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Printed and Distributed by

Associazione La Sinistra Comunista—Casella Postale 1157—50121 Firenze—Italia

I.C.P. Editions—c/o 96 Bold Street—Liverpool L1 4HY—UK

C.L. Publishing—c/o 523 S.E. Morrison St.—Portland, OR 97214—U.S.A.

international-communist-party.org

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Three Articles on Workers' Councils

International Communist Party

up for the revolutionary inactivity of their organization; and the working-class Leagues of war veterans.

3. The political struggle against the State, a military organ of war, in every political form open to it, must as in Russia have passion and rebellious elan, because socialism has been transformed from a pure problem in social logic into a furnace of ardor and enthusiasm, by implanting in the civil and military proletariat the confidence that they can effect the transfer of power to the Soviets and subsequently defend them against any revolutionary attack. This and nothing else is the summons to violence that the Russian pioneers challenge us with. It is a debt of honor and a necessity for us to take it up, rather than the conflict and chaos against which socialism in Russia has become the guarantee, as the bearer of a new order.

4. The Russian Bolshevik Party, and equally the Italian Socialist Party, will not give up its existence until the Soviet experiment has reached full maturity—an experiment which must at once be initiated -though it must subordinate all its activities to the principles suggested by the Russian revolutionary experience, which teaches that only the proletariat grouped in Soviets, which are superior to parties, schools, corporations, may take great historical initiatives and bring them to a triumphant conclusion

Three Articles on Workers' Councils

CL Publishers

February 2021

www.clpublishers.com

Text sourced from the ICP (https://www.international-communist-party.org/index.htm). Translated and edited by the ICP.

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Contents

1. The class struggle has been revealed as the true engine of the present history of mankind, demonstrating its capacity to smash the social-national union, to which bourgeois governments with their mystifications intended to entrust the task of eliminating or delaying it.

2. The socialist revolution has manifested a twofold movement in practice:

   a. a movement of erosion and emptying of State powers and negation of the fundamental institutions which democratic forms utilize to deflect the historical mission of the proletariat; i.e. constituent assemblies, which place oppressed and oppressors on a sham footing of legal equality, and the parliaments which emerge from them—complementary organs of State sovereignty and not expressions of the popular will;

   b. a movement of construction, thanks to a class organ of new creativity—the Soviet of workers peasants and soldiers—which, as an organ linking all the oppressed desirous of attaining the giddy heights already reached by the Russian pioneers, should henceforth be established throughout Italy and western Europe, and whose social composition should consist of the masses of workers and peasants and also (without abandoning their individual specificity) the parties which conduct a revolutionary campaign for the abolition of private ownership and the powers of the bourgeois State; the trade unions, which will operate on a more elevated and revolutionary socio-political level within the Soviet than they have hitherto achieved on account of their corporative structure; the members of the co-operative movement, who in the Soviet will be able to struggle against the capitalist regime as allies of the wage-earners, making

concerning the conquest of power, to build awareness of what the revolution will be, what its organs will be, how the Soviets will really function. Then we can say we have done truly valuable work towards establishing the councils of the proletariat and winning within them the revolutionary dictatorship that will open up the radiant road to communism

Appendix: The Leone Statement.

The Bologna Congress of the Socialist Party proclaims and recognizes that the Russian Revolution, which it salutes as the most magnificent event in the history of the world proletariat, has sparked the necessity to facilitate its expansion into all the countries of capitalist civilization; it believes that the methods and forms of this revolutionary expansion, destined to transform the Russian upheaval into a total social revolution, are to be sought in the models of a revolution which, although it is called Russian in reference to geography, is universal in character—a revolution founded on the principle of uniting the proletarians of the world. The lessons we may learn from this revolution of the Soviets, a revolution which has realized in practice all the expectations of the authentic champions of the cause of socialism, may be summarized in the following points.

Is this the Time to form "Soviets"?

From *Il Soviet*, September 21, 1919

Two of the articles in our last issue, one devoted to an analysis of the communist system of representation and the other to an exposition of the current tasks facing our Party, concluded by asking whether it is possible or appropriate to set up workers' and peasants' councils today, while the power of the bourgeoisie is still intact. Comrade Ettore Croce, in a discussion of our abstentionist thesis in an article in *Avanti!*, asks that we should have a new weapon at the ready before getting rid of the old weapon of parliamentary action and looks forward to the formation of Soviets.

In our last issue we clarified the distinction between the technical-economic and political tasks of the Soviet representative bodies, and we showed that the true organs of the proletarian dictatorship are the local and central political Soviets, in which workers are not sub-divided according to their particular trade. The supreme authority of these organs is the Central Executive Committee, which nominates the People's Commissars; parallel to them, there arises a whole network of economic organs, based on factory councils and trade unions, which culminate in the Central Council of the Economy.

In Russia, we repeat, whereas there is no trade representation in the CEC and Soviet of Soviets, but only territorial representation, this is not the case as regards the Council of the Economy, the organ which is responsible for the technical implementation of the socialization measures decreed by the political assembly. In this Council, trade federations and local economic councils play a role. The August 16 issue of *L'Ordine Nuovo* contained an interesting article on the Soviet-type system of socialization. This article explained how in a first stage,

dubbed anarcho-syndicalist, the factory councils would take over the management of production, but that subsequently, in later stages involving centralization, they would lose importance. In the end they would be nothing more than clubs and mutual benefit and instruction societies for the workers in a particular factory.

If we shift our attention to the German communist movement, we see in the programme of the Spartacus League that the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, the bodies which are to take the place of the bourgeois parliaments and municipal councils, arc quite different from factory councils, which (Art. 7 of Section 3) regulates working conditions and control production, in agreement with the workers' councils, and eventually take over the management of the whole enterprise.

In Russian practice, factory management was made up to the extent of only one-third by representatives from the factory council, one-third by representatives from the Supreme Council of the Economy, and one-third by representatives from the Central Federation of Industry (the interests of the workforce, the general interests of society, and the interests of the particular industrial sector).

