This study of the Finns at the International Lenin School (ILS) reflects history of the Soviet Union during Stalin’s era, history of the Communist International (Comintern) as well as history of Finnish communism. The life span of the ILS (1926–1938) matches up with creating and establishing the power structures of Stalinism. Both the ILS and Finnish Communism in the USSR became casualties of the Great Terror (1937–1938). After the WW2, however, the Soviet education was appreciated inside the Communist Party of Finland (CPF). If Finland would have become People’s Democracy, the former ILS students would have composed the inner circle of the new “democratic” government.

The Finnish teachers of the ILS were leaders of the CPF that was headquartered in Moscow. At the ILS studied in total 141 Finnish communists. The purpose of the ILS was to educate the communist parties’ leading stratum of functionaries. They were supposed to internalize current values, methods and discipline of the Bolsheviks. This study evaluates the effects of the total school experience on the Finns that often ended in another total institution in Finland: prison.

The curricula of the ILS consisted of theory of Marxism-Leninism, party history, political economics and themes of campaigns of Stalinism. The ILS year included participation in Bolshevik party life and practical work. During summer excursions (praktikas) the students could acquaint themselves with building of socialism in the Soviet Republics. At the ILS, intention to ideological moulding was not hidden. The students were supposed to adopt the Stalinist identity of the professional revolutionaries of the era.

The ILS was saturated with ideology and propaganda. This study analyzes especially uses of history as vehicle of ideological standardisation and as instrument of power. Stalin contributed personally to shortcomings of history writing of the communist party. Later he supervised writing of the inclusive handbook of communism, “History of the All-Union Communist Party. Short Course”. Special attention will be paid to the effects of Stalin’s intervention at the ILS and inside the CPF.

The life of the Finns at the ILS and outside the school is described at grass roots. The dividing line between personal and political is analyzed by charting emotional, intimate and bodily experiences of the Finns of the ILS. The fates of the ILS Finns after the studying or teaching period in Moscow are explored in detail. The protagonist among the teachers is Yrjö Sirola that was called “father of the CPF cadres”. The Finnish ILS teachers and the formed students that had remained in the USSR were most severely hit by the Great Terror. The Soviet education had most importance in Finland of post WW2 period. The training at the ILS, however, did not contribute to revolution in Finland.

The main heading of the study, “A Short Course of Stalinism”, crystallises interpretation of the ILS as seat of learning of ideological unity of Stalinism. On the other hand, the title includes a statement of incompleteness of the Stalinist education if the schooling at the ILS had remained in one year.