



SOVIETS

IN

ITALY

BY ANTONIO GRAMSCI

Published in 1969 by the Institute for Workers' Control, Antonio Gramsci's *Soviets in Italy* opens with a study of workers' democracy. Gramsci writes: "An urgent problem today faces every socialist with a lively sense of the historical responsibility on the working class and on the Party which represents the critical and active consciousness of the mission of the class." He continues: "The aim of this article is to stimulate thought and action. It is an invitation to the best and most conscious workers to reflect on the problem and collaborate – each in the sphere of his own competence and activity – towards its solution ... Only common solidarity in a work of clarification, persuasion and mutual education will produce concrete, constructive action."

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SOVIETS IN ITALY

1 WORKERS' DEMOCRACY

An urgent problem today faces every socialist with a lively sense of the historical responsibility that rests on the working class and on the Party which represents the critical and active consciousness of the mission of this class.

How are the immense social forces unleashed by the War to be harnessed? How are they to be disciplined and given a political form which has the potential to develop and grow continuously into the basis of the socialist State in which the dictatorship of the proletariat is embodied? How is the present to be welded to the future, satisfying the urgent necessities of the one and working effectively to create and 'anticipate' the other?

The aim of this article is to stimulate thought and action. It is an invitation to the best and most conscious workers to reflect on the problem and collaborate— each in the sphere of his own competence and activity—towards its solution, by focusing the attention of their comrades and associations on it. Only common solidarity in a work of clarification, persuasion and mutual education will produce concrete, constructive action.

The socialist State already exists potentially in the institutions of social life characteristic of the exploited working class. To link these institutions together, co-ordinating and ordering them in a highly centralized hierarchy of instances and powers, while respecting the indispensable autonomy and articulation of each, means creating a true and representative workers' democracy here and now. Such a democracy should be effectively and actively opposed to the

bourgeois State, and already prepared to replace it in all its essential functions of administration and control of the national heritage.

Today, the workers' movement is led by the Socialist Party and the Confederation of Labour.¹ But for the great mass of workers, the exercise of the social power of the Party and the Confederation is only achieved indirectly, by prestige and enthusiasm, authoritarian pressure and even inertia. The scope of the Party's prestige widens daily, spreading to previously unexplored popular strata; it wins consent and a desire to work effectively for the advent of Communism among groups and individuals which have never previously participated in political struggle. These disorderly and chaotic energies must be given permanent form and discipline. They must be organized and strengthened, making the proletarian and semi-proletarian class an organized society that can educate itself, gain experience and acquire a responsible consciousness of the duties that fall to a class that achieves State power.

Only many years of decades of work will enable the Socialist Party and the trade unions to absorb the whole of the working class. These two institutions cannot be identified immediately with the proletarian State. In fact, in the Communist Republics, they have continued to survive independently of the State, as institutions of propulsion (the Party) or of control and partial implementation (the unions). The Party must continue as the organ of Communist education, the dynamo of faith, the depository of doctrine, the supreme power harmonizing and leading towards their goal the organized and disciplined forces of the working class and the peasantry. Precisely because it must strictly carry out this task, the Party cannot throw open its doors to an invasion of new members, unused to the exercise of responsibility and discipline.

But the social life of the working class is rich in institutions, is articulated by a multiplicity of activities. These precisely demand development, co-ordination, and interconnection in a broad and flexible system that will include and order the entire working class.

The workshop with its internal commissions,² the socialist circles and the peasant communities are the centres of proletarian life in which we must work directly.

The internal commissions are organs of workers' democracy which must be freed from the limitations imposed on them by the management, and infused with new life and energy. Today, the internal commissions limit the power of the capitalist in the factory and perform functions of arbitration and discipline. Tomorrow, developed and enriched, they must be the organs of proletarian power, replacing the capitalist in all his useful functions of management and administration.

The workers should proceed forthwith to the election of vast delegate assemblies, chosen from their best and most conscious comrades, under the slogan: 'All Power in the Workshop to the Workshop Committee', co-ordinating this slogan with another: 'All State Power to the Workers' and Peasants' Councils'.

A vast field of concrete revolutionary propaganda would open up before the Communists organized in the Party and in the ward circles. In accord with the urban sections, the ward circles should make a survey of the workers' forces in their zone, and become the seat of the ward council of workshop delegates, the ganglion that

1 Founded at Genoa in 1892, The Italian Socialist Party (PSI) represented the Second International in Italy. Unlike its French and German equivalents, it did not support the entry of Italy into the War in May 1915, but neither did it adopt a Zimmerwaldist attitude. The result was that it survived the War with the three wings characteristic of pre-War Socialist Parties: a reformist wing on the right; a 'maximalist' (orthodox) centre; and a revolutionary wing on the left. The General Confederation of Labour (CGL) was the Socialist federation of trade unions. Founded in 1906, its pre-war membership rose to 384,000, about half the organized workers in Italy.