In Germany again, elections to the Workers' Councils are arranged in accordance with the formula: one council member to every 1,000 electors. Only the large factories with over 1,000 workers constitute a single electoral unit; in the case of small factories and the unemployed, voting takes place in accordance with methods established by the electoral commission in agreement with various trade organizations.

It seems to us that we have marshalled enough evidence here to be able to declare ourselves supporters of a system of representation that is clearly divided into two divisions: economic and political. As far as economic functions are concerned, each factory will have its own factory council elected by the workers; this will have a part to play in the socialization and subsequent

To study both problems, and establish the optimal conditions in which to tackle both without delay—this too is acceptable, but without setting fixed and schematic dates for an almost official inauguration of Soviets in Italy.

To accomplish the formation of the genuine communist party means sorting out the communists from the reformists and social democrats. Some comrades believe that the very proposal to set up Soviets would also facilitate this sorting out process. We do not agree—for the very reason that the Soviet, in our view, is not in its essence a revolutionary organ. In any case, if the rise of Soviets is to be the source of political clarification, we fail to see how this may he accomplished on the basis of an understanding—as in the Bombacci proposal—between reformists, maximalists, syndicalists, and anarchists! On the contrary, the forging of a sound and healthy revolutionary movement in Italy will never be accomplished by advancing new organs modelled on future forms, like factory councils or soviets—just as it was an illusion to believe that the revolutionary spirit could be salvaged from reformism by importing it into the unions, seen as the nucleus of the future society.

We will not effect the sorting-out process through a new recipe, which will frighten no one, but by abandoning once and for all the old "recipes", the pernicious and fatal methods of the past. For well-known reasons, we feel that if a method has to be abandoned, and expelled along with non-communists from our ranks, then it should be the electoral method—and we see no other route to the setting up of a communist party that is worthy to affiliate to Moscow.

Let us work towards this goal—beginning, as Niccolini puts it so well, with the elaboration of a consciousness, a political culture, in the leaders, through a more serious study of the problems of the revolution, with fewer distractions from spurious electoral, parliamentary and minimalist activities.

Let us work towards this goal. let us issue more propaganda

have matured in the real world, a powerful communist party must exist and its consciousness of the events which lie ahead must be particularly acute.

As regards the revolutionary organs which will exercise proletarian power and represent the foundations of the revolutionary State on the morrow of the collapse of the bourgeoisie, their consciousness of their role will depend on the extent to which they are led by workers who are conscious of the need for a dictatorship of their own class—i.e. communist workers. Wherever this is not the case, these organs will concede the power they have won and the counter-revolution will triumph. Thus if at any given moment these organs are required and communists need to concern themselves with setting them up, it should not therefore be thought that in them we have a means of readily outflanking the bourgeoisie and almost automatically overcoming its resistance to the ceding of power.

Can the Soviets, the State organs of the victorious proletariat, play a role as organs of revolutionary struggle for the proletariat while capitalism still controls the State? The answer is yes—in the sense, however, that at any given stage they may constitute the right terrain for the revolutionary struggle that the Party is waging. And at that particular stage, the Party has to fashion such a terrain, such a grouping of forces, for itself.

Today, in Italy, have we reached this stage of struggle? We feel that we are very close to it, but that there is one more stage to go through. The communist party, which has to work within the Soviets, does not yet exist. We are not saying that the Soviets will wait for it before they emerge. It could happen that events occur differently. But then we will run this grave risk, that the immaturity of the party will allow these organs to fall into the hands of the reformists, the accomplices of the bourgeoisie, the saboteurs and falsifiers of the revolution. And so we feel that the problem of forging a genuine communist party in Italy is much more urgent than the problem of creating Soviets.

management of the plant in accordance with suitable criteria. As far as the political function is concerned, that is to say the formation of local and central organs of authority, elections to proletarian councils will be held on the basis of electoral rolls in which (with the rigorous exclusion of all bourgeois, i.e. people who in any way whatsoever live off the work of others) all proletarians are included on an equal footing, irrespective of their trade, and even if they are (legitimately) unemployed or incapacitated. Bearing all this in mind, is it possible, or desirable, to set up Soviets now?

If we are speaking of factory councils, these are already spreading in the form of internal commissions, or the English "shop stewards" system. As these are organs which represent the interests of the workforce, they should be set up even while the factory is still in the hands of private capital. Indeed it would certainly be to our advantage to urge the setting up of these factory councils, although we should entertain no illusions as to their innate revolutionary capacity. Which brings us to the most important problem, that of political Soviets. The political Soviet represents the collective interests of the working class, in so far as this class does not share power with the bourgeoisie, but has succeeded in overthrowing it and excluding it from power. Hence the full significance and strength of the Soviet lies not in this or that structure, but in the fact that it is the organ of a class which is taking the management of society into its own hands. Every member of the Soviet is a proletarian conscious that he is exercising dictatorship in the name of his own class.

If the bourgeois class is still in power, even if it were possible to summon proletarian electors to nominate their delegates (for there is no question of using the trade unions or existing internal commissions for the purpose), one would simply be giving a formal imitation of a future activity, an imitation devoid of its fundamental revolutionary character. Those who can represent the proletariat today, before it takes power tomorrow,

are workers who are conscious of this historical eventuality; in other words, the workers who are members of the Communist Party.

In its struggle against bourgeois power, the proletariat is represented by its class party, even if this consists of no more than an audacious minority. The Soviets of tomorrow must arise from the local branches or the Communist Party. It is these which will be able to call on elements who, as soon as the revolution is victorious, will be proposed as candidates before the proletarian electoral masses to set up the Councils of local worker delegates.

