalism. And that’s where Soviet nostalgia now has its very socially conservative and reactionary base, is from Brezhnev’s wrenching to the right of his understanding of the national question from one of “We are internationalist. We are a Union of many peoples, all in this together, fighting for revolution,” to Russia plus a bunch of satellite states. And this does incredible damage to basically the Soviet Union, because what ends up happening in practice is that Russian interests are prioritized again and again and again, over those of the Union republics. There was an incident in which the Kazakhstan Communist Party leader was replaced by a Russian at a time when Kazakhs were 40% of the population in their own country. So not only were Russians the majority population in Kazakhstan, but the leader of the Kazakh Communist Party, wasn’t even a Kazakh, he was a Russian. By the time Gorbachev takes office, there’s no non-Russians in the Central Committee anymore, they’re all Russians.

Jeremy: Yikes. That’s not good buddy.

Colette: So when we look now at, “Well, why is Soviet nostalgia so reactionary?” it’s because of that, it’s because of this complete destruction of the democratic rights of the Union republics. And I mean, at that point, they did kind of just become satellite states. They lost a lot of their personal power that they had in favor of this sort of furthering of Russian identity, which we’re dealing with the consequences of now. Latvia just had neo-Nazis marching in the streets a few weeks ago, and that’s an after effect of all of that.

Jeremy: Yeah, it leaves them... it leaves all of the Soviet states open to nationalism of the reactionary type. And then also, of course, American propaganda, or I guess, Western propaganda, which of course would lead in parts of the dissolution of the USSR.

Colette: Yeah. So that’s kind of the rise and fall of democracy and democratic processes in the USSR. So now we’re going to kind of take a world tour of how democracy has manifested in other places. So the next biggest example is obviously China. The way Chinese democracy works is a little different than how it manifested in the USSR because of mass line. So mass line is new, “new”, as with everything about “Maoism”. (Laughter)

Jeremy: Oh boy. We’re get some angry letters.

Justin: Gonzalo gang’s gonna descend upon us. (Laughter)

Colette: Look, if I wanted letters from terrorists, I would go somewhere else. (Laughter) There are Maoists and then there are Maoists. Maoists, so... okay, if we’re even going to accept the term Maoist for the purposes of this argument, because it’s kind of an anachronism... but that goes beyond the scope of this discussion. A lot of Maoists would point to Mass Line as one of Mao’s greater contributions to the idea of socialist democracy. Well, there’s a counterpoint that Mass Line is just the idea of Soviet democracy adapted to China, whatever. The idea of Mass Line is that the program and efforts of the Party were informed directly by the masses, rather than necessarily other party cadre.
What this led to was... one of the things that always cracks me up is when people put Maoist as the most authoritarian type of communism or whatever, because if anything Maoism is almost close to anarchism... well, it’s not close to anarchism, they’re obviously fundamentally different but...

Jeremy: I’ve heard it called Anarcho-Stalinism.

Colette: I mean, it’s not wrong, is the thing. (Laughter) There’s this heavy, heavy emphasis not just on the bottom up kind of idea. Because, again, Commandism is a Maoist term, Maoists really don’t like the idea of an all-powerful bureaucracy that just kind of controls everything. But they also don’t like ultra-democracy, which in Maoist analysis anarchism would probably fall under, where you’re just having endless debates and nothing ever gets done. The Maoist balance is Mass Line, which is the vanguard party is informed directly by the masses, and so using that resource, the party advances that way. What’s really interesting, I can’t believe I found this on the internet, is the Constitution of the Communist Party of the Philippines, the same Communist Party of the Philippines that’s currently engaged in a protracted peoples war for the last 50 years. Why their constitution is available online is news to me, but it is and it’s from 2016. So it was amended at their last Party Congress, so it’s the most up to date version there is, but it’s really interesting because you get to see the structure of a communist party that’s currently engaged in an active revolution. And article four section one: “The structure of the party shall be based on the principle of democratic centralism,” right there. So even like the Maoists, with their big emphasis on the power of the everyday person having influence on the direction of the party, still hold to this idea of democracy, but with leadership. Which you would think everyone would get on board with, but no.