After the War, the CGL membership rose rapidly to 2,000,000; its Catholic (CIL) and syndicalist (USI) counterparts claimed 1,160,000 and 800,000 members respectively. The CGL was dominated by reformists like its post-War secretary, D'Aragona.

knits together and centralizes all the proletarian energies of the ward. The system of elections could be varied according to the size of the ward, but the aim should be to get one delegate elected for every 15 workers, divided into categories (as in English factories), arriving by electoral stages at a committee of factory delegates which included representatives of the whole work process (manual workers, clerical workers, technicians).

The ward committee should also try to include delegates from the other categories of workers living in the ward: servants, coachmen, tram-drivers, railway workers, road-sweepers, private employees, clerks, and others.

The ward committee should be an expression of the whole working class living in the ward, a legitimate and authoritative expression that commands respect for a discipline invested with spontaneously delegated power, and that can order the immediate, integral cessation of all work throughout the ward.

The ward committees should be enlarged into urban commissions, controlled and disciplined by the Socialist Party and the craft federations.

Such a system of workers' democracy (integrated with the corresponding peasant organizations) would give a permanent form and discipline to the masses. It would be a magnificent school of political and administrative experience, and it would incorporate the masses into its framework down to the last man, so that tenacity and perseverance become habitual for them, and they get used to regarding themselves as an army in the field which needs a strict cohesion if it is not to be destroyed and reduced to slavery.

2 'Commissioni interni': roughly equivalent to the shop steward committees set up in Britain during the First World War. The internal commissions had long been demanded by the engineering workers' union (FIOM) in Turin before they were acknowledged by the government (but not fully by the employers) in 1915. Most were dominated by revolutionary workers, though a few were tools of the management.

Each factory would constitute one or more regiments of this army, with its commanders, its interconnecting services, its general staff, whose power will be delegated by free election, not imposed in an authoritarian fashion. Assemblies, held within the workshop, and ceaseless propaganda and persuasion by the most highly conscious elements, should radically transform the workers' psychology. It should increase the readiness and capacity of the masses for the exercise of power, and diffuse a consciousness of the rights and duties of comrade and worker that is concrete and effective, since it has been spontaneously generated from living historical experience.

As we have said, these brief proposals have been put forward only to stimulate thought and action. Every aspect of the problem deserves coherent subsidiary treatment, elucidation and integration, in breadth and depth. But the concrete, integral solution of the problems of socialist life can only arise from Communist practice: collective discussion, sympathetically modifying consciousness, unifying it and inspiring it with active enthusiasm. It is a Communist and revolutionary act to tell the truth, to arrive together at the truth. The 'dictatorship of the proletariat' must cease to be a mere formula, an occasion for showy revolutionary phraseology. He who wants the end must also want the means. The dictatorship of the proletariat is the installation of a new, typically proletarian State, which will bring together the institutional experiences of the oppressed class and make the social life of the working class and the peasantry a highly organized and extensive system. This State cannot be improvised; the Russian Bolshevik government laboured eight months to diffuse and concretize the slogan 'All Power to the Soviets', and the Russian workers had known Soviets since 1905. Italian Communists must treasure the Russian experience and save time and labour: the work of reconstruction itself will demand so much time and so much labour that every day, every act must be devoted to it.

21 June 1919.

2 THE FACTORY COUNCIL

The proletarian revolution is not the arbitrary act of an organization that asserts itself to be revolutionary, or a system of organizations that assert themselves to be revolutionary. The proletarian revolution is a very long historical process that manifests itself in the rise and growth of determinate forces of production (which we summarize by the expression: ‘proletariat’) in a determinate historical context (which we summarize by the expressions: ‘private property, capitalist mode of production, factory system, organization of society in a democratic parliamentary state’). In a given phase of this process, the new productive forces are unable to develop or to organize themselves autonomously within the official order of the human community. Then the revolutionary act occurs: it is a direct bid to overthrow this order of things violently, to destroy the whole apparatus of economic and political power in which revolutionary productive forces are oppressively constricted. The revolutionary act is also a direct bid to overthrow the machinery of the bourgeois State and to construct a type of State in which liberated productive forces find both the adequate form for their further development and expansion, and the necessary fortress and weaponry to suppress their adversaries.