But if it is to fulfill these functions, the Communist Party must abandon its participation in elections to organs of bourgeois democracy. The reasons supporting this statement are obvious. The Party should have as members only those individuals who can cope with the responsibilities and dangers of the struggle during the period of insurrection and social reorganization. The conclusion that we should abandon our participation in elections only when we have Soviets available is mistaken. A more thorough examination of the question leads one instead to the following conclusion: for as long as bourgeois power exists, the organ of revolution is the class party; after the smashing of bourgeois power, it is the network of workers' councils. The class party cannot fulfill this role, nor be in a position to lead the assault against bourgeois power in order to replace parliamentary democracy by the Soviet system, unless it renounces the practice of dispatching its own representatives to bourgeois organs. This renunciation, which is negative only in a formal sense, is the prime condition to be satisfied if the forces of the communist proletariat are to be mobilized. To be unwilling to make such a renunciation is tantamount to abandoning our posture of readiness to declare class war at the first available opportunity.

historical conditions, probably corresponding to serious convulsions in the institutional arrangements of the State and society, bring Soviets into existence—and it can be very appropriate for communists to facilitate and stimulate the birth of these new organs of the proletariat. We must, however, be quite clear that their formation in this manner cannot be an artificial procedure, the mere application of a recipe—and that in any case the simple establishment of workers' councils, as the form of the proletarian revolution, does not imply that the problem of the revolution is resolved, nor that infallible conditions have been laid for its success. The revolution may not occur even when councils exist (we shall cite examples), if these are not infused with the political and historical consciousness of the proletariat—a consciousness which is condensed, one might almost say, in the communist political party.

The fundamental problem of the revolution thus lies in gauging the proletariat's determination to smash the bourgeois State and take power into its own hands. Such a determination on the part of the broad masses of the working class exists as a direct result of the economic relations of exploitation by capital; it is these which place the proletariat in an intolerable situation and drive it to smash the existing social forms. The task of the communists, then, is to direct this violent reaction on the part of the masses and give it greater efficiency. The communists—as the *Manifesto* said long ago—have a superior knowledge of the conditions of the class struggle and the proletariat's emancipation than the proletariat itself. The critique they make of history and of the constitution of society places them in a position to make fairly accurate predictions concerning the developments of the revolutionary process. It is for this reason that communists form the class's political party, which sets itself the task of unifying the proletarian forces and organizing the proletariat into the dominant class through the revolutionary conquest of power. When the revolution is imminent and its pre-conditions

our own D.L. For the moment we shall go no further than remind the comrades who put forward such proposals of one of Lenin's conclusions in the declaration adopted by the Moscow Congress: "Put a distance between yourselves and those who delude the proletariat by proclaiming the possibility of their victories within the bourgeois framework, and propose that the new proletarian organs should combine with or collaborate with the instruments of bourgeois domination." If the former are the social-democrats (who are still members of our Party), should we not recognize the latter in the electionist maximalists, concerned as they are with justifying their parliamentary and communal activity by monstrous pseudo-Soviet projects?

Are the comrades in the faction which was victorious at Bologna blind to the fact that these people are not even in line with that form of communist electionism which may legitimately be opposed—on the basis of the arguments of Lenin and certain German communists—to our own irreducible, principled abstentionism?

V

With this article we propose to conclude our exposition, though we may resume the discussion in polemic with comrades who have commented on our point of view in other newspapers. The discussion has now been taken up by the whole of the socialist press. The best articles we have come across are those by C. Niccolini in *Avanti!* These articles were written with great clarity and in line with genuine Marxist principles; we fully concur with them.

The Soviets, the councils of workers, peasants (and soldiers), are the form adopted by the representative system of the proletariat, in Its exercise of power after the smashing of the capitalist State. Prior to the conquest of power, when the bourgeoisie is still politically dominant, it can happen that special

Seize Power or Seize the Factory?

From *Il Soviet,* February 22, 1920

The working-class disturbances of the past few days in Liguria have seen yet another example of a phenomenon that for some time now has been repeated with some frequency, and that deserves to be examined as a symptom of a new level of consciousness among the working masses.

Instead of abandoning their jobs, the workers have so to speak taken over their plants and sought to operate them for their own benefit, or more precisely without the top managers being present in the plant. Above all, this indicates that the workers are fully aware that the strike is not always the best weapon to use, especially under certain circumstances.

The economic strike, through the immediate harm it inflicts on the worker himself, derives its utility as a defensive weapon for the worker from the harm the work-stoppage inflicts on the industrialist by cutting back the output which belongs to him.

This is the state of affairs under normal conditions in the capitalist economy, when competition and price-cutting force a continual increase in production itself. Today the profiteers of industry, in particular the engineering industry, are emerging from an exceptional period in which they were able to amass enormous profits for a minimum of effort. During the war the State supplied them with raw materials and coal and, at the same time, acted as sole and reliable purchaser. Furthermore, through its militarization of factories, the State itself undertook to impose a rigorous discipline on the working masses. What more favorable conditions could there be for a fat profit? But now these people are no longer disposed to deal with all the difficulties arising from shortages of coal and raw materials, from the instability of the market and the fractiousness of the working masses. In particular, they are not disposed to put up with modest profits which are roughly the same or perhaps a bit below their pre-War level.

This is why they are not worried by strikes. Indeed they positively welcome them, while mouthing a few protests about the absurd claims and insatiability of the workers. The workers have understood this, and through their action of taking over the factory and carrying on working instead of striking, they are making it clear that it is not that they have no wish to work, but that they have no wish to work the way the bosses tell them to. They no longer want to be exploited and work for the benefit of the bosses; they want to work for their own benefit, i.e. in the interests of the workforce alone.

This new consciousness that is emerging more clearly every day should be held in the highest regard; however, we would not want it to be led astray by vain illusions.