Other examples, the one that I really wanted to focus on is Venezuela, because it’s really, really, really exciting. The latest PSUV Congress, which was this past June, so keep in mind that they’re not yet out of the coup stage, they’re still dealing with a lot of the after effects of it. The theme of the last PSUV Congress was essentially “All power to the communes,” which sounds a lot like “All Power to the Soviets,” so I decided to look into how Venezuela’s democracy works, and they’re also in a revolutionary type of situation, but a different one than the Maoists. They’re in this stage of shifting from a bourgeois democracy to a proletarian one, because now that the coup has subsided... I’m not gonna say “failed” because God knows from Cuba’s example that coups don’t fail, they just come back, like a hydra wearing a Uncle Sam hat, that the National Assembly from whence sprouted Juan Guido has basically lost any influence that it had, because it’s basically been openly revealed to have been collaboratively... collaborating with the United States to topple the democratically elected government of Venezuela. And so we’re going to see if the constitutional convention that has now been convened for two years, and it’s kind of been sitting on the sidelines waiting to see what’s going to be happening with it, it might finally actually see some power now. And that’s really exciting because that means that the focus of democracy in Venezuela is going to shift from the legislature, to the, to the “communas,” to these neighborhood pop up assemblies; and you look at how these assemblies are structured, and they are basically like soviets. They’re basically neighborhood assemblies or workplace assemblies, or focused around a certain issue like electricity in a certain neighborhood, literally anything. It’s just a gathering of people, and they file paperwork with the government, and they become an official commune. And there’s a couple thousand of these things all throughout Venezuela, and that may end up becoming the new basis of Venezuela’s government in the next few years, which is super, super exciting because we’re essentially going to see the birth of the sixth actually existing socialist state, which I’m personally really excited for. Again, a lot of this is kind of up in the air because they’re still recovering from a coup attempt. We’re still yet to see the direction that Maduro is going to go.
Everything lately has said that he’s looking to shift towards a commune-based democracy. We're going to have to see.

Jeremy: I’d take democratic socialists a lot more serious if they actively supported Maduro. (Sighs) If they were like, “Yeah, no, I believe in communism. But the way we’re going to get there is by electing leftist leaders who can push things in that direction.” Well, here you go.

Colette: The DSA is getting their own in a few minutes. (Laughter)

So Venezuela, Laos, and China presently all kind of operate under the same principle of a front that then has a dominant party within it. So the idea of the popular front manifested in two ways: it manifested in one way in what became the Warsaw Pact countries where the communist parties would ally with friendly social democratic and liberal parties to form a popular coalition against fascism. That then ended up becoming the governing party afterwards.

Justin: Hell yeah.

Colette: And it worked and also didn't, that's just the science of things. In China they also use a Popular Front, the fucking Kuomintang has seats in the in the Chinese government. So they also utilize that popular front. Laos does the same, Vietnam does the same, and so does North Korea, which is, in terms of reviewing how democracies working in currently existing socialist states is our last stop. And a lot of the same nonsense that we hear about the DPRK is basically repackaged nonsense that we heard about the USSR; that you can only vote for one person, that the secret police watch you, and that if you don’t vote for the Workers Party you get executed. Okay, a lot of these accusations can be disappointed with simple logic (Laughter). Destroyed with facts and logic. For one thing, there's multiple parties with representation in the Supreme People's Assembly. So if people who were voting against the Workers Party were summarily executed for doing so, that would mean that we would see rapid population decreases in the DPRK like clockwork every five years and we obviously don’t. Furthermore, the DPRK’s candidate selection operates on a lot of the same basis that the USSR did, there's a pre... before the actual election there’s a lot of pre-discussion, a lot of candidate selection that goes on within local groups, and then there’s the candidate whenever you vote. It’s not like you just get one candidate and that’s kind of it. That's kind of a projection of how it’s like in bourgeois democracies, than necessarily anything else. Other than that, the DPRK’s system of democracy isn't... I mean, legislature-wise it’s not terribly different from any other type of parliamentary system that we’ve seen before. You can actually look up all of the DPRK’s electoral statistics on the website of the International Parliamentary Union, which monitors the legislatures of every nation on Earth, including the DPRK’s. And you can look and see how many members there are, what parties they belong to, what percentage of them are women, what percentage of them are young, when their last elections were, all of these basic statistics are available for people to read. And the International Parliamentary Union is not a communist resource. It’s, if anything, maybe a liberal resource. I actually don’t know the political bent of it. But if they're presenting the bare bones facts of what the DPRK’s voting system is like, you would think it's not hard for people to investigate that shit. But it is.

So now we move to the United States.

Justin: Death to America.

Jeremy: Let’s not, let’s not do that.
Drew: Gross.

Colette: And kind of, where do we go, what direction does democracy go?

Jeremy: What is to be done? (Laughter)

Colette: ...going forward? We're kind of at... the way that I personally see it is that we're kind of at a crossroads right now. We're still very much in a pre-revolutionary formation, which is becoming a problem, because it's rapidly becoming apparent that it's 1916. And we're still in 1899.

Jeremy: Sad.