The true process of the proletarian revolution cannot be identified with the development and action of revolutionary organizations of a voluntary and contractual type, such as the political party or the trade unions. These are organizations born on the terrain of bourgeois democracy and political liberty, as an affirmation and development of political freedom. These organizations, in so far as they both embody a doctrine which interprets the revolutionary process and predicts its development (within certain limits of historical probability), and are acknowledged by the broad masses as their expression and embryonic apparatus of government, are—increasingly so—the direct and responsible agents of the successive acts of liberation which the whole working class will launch in the course of the revolutionary process. But all the same they do not incarnate this process. They do not supersede the bourgeois State:

they do not and cannot embrace the multiple epicentres of revolution which capitalism throws up in its implacable path as a machine of exploitation and oppression.

During the economic and political predominance of the bourgeois class, the actual unfolding of the revolutionary process takes place subterraneously, in the darkness of the factory and in the obscurity of the consciousness of the countless multitudes that capitalism subjects to its laws. It is not controllable and documentable: it will be so in the future when the elements that constitute it (the feelings, the desires, the mores, the germs of initiative and of habit) are developed and purified by the evolution of society and the new place that the working class comes to occupy in the field of production. The revolutionary organizations of the political party and the trade union are born on the terrain of political liberty and bourgeois democracy, as an affirmation and development of liberty and of democracy in general, where the relationships of citizen to citizen subsist. The revolutionary process takes place on the terrain of production, in the factory, where the relations are those of oppressor to oppressed, of exploiter to exploited, where freedom for the worker does not exist, where democracy does not exist. The revolutionary process occurs where the worker is nothing and wants to become everything, where the power of the proprietor is unlimited, is the power of life and death over the worker, over the workers' wife and over the workers' children.

When we say that the historical process of the workers' revolution which is immanent in the human community under capitalism, whose intrinsic laws are those of an objective concatenation of a multiplicity of actions that are uncontrollable, because they are created by a situation that has not been willed by the worker and is not foreseeable by the worker—when we say that this historical process has exploded into the light of day, has it become a controllable and documentable force? We say this when the whole working-class has become revolutionary: no longer in the sense that it refuses in a general way to collaborate with the ruling institutions of the bourgeois class and represents an opposition within the framework of democracy, but in the sense that the working class, as

it is to be found in a factory, launches a movement that must necessarily result in the founding of a workers' State— that is, shape a human society altogether different from anything that has previously existed, in a universal form that embraces the whole workers' International, and hence the whole of humanity. We say the present period is revolutionary precisely because we can see that the working class, in all countries, is tending to generate from within itself, with the utmost vital energy (if with the mistakes, gropings and encumbrances natural to an oppressed class which has no historical precedent, and must do everything for the first time), proletarian institutions of a new type: representative in basis and industrial in arena. We say the present period is revolutionary because the working class tends with all its energy and all its will-power to found its own State. That is why we claim that the birth of the workers' Factory Councils represents a major historical event—the beginning of a new era in the history of humanity. The revolutionary process has exploded into the light of day. It has become controllable and documentable.

In the liberal phase of the historical evolution of the bourgeois class and the society dominated by the bourgeoisie, the elementary cell of the State was the proprietor who subjugated the working class to his profit in the factory. The proprietor was also the entrepreneur and the industrialist. Industrial power and its source was in the factory, and the worker never succeeded in freeing himself from the conviction that the proprietor was necessary: his person was identified with that of the industrialist, with that of the manager responsible for production and hence also for the workers' wages, his bread, his clothing, his roof.

In the imperialist phase of the historical evolution of the bourgeois class, industrial power has become separated from the factory and is concentrated in a trust, in a monopoly, in a bank, in the State bureaucracy. Industrial power does not have to answer for what it does and hence becomes more autocratic, ruthless and arbitrary. But the worker, freed from obedience to the 'boss' in a servile atmosphere of hierarchy, and stimulated by new social and historical conditions, achieves priceless gains in independence and initiative.

In the factory the working-class becomes a determinate ‘instrument of production’ in a determinate organic system. Every worker enters ‘at the dictate of chance’ to play a part in this system: at the dictate of chance so far as his own will is concerned, but not at the dictate of chance as regards the assignation of his work, since he represents a specific necessity in the process of labour and production. It is only for this that he is taken on: it is only for this that he is able to earn his bread. He is a cog in the machine of the division of labour, in a working class constituted into an instrument of production. If the worker acquires a clear consciousness of the ‘determinate necessity’ of his situation and makes it the basis of a representative apparatus of a State type (that is, not voluntary or contractual, through the membership card, but absolute and organic, part of a reality that is a precondition of bread, clothes, housing, industrial production)—if the working class does this, it achieves something of deep significance. It initiates a new history, the era of workers’ States that must coalesce to form a communist society: a world organized on the model of a large engineering works, an International in which every people, every part of humanity acquires a characteristic personality by its performance of a particular form of production and not by its organization as a State with particular frontiers.