It is rumored that factory councils, where they were in existence, functioned by taking over the management of the workshops and carrying on the work. We would not like the working masses to get hold of the idea that all they need do to take over the factories and get rid of the capitalists is set up councils. This would indeed be a dangerous illusion. The factory will be conquered by the working class—and not only by the workforce employed in it, which would be too weak and non-communist—only after the working class as a whole has seized political power. Unless it has done so, the Royal Guards, military police, etc.—in other words, the mechanism of force and oppression that the bourgeoisie has at its disposal, its political power apparatus—will see to it that all illusions are dispelled.

It would be better if these endless and useless adventures that are daily exhausting the working masses were all channeled, merged and organized into one great, comprehensive upsurge aimed directly at the heart of the enemy bourgeoisie.

Only a communist party should and would be able to carry out such an undertaking. At this time, such a party should and would have no other task than that of directing all its activity towards making the working masses increasingly conscious of the need for this grand political attack—the only more or less direct route to the take-over of the factory, which if any other route is taken may never fall into their hands at all.

Austria, however, Maschl concludes, the existence of councils within the democratic system, or rather the existence of democracy, in spite of the councils, proves that these workers' councils are far from playing the role of what are called Soviets in Russia. And he expresses the doubt that perhaps at the moment of the revolution, alternative, truly revolutionary Soviets may emerge and become the depositories of proletarian power in place of these domesticated versions.

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The Party programme adopted at Bologna declares that Soviets should be set up in Italy as organs of revolutionary struggle. The object of the Bombacci proposal is to concretize this aim.

Before getting down to details, let us discuss the general ideas which have inspired Comrade Bombacci. First of all, and let no one accuse us of being pedantic, let us request a formal clarification. In the phrase: "only a national institution that is broader than the Soviets can usher the present period towards the final revolutionary struggle against the bourgeois regime and its democratic mask: parliamentarism," does it mean that parliamentarism is the aforementioned broader institution, or is it the democratic mask? We fear that the first interpretation must be the right one, a feeling which is confirmed by the paragraph on the Soviets' programme of action, which is a strange mixture of the functions of the latter with the Party's parliamentary activity. If the councils to be set up are to carry out their activities on this ambiguous terrain, then it would certainly be better not to set them up at all.

The idea that the Soviets should have the role of working out proposals for socialist and revolutionary legislation which socialist deputies will place before the bourgeois State—here we have a proposal that makes a fine pair with the one on communal-electionist Sovietism which was so well demolished by

Ambrosini, for example, makes this error in his proposals. Such a system might perhaps be useful in order to form Soviets quickly and on a provisional basis, but it does not correspond to their definitive structure. It is true that in Russia a small percentage of delegates to the Soviet are added to those elected directly by the proletarian electors. But in reality the Communist Party, or any other party, obtains its representation by standing tried and proven members of its organization as candidates, and by campaigning around its programme before the electorate. In our view, a Soviet can only be called revolutionary when a majority of its delegates are members of the Communist Party.

All of this, it should be understood, refers to the period of the proletarian dictatorship. Now we come to the vexed question: what should be the role and characteristics of the workers' councils while the power of the bourgeoisie is still intact?

***

In central Europe at the moment, workers' councils co-exist with the bourgeois-democratic State, which is all the more anti-revolutionary in that it is republican and social-democratic. What is the significance of this proletarian representative system, if it is not the depository and foundation of State power? At the very least, does it act as an effective organ of struggle for the realization of the proletarian dictatorship?

These questions are answered by the Austrian comrade Otto Maschl in an article we came across in the Geneva journal, *Nouvelle Internationale*. He states that in Austria the councils have brought about their own paralysis and have handed over their power to the national bourgeois assembly. In Germany on the other hand, according to Maschl, once the Majoritarians and Independents had left the councils, these latter became true foci of the struggle for proletarian emancipation, and Noske had to smash them in order to allow social democracy to govern. In

Towards the Establishment of Workers' Councils in Italy

Series of articles from multiple issues of *Il Soviet* over the course of January–February 1920

I

We have now collected quite a lot of material concerned with proposals and initiatives for establishing Soviets in Italy, and we reserve to ourselves the right to expound the elements of the argument step by step. At this stage we wish to make a few preliminary observations of a general nature, to which we have already referred in our most recent issues.

The system of proletarian representation that has been introduced for the first time ever in Russia has a twofold character: political and economic. Its political role is to struggle against the bourgeoisie until the latter has been totally eradicated. Its economic role is to create the whole novel mechanism of communist production. As the revolution unfolds and the parasitic classes are gradually eliminated, the political functions become less and less important in comparison with their economic counterparts: but in the first instance, and above all when it is a question of struggling against bourgeois power, political activity must come first.

The authentic instrument of the proletariat's struggle for liberation, and above all of its conquest of political power, is the communist class party. Under the bourgeois regime, the communist party, the engine of the revolution, needs organs in which it can operate; these organs are the workers' councils. To declare that they are the proletariat's organs of liberation, without mentioning the role of the party, after the fashion of the programme adopted at the Congress of Bologna, seems mistaken in our view. To maintain, after the fashion of the Turin *L'Ordine*

Nuovo comrades, that even before the collapse of the bourgeoisie the workers' councils are organs, not only of political struggle, but of technical-economic training in the communist system, can only be seen as a return to socialist gradualism. This latter, whether it is called reformism or syndicalism, is defined by the mistaken belief that the proletariat can achieve emancipation by making advances in economic relations while capitalism still holds political power through the State.

We shall now expand on the criticism of the two concepts we have mentioned.

•••

The system of proletarian representation must be rooted in the whole of the technical process of production. This is a perfectly valid principle, but it corresponds to the stage when the proletariat is organizing the new economy alter its seizure of power. Apply it without modification to the bourgeois regime, and you accomplish nothing in revolutionary terms. Even at the stage which Russia has reached, Soviet-type political representation—i.e. the ladder that culminates in the government of the people's commissars—does not start with work-crews or factory shops, but from the local administrative Soviet, elected directly by the workers (grouped if possible in their respective workplaces). To be specific, the Moscow Soviet is elected by the Moscow proletariat in the ratio of one delegate to every 1,000 workers. Between the delegates and the electors there is no intermediary organ. This first level then leads to higher levels, to the Congress of Soviets, the executive committee, and finally the government of commissars.