Colette: If anything, Ferguson and Baltimore were our 1905 revolution, and nothing has changed since then. Which is terrifying. So we're kind of at this critical crossroads of, we need to figure out what we're going to do from here, and every experiment at forming sort of this unprincipled Big Tent has summarily collapsed. We've seen that kind of with the Marxist Center, about how it hasn't fallen apart yet. Whether it will or not in the near future is left to be determined, that depends on whether they institute any sort of centralism or they just let member organizations remain completely autonomous. The DSA convention was kind of a picture perfect capsule of how not to do inter-organizational democracy. Because this was probably the most important event for the DSA that it's had in a really long time. This was the first... it had a convention in 2017 which was right after the Trump bump, but 2019 is more like, they've had time, they've developed further from 2016. Now we get to see where this organization is at. And I watched that thing live for reasons beyond my personal understanding. (Laughter)

Jeremy: You made a mistake.

Colette: It was, from an organizational standpoint, a complete catastrophe. First off, it should serve as the last will and testament of Robert's Rules of Order, which is just about the worst parliamentary procedure on the planet. There's a reason a lot of other groups just use something that's either simplified, or something that's completely different, because it was just chaotic. And it was clear that, on several occasions, I thought there was going to be a straight up split in the middle of the livestream. I was expecting, on the antifa resolution, I was expecting a walkout. I'm amazed that there wasn't one, because that resolution in particular really highlighted for me, I don't think DSA as an organization is a barometer of where the left is the United States. I don't consider... I personally consider the DSA to be on par with the Mensheviks. They're very similar ideologically, they're very similar organizationally. But that resolution debate really encapsulated how much further we have left to go. That there is still, that resolution, out of a total convention attendance of about 1000 people, that resolution only passed by 28 votes, which is just, I mean, and it was a resolution basically saying DSA should actually do something material again fascism.

Jeremy: And they barely passed it.

Colette: And that resolution passed by 28 votes. And the debate that I watched about it really highlighted how factionalized that organization is. And that the pro “militant” section won but barely, but there's still a very significant portion of an organization that is ostensibly the largest organization in the United States on the left that isn't really on board with the idea of being militant against fascism.
And that's a major issue. Now, I'm not... DSA can learn from that. And I really hope they do. Because as weird as the sounds, I feel like there is some hope for DSA but it's going to take an awakening of almost biblical proportions to finally get people to realize, “You know what, we're not going to... trying to wrench the Democratic Party to the left isn't going to work anymore. We need to actually become our own thing.” And I mean, the problem is a lot of these, the answer to these is: time will tell. But watching that was kind of perfect in how much people need to study democratic procedures, not just in practice, not just how we form, you know, workers assemblies and how we, you know, I mean, the anarchists are really taking the mantle from the Marxists in terms of, workers and community assemblies, which is a thing which has its own host of issues. But that just kind of serves as a testament as to what we can do better. It's not necessarily that the anarchists are necessarily doing anything bad. I would argue that there's very few leftists in the United States that have objectively bad intentions. And I'm not going to name names, but I'm sure we can all assume who. It just, we need to learn from these incidences and these mistakes that we've made going forward in honing our revolutionary theory about democracy and how we implement that in practice.

**Justin:** Yeah, that’s what we're trying to do.

**Jeremy:** Alright, so thank you so much to Colette for coming on tonight, I want to thank everyone for listening. There will be some suggested reading in the show notes. Colette, where can people find you online? Or do you have any sort of projects that you're developing?

**Justin:** Which you'll already have heard at this point.

**Colette:** I am hosting, by myself for now, the newest member in the Proles of the Round Table podcast family called Ad Vincere Mundi, it means “A World to Win” in Latin. And it is a podcast looking at classical history from a historical materialist perspective. And the next historical arc that I will be recording is on ancient Palestine and I will be doing that in collaboration with Yaakov from Proles of the Minyan and that's gonna be super exciting. So that's what's going on and what you can look forward to.

**Jeremy:** All right. Well, our sponsors are all of our excellent fans on Patreon. As always, we have way too many to read each time now, but since the last time we recorded or the last last time we recorded, these are new ones. (Jeremy reads list of new Proles patrons) All of these people are inspiring and revolutionary and make it easier for us to make this podcast for you and have it sound good. We've established what we're calling the USSP with several child podcasts that we have started centralizing links to the various feeds on our website, so you can check those out. Also, we wanted to thank Ransom Notes for our intro music, check him out on SoundCloud. Please don't forget to rate and review visit ProlesPod.com. Like us on Facebook.com/ProlesPod, and follow us on Twitter @ProlesPod. If you have any feedback, topic ideas, or suggestions feel free to send us an email at ProlesPod@gmail.com or in the comment box on our website. Thanks for tuning in. Solidarity...(Proles each sing) Forevvvveeeeeeer!

(Laughter)

Good Night!

(Outro Music Plays: Vladimir Konovalov Jazz Orchestra "The Legend of the Araratsky Valley")