The factory council plays its part in quite a different network, that of workers' control over production. Consequently the factory council, made up of one representative for every workshop, does not nominate the factory's representative in the local political-administrative Soviet: this representative is

occasion, soldiers—are, as is clear, the political organs of the proletariat, the foundations of the proletarian State. The urban and rural local councils take the place of the municipal councils under the bourgeois regime. The provincial and regional Soviets take the place of the present provincial councils, with this difference, that the provincial Soviets are not elected directly, but indirectly from the local Soviets. The State Congress of Soviets, together with the Central Executive Committee, take the place of the bourgeois parliament, with the difference again that they are not elected directly, but by third or even fourth degree suffrage.

There is no need here to emphasize the other differences, of which the most important is the electors' right of recall of any delegate at any time. If the mechanism to cope with these recalls is to be flexible, then the elections in the first place should not be based on lists of candidates, but should involve giving a single delegate to a grouping of electors who, if possible, should live and work together. But the fundamental characteristic of this whole system does not reside in these technicalities, which have nothing magical about them, but rather in the principle which lays down that the right to vote, both actively and passively, is reserved to the workers alone and denied to the bourgeois.

As far as the formation of municipal Soviets is concerned, two errors are commonly encountered. One is the idea that delegates to the Soviets are elected by factory councils and committees (executive commissions of the councils of workshop delegates), whereas in fact, as we make no apology for repeating, the delegates are elected directly by the mass of electors. This error is reproduced in the Bombacci proposal for establishing Soviets in Italy (Para. 6).

The other error consists in thinking that the Soviet is a body composed of representatives simply nominated by the Socialist Party, the trade unions and the factory councils. Comrade

organs of the proletariat, the stages of the political process with their economic counterparts is to lapse into the petty-bourgeois caricature of Marxism called economism (which in turn can be classified into reformism and syndicalism).

Over-emphasis on the factory council is just a resurrection of this hoary old error, which unites the petty-bourgeois Proudhon with all those revisionists who believe they have transcended Marx.

Under a bourgeois regime, then, the factory council represents the interests of the workers in a particular enterprise, just as it will do under a communist regime. It arises when circumstances demand it, through changes in the methods of proletarian economic organization. But perhaps to an even greater extent than the trade union, the council opens its flank to the deviations of reformism.

The old minimalist tendency that argues in favor of compulsory arbitration and profit-sharing by workers (i.e. their participation in the management and administration of the factory) could well find in the factory council the basis for the drafting of an anti-revolutionary piece of social legislation. This is happening in Germany at the moment, where the Independents are opposing not the principle, but the manner of the draft legislation, in stark contrast to the Communists who maintain that the democratic regime cannot grant the proletariat any form of control whatsoever over capitalist functions. It should thus be clear that it makes no sense to speak of workers' control until political power rests in the hands of the proletarian State. Such control can only be exercised, as a prelude to the socialization of firms and their administration by appropriate organs of the collectivity, in the name of the proletarian State and on the basis of its power.

***

Councils of workers—industrial workers, peasants and, on

elected directly and independently. In Russia, the factory councils arc the basic unit of another system of representation (itself subordinate of course to the political network of Soviets): the system of workers' control and the people's economy. Control within the factory has a revolutionary and expropriative significance only after central power has passed into the hands of the proletariat. While the factory is still protected by the bourgeois State, the factory council controls nothing. The few functions it fulfils are the result of the traditional practice of:

1. parliamentary reformism;
2. trade-union resistance, which does not cease to be a reformist way of advancing.

To conclude: we do not oppose the setting up of internal factory councils if the workers themselves or their organizations demand them. But we insist that the communist party's activity must be based on another terrain, namely the struggle for the conquest of political power. This struggle may well be advanced fruitfully by the setting up of workers' representative bodies—but these must be urban or rural workers' councils elected directly by the names, waiting to take the place of municipal councils and local organs of State power at the moment the bourgeois forces collapse. Having thus advanced our thesis, we promise to give it ample documentation and factual support, and to present our work in a report to the next meeting of the communist fraction.

II

Prior to getting down to discussing the practical problems of setting up workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils in Italy, and bearing in mind the general considerations contained in the article we published in our last issue, we wish to examine the programmatic guidelines or the Soviet system as they are

developed in the documents of the Russian Revolution and in the declarations of principle issued by some or the Italian maximalist currents, such as the programme adopted by the Bologna Congress, the motion proposed by Leone and other comrades to the same congress; and the writings of *L'Ordine Nuovo* on the Turin factory council movement.

The Councils and the Bolshevik Program

In the documents of the Third International and the Russian Communist Party, in the masterly reports of those formidable exponents of doctrine, the leaders of the Russian revolutionary movement—Lenin, Zinoviev, Radek, Bukharin—there recurs at frequent intervals the idea that the Russian Revolution did not invent new and unforeseen structures, but merely confirmed the predictions of Marxist theory concerning the revolutionary process.

The core of the imposing phenomenon of the Russian Revolution is the conquest of political power on the part of the working masses, and the establishment of their dictatorship, as the result of an authentic class war.

The Soviets—and it is well to recall that the word soviet simply means council, and can be employed to describe any sort of representative body—the Soviets, as far as history is concerned, are the system of representation employed by the proletarian class once it has taken power. The Soviets are the organs that take the place of parliament and the bourgeois administrative assemblies and gradually replace all the other ramifications of the State. To put it in the words of the most recent congress of the Russian communists, as quoted by Comrade Zinoviev, "the Soviets are the State organizations of the workers and poor peasants; they exercise the dictatorship of the proletariat during the stage when all previous forms of the State are being extinguished."

would be quite different from the system of factory councils and committees that has begun to form in Turin (and indeed this is partially recognized in the Party's proposals).

IV

We believe we have already said enough concerning the difference between factory councils and politico-administrative councils of workers and peasants. The factory council represents workers' interests which extend no farther than the narrow circle of an industrial firm. Under a communist regime, it is the basic unit of the system of "workers' control" which has a certain part to play in the system of "Councils of the Economy", a system which will eventually take over the technical and economic management of production. But the factory council has nothing to do with the system of political Soviets, the depositories of proletarian power.

Under the bourgeois regime, therefore, the factory council, or for that matter the trade union, cannot be viewed as an organ for the conquest of political power. If, on the other hand, one were to view them as organs for the emancipation of the proletariat via a route that does not involve the revolutionary conquest of power, one would be lapsing into the syndicalist error: the comrades around *L'Ordine Nuovo* are hardly correct when they maintain, as they have done in polemic with *Guerra di Classe*, that the factory council movement, as they theorize it, is not in some sense a syndicalist movement.

Marxism is characterized by its prediction that the proletariat's struggle for emancipation will be divided into a number of great historical phases, in which political activity and economic activity vary enormously in importance: the struggle for power; the exercise of power (dictatorship of the proletariat) in the transformation of the economy; the society without classes and without a political State. To identify, in the role of the liberation

and harmonized only in a very advanced stage of the communist economy, when the possibility of the interests of a group of producers being at variance with the general interest in the progress of production will be reduced to a minimum.

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What is important to establish is that the communist revolution will be led and conducted by an organ representing the working class politically; prior to the smashing of bourgeois power, this is a political party. Subsequently, it is the system of political Soviets elected directly by the masses, with the aim of choosing representatives who have a general political programme and are not merely the exponents of the narrow interests of a trade or firm.

The Russian system is so contrived that a town's municipal Soviet is composed of one delegate for every group of proletarians, who vote for a single name only. The delegates, however, are proposed to the electors by the political party; the same process is repeated for the second and third degrees of delegation, to the higher organs of the State system. Thus it is always a single political party—the Communist Party—which seeks and obtains from the electors a mandate to administer power. We are certainly not saying that the Russian system should be adopted in an uncritical fashion elsewhere, but we do feel that the principle underlying the revolutionary system of representation—viz. the subjection of selfish and sectional interests to the collective interest—should be adhered to even more closely than in Russia.

Would it usefully serve the communists' revolutionary struggle if the network of a political system of representation of the working class were instituted now? This is the problem we shall examine in the next article, when we discuss the relevant proposals elaborated by the Party leadership. We shall remain unshaken in our conviction that such a representative system

In the final analysis, this system of State organizations gives representation to all producers in their capacity as members of the working class, and not as members of a particular trade or industrial sector. According to the latest manifesto of the Third International, the Soviets represent "a new type of mass organization, one which embraces the working class in its entirety, irrespective of individual trades or levels of political maturity." The basic units of the Soviet administrative network are the urban and rural councils; the network culminates in the government of commissars.

And yet it is true that during the phase of economic transformation, other organs are emerging parallel to this system, such as the system of workers' control and the people's economy. It is also true, as we have stressed many times, that this economic system will gradually absorb the political system, once the expropriation of the bourgeoisie is completed and there is no further need for a central authority. But the essential problem during the revolutionary period, as emerges clearly from all the Russian documents, is that of keeping the various local and sectional demands and interests subordinate to the general interest (in space and time) of the revolutionary movement.

Not until the two sets of organs are merged will the network of production be thoroughly communist, and only then will that principle (which in our view is being given exaggerated importance) of a perfect match between the system of representation and the mechanisms of the productive system be successfully realized. Prior to that stage, while the bourgeoisie is still resisting and above all while it still holds power, the problem is to achieve a representative system in which the general interest prevails. Today, while the economy is still based on individualism and competition, the only form in which this higher collective interest can be manifested is a system of political representation in which the communist political party is active.

We shall come back to this question, and demonstrate how

the desire to over-concretize and technically determine the Soviet system, especially when the bourgeoisie is still in power, puts the cart before the horse and lapses into the old errors of syndicalism and reformism. For the moment we quote these non-ambiguous words of Zinoviev: "The communist party unifies that vanguard of the proletariat which is struggling, in conscious fashion, to put the communist programme into effect. In particular it is striving to introduce its programme into the State organizations, the Soviets, and to achieve complete dominance within them."

To conclude, the Russian Soviet Republic is led by the Soviets, which represent ten million workers out of a total population of about eighty million. But essentially, appointments to the executive committees of the local and central Soviets are settled in the sections and congresses of the great Communist Party which has mastery over the Soviets. This corresponds to the stirring defense by Radek of the revolutionary role of minorities. It would be as well not to create a majoritarian-workerist fetishism which could only be to the advantage of reformism and the bourgeoisie. The party is in the front line of the revolution in so far as it is potentially composed of men who think and act like members of the future working humanity in which all will be producers harmoniously inserted into a marvelous mechanism of functions and representation.

The Bologna Programme and the Councils

It is to be deplored that in the Party's current programme there is no trace of the Marxist proposition that the class party is the instrument of proletarian emancipation; there is just the anodyne codicil: "decides (Who decides? Even grammar was sacrificed in the haste to decide—in favor of elections.) to base the organization of the Italian Socialist Party on the above-mentioned principles."

This declaration is unacceptable, since proletarian power is formed directly within the municipal Soviets of town and country, without passing via factory councils and committees, as we have repeated many times; this fact also emerges from the lucid expositions of the Russian Soviet system published by *L'Ordine Nuovo* itself. The factory councils are organs whose task will be to represent the interests of groups of workers during the period of revolutionary transformation of production. They represent not only a particular group's determination to achieve liberation through socialization of the private capitalist's firm, but also the group's concern for the manner in which its interests will be taken into account during the process of socialization itself, a process disciplined by the organized will of the whole of the working collectivity.

The workers' interests have until now been represented by the trade unions, throughout the period when the capitalist system appeared stable and there was scope only for putting upward pressure on wages. The unions will continue to exist during the revolutionary period, and naturally enough there will be a demarcation dispute with the factory councils, which only emerge when the abolition of private capitalism is seen to be imminent, as has happened in Turin. However, it is not a matter of great revolutionary moment to decide whether non-union members should participate or no in the elections for delegates. If it is logical that they should in fact participate, given the very nature of the factory council, it certainly does not appear logical to us that there should be a mingling of organs and functions between councils and unions, along the lines of the Turin proposals—compelling, for example, the Turin section of the Metalworkers' Federation to elect its own executive council from the workshop delegates' assembly.

At any rate, the relations between councils and unions as representatives of the special interests of particular groups of workers will continue to be very complex; they will be settled

importance to the appearance in the Russian Revolution of a new social representative organ, the Soviet, and endow it with an inner force such that its mere establishment constitutes a wholly novel historical solution to the proletariat's struggle against capitalism But the Soviets—most successfully defined by comrade Zinoviev as the State organizations of the working class—are nothing other than organs of proletarian power, exercising the revolutionary dictatorship of the working class; it is this latter which is the lynchpin of the Marxist system, and whose first positive experiment was the Paris Commune of 1871. The Soviets are the form, not the cause, of the revolution.

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In addition to this disagreement, there is another point which separates us from the Turin comrades. The Soviets, State organizations of the victorious proletariat, are not at all the same as the factory councils, nor do these latter constitute the first step or rung of the Soviet political system. This confusion is also present in the declaration of principles adopted by the first assembly of workshop delegates from the factories of Turin, which begins as follows:

> The factory delegates are the sole and authentic social (economic and political) representatives of the proletarian class, by virtue of their being elected by all workers at their workplace on the basis of universal suffrage. At the various levels of their constitution, the delegates embody the union of all workers as realized in organs of production (work-crew, workshop, factory, union of the factories in a given industry, union of the productive enterprises in a city, union of the organs of production in the mechanical and agricultural industry of a district, a province, a region, the nation, the world) whose authority and social leadership are invested in the councils and council system.

As regards the paragraph which denies the transformation of any State organ into an organ of struggle for the liberation of the proletariat, there are certain points to be made—but it will have to be done on another occasion, after an indispensable previous clarification of terms. But we dissent still more strongly from the programme where it states that the new proletarian organs will function initially, under the bourgeois regime, as instruments of the violent struggle for liberation, and will subsequently become organs of social and economic transformation; for among the organs mentioned are not only workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils, but also councils of the public economy, which are inconceivable under a bourgeois regime. Even the workers' political councils should be seen primarily as vehicles for the communists' activity of liberating the proletariat.

Even quite recently Comrade Serrati, in flagrant opposition to Marx and Lenin, has undervalued the role of the class party in the revolution. As Lenin says: "Together with the working masses, the Marxist, centralized political party, the vanguard of the proletariat, will lead the people along the right road, towards the victorious dictatorship of the proletariat, towards proletarian not bourgeois democracy, towards Soviet power and the socialist order." The Party's current programme smacks of libertarian scruples and a lack of theoretical preparation.

The Councils and the Leone Motion

This motion was summarized in four points expounded in the author's evocative style.

The first of these points finds miraculous inspiration in the statement that the class struggle is the real engine of history and that it has smashed social-national unions. But then the motion proceeds to exalt the Soviets as the organs of revolutionary synthesis, which they are supposed to bring about virtually through the very mechanism of their being created; it states that only

Soviets, rather than schools, parties or corporations, can bring the great historical initiatives to a triumphant conclusion.

This idea of Leone's, and of the many comrades who signed his motion, is quite different from our own, which we have deduced from Marxism and from the lessons of the Russian revolution. What they are doing is over-emphasizing a form in place of a force, just as the syndicalists did in the case of the trade unions, attributing to their minimalist practice the magical virtue of being able to transform itself into the social revolution. Just as syndicalism was demolished in the first place by the criticism of true Marxists, and subsequently by the experience of the syndicalist movements which all over the world have collaborated with the bourgeois regime, providing it with elements for its preservation, so Leone's idea collapses before the experience of the counter-revolutionary, social-democratic workers' councils, which are precisely those which have not been penetrated successfully by the communist political programme.

Only the party can embody the dynamic revolutionary energies of the class. It would be trivial to object that socialist parties too have compromised, since we are not exalting the virtues of the party form, but those of the dynamic content which is to be found only in the communist party. Every party defines itself on the basis of its own programme, and its functions cannot be compared with those of other parties, whereas of necessity all the trade unions and even, in a technical sense, all the workers' councils have functions in common with one another. The shortcoming of the social-reformist parties was not that they were parties, but that they were not communist and revolutionary parties. These parties led the counter-revolution, whereas the communist parties, in opposition to them, led and nourished revolutionary action. Thus there are no organs which are revolutionary by virtue of their form; there are only social forces that are revolutionary on account of their orientation. These forces transform themselves into a party that goes into battle with a

> which, if they are active and alert, by virtue of this fact alone provoke the social and economic transformation which is their goal. This is not a question of form, but of substance. In the present formulation, we repeat, the compilers of the programme have ended up adhering to Bordiga's conception, which attaches more importance to the conquest of power than to the formation of Soviets; for the present period, Bordiga sees the Soviets as having more of a "political" function, in the strict sense of the word, than an organic role of "economic and social transformation." Just as Bordiga maintains that the complete Soviet will come into being only during the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, so Gennari, Bombacci, etc., argue that only the conquest of power (which thereby acquires a political character, and so brings us back full circle to the "public powers" that had already been superseded) can provide the Soviets with their true, full functions. It is this which is in our opinion the nub of the argument, and it must lead us' sooner or later, to a further revision of the newly adopted programme.

According to Tasca, then, the working class can project the stages of its liberation, even before it has wrested power from the bourgeoisie. Moreover Tasca lets it be understood that this conquest could occur even without violence, once the proletariat had completed its work of technical preparation and social education: here we have the concrete revolutionary method of the *L'Ordine Nuovo* comrades. We will not proceed at length to demonstrate how this idea eventually coincides with that of reformism and becomes foreign to the fundamentals of revolutionary Marxism; according to Marxist doctrine, the revolution does not occur as a result of the education, culture, or technical capacity of the proletariat, but as a result of the inner crises of the system of capitalist production.

Like Enrico Leone, Tasca and his friends attach too much

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Comrade A. Tasca himself, in *L'Ordine Nuovo* No.22, clearly expounds his disagreement with the programme of the maximalist majority adopted at the Bologna Congress, and his even greater disagreement with us abstentionists, in the following passage that deserves to be reproduced.

> Another point in the Party's new programme deserves to be considered: the new proletarian organs (workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils, councils of the public economy, etc.) functioning initially (under the bourgeois regime) as instruments of the violent struggle for liberation, are subsequently transformed into organs of social and economic transformation, for reconstruction of the new communist order. At an earlier session of the Commission, we had stressed the shortcomings of such a formulation, which entrusted different functions to the new organs initially and subsequently, separated by the seizure of power on the part of the proletariat. Gennari had promised to make an alteration, along the lines of "... initially predominantly as instruments...", but it is evident that he eventually abandoned this idea, and as I was unable to attend the last session of the Commission, I could not make him adopt it again. There is in this formulation, however, a veritable point of disagreement which, while bringing Gennari, Bombacci and others closer to the abstentionists, puts a greater distance between them and those who believe that the new workers' organs cannot function as "instruments of the violent struggle for liberation" except and to the degree that they become "organs of social and economic transformation" at once (rather than subsequently). The proletariat's liberation is achieved through the manifestation of its ability to control in an autonomous and original fashion the social processes it created by and for itself: liberation consists in the creation of the sort of organs

programme.

The Councils and the initiative of L'Ordine Nuovo in Turin

In our view, the comrades around the newspaper *L'Ordine Nuovo* go even further than this. They are not even happy with the wording of the Party's programme, because they claim that the Soviets, including those of a technical-economic character (the factory councils), not only are already in existence and functioning as organs of the proletarian liberation struggle under the bourgeois regime, but have already become organs for the reconstruction of the communist economy.

In fact they publish in their newspaper the section of the Party's programme that we quoted above, leaving out a few words so as to transform its meaning in accordance with their own point of view:

> They will have to be opposed by new proletarian organs (workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils, councils of the public economy, etc.) ... organs of social and economic transformation and for the reconstruction of the new communist order.

But this article is already a long one, so we postpone to our next issue the exposition of our profound dissension from this principle; in our view, it runs the risk of ending up as a purely reformist experiment involving modification of certain functions of the trade unions and perhaps the promulgation of a bourgeois law on workers' councils.

III

At the end of our second article on the establishment of Soviets in Italy, we referred to the Turin movement to establish factory councils. We do not share the point of view which

inspires the efforts of the *L'Ordine Nuovo* comrades, and while appreciating their tenacity in making the fundamentals of communism better known, we believe that they have committed major errors of principle and tactics.

According to them, the essence of the communist revolution lies in the setting up of new organs of proletarian representation, whose fundamental character is their strict alignment with the process of production; eventually these organs are to control production directly. We have already made the point that we see this as over-emphasis on the idea of a formal coincidence between the representative organs of the working class and the various aggregates of the technical-economic system of production. This coincidence will in fact be achieved at a much more advanced stage of the communist revolution, when production is socialized and all its various constituent activities are subordinated in harmonious fashion to the general and collective interests.

Prior to this stage, and during the period of transition from a capitalist to a communist economy, the groupings of producers are in a constant state of flux and their individual interests may at times clash with the general and collective interests of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat. This movement will find its real instrument in a working-class representative institution in which each individual participates in his capacity as a member of the working class, and as such interested in a radical change in social relations, rather than as a component of a particular trade, factory or local group.

So long as political power remains in the hands of the capitalist class, a representative organ embodying the general revolutionary interests of the proletariat can only be found in the political arena. It can only be a class party that has the personal adherence of the sort of people who, in order to dedicate themselves to the cause of the revolution, have managed to overcome their narrow selfish, sectional and even sometimes class

interests (the latter case obtaining when the party admits deserters from the bourgeois class into its ranks, provided they are supporters of the communist programme).

It is a serious error to believe that by importing the formal structures which one expects to be formed to manage communist production into the present proletarian environment, among the wage-earners of capitalism, one will bring into being forces which are in themselves and through inner necessity revolutionary. This was the error of the syndicalists, and this too is the error of the over-zealous supporters of the factory councils.

The article published by comrade C. Niccolini in *Communismo* comes at an opportune moment. He notes that in Russia, even after the proletarian seizure of power, the factory councils frequently placed obstacles in the path of revolutionary measures; to an even greater extent than the trade unions, they counterposed the pressures of narrow interests to the unfolding of the revolutionary process. Even within the network of the communist economy, the factory councils are not the principal determinants of the production process. In the organs which fulfil this function (Councils of the People's Economy), the factory councils have fewer representatives than the trade unions or the proletarian State authorities; it is this centralized political network that is the instrument and the dominant factor in the revolution—understood not only as a struggle against the political resistance of the bourgeois class, but also as a process of socializing wealth.

At the juncture we have reached in Italy, viz. the juncture where the proletarian State is still a programmatic aspiration, the fundamental problem is the conquest of power on the part of the proletariat, or better the communist proletariat—i.e. the workers who are organized into a class-based political party, who are determined to make the historical form of revolutionary power, the dictatorship of the proletariat, into a concrete reality.