In so far as it builds this representative apparatus, the working class effectively completes the expropriation of the primary machine, of the most important instrument of production: the working class itself. It thereby rediscovers itself, acquiring consciousness of its organic unity and counterposing itself as a whole to capitalism. The working class thus asserts that industrial power and its source ought to return to the factory. It presents the factory in a new light, from the workers’ point of view, as a form in which the working class constitutes itself into a specific organic body, as the cell of a new State, the workers’ State— and as the basis of a new representative system, a system of Councils. The workers’ State, which is born within a specific matrix of production, creates the conditions for its own development and for its ultimate disappearance as a State, with its organic incorporation into the world system of the Communist International.

In the Council of a large engineering works today, every work team (by craft) is united, from the proletarian point of view, with the other teams in the section, and every branch of industrial production merges with all the other branches, throwing into relief the productive process: so throughout the world, English coal will mix with Russian petrol, Siberian grain with Sicilian sulphur, rice from Vercelli with wood from Styria . . . in a single organism, subject to an international administration which governs the richness of the world in the name of all humanity. In this sense the workers' Factory Council is the first cell of a historical process which should end in the Communist International, no longer as a political organization of the revolutionary proletariat, but as a reorganization of the world economy and of the whole human community, on a national and international scale. Every revolutionary action has value and is historically real, in so far as it participates in this process and is conceived as an initiative to free it from the bourgeois superstructures that restrict and obstruct it.

The relations that should link the political party and the Factory Council, the trade union and the Factory Council, are already implicit in the argument that has been presented. The party and the trade union should not impose themselves as tutors or ready-made superstructures for the new institution, in which the historical process of the revolution takes a controllable historical form. They should become the conscious agents of its liberation from the restrictive forces concentrated in the bourgeois State. They ought to set themselves the task of organizing the general external (political) conditions in which the process of the revolution can achieve its maximum speed, and liberated productive forces find their greatest expansion.

5 June 1920

3 UNIONS AND COUNCILS - I

The proletarian organization that, as a total expression of the worker and peasant masses, is centred on the Confederation of Labour is undergoing a constitutional crisis similar in nature to the crisis in which the democratic parliamentary State is vainly struggling. This crisis is a crisis of power and sovereignty. The solution of the one is the solution of the other. By solving the problem of the will for power in the sphere of their class organization, the workers will succeed in creating the organic foundations of their State and will victoriously counterpose it to the parliamentary State.

The workers feel that the complex of 'their' organization, the trade union, has become such an enormous apparatus that it now obeys laws internal to its structure and its complicated functions, but foreign to the masses who have acquired a consciousness of their historical mission as a revolutionary class. They feel that their will for power is not adequately expressed, in a clear and precise sense, in the present institutional hierarchy. They feel that even in their own home, in the house they have built tenaciously, with patient effort, cementing it with their blood and tears, the machine crushes man and bureaucracy sterilizes the creative spirit. Banal and verbalistic dilettantism cannot hide the absence of precise ideas for the necessities of industrial production, or a lack of understanding for the psychology of the proletarian masses. These de facto conditions irritate the workers, but as individuals they are powerless to change them: the worlds and desires of each single man are too small in comparison to the iron laws inherent in the bureaucratic structure of the trade-union apparatus.

The leaders of the organization are oblivious to this deep and widespread crisis. The clearer it becomes that the working class is organized in forms that do not accord with its real historical structure; the more certain it is that the working class is not organized into an institution that perpetually adapts itself to the laws that govern the intimate process of the real historical development of the class itself: the more these leaders persist in blindness, and work

to resolve dissensions and conflicts within the organization 'legalistically'. Eminently bureaucratic in spirit, they believe that an objective condition, rooted in the psychology that develops in the living experience of the workshop, can be overcome by speeches that move the emotions and with an agenda voted unanimously in an assembly stupefied by oratorical din and verbosity. Today, they are stirring themselves to 'keep up with the times' and, to show that they are still capable of 'trenchant thought', they are reviving the old and threadbare syndicalist ideology, insisting painfully on establishing an identity between the Soviet and the trade union, insisting painfully on the claim that the present system of union organization already constitutes the foundation for a Communist society, the system of forces which should embody the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In the form in which it exists at present in Western Europe, the trade union is a kind of organization which not only differs essentially from the Soviet, but also differs considerably from the trade union as it is steadily developing in the Russian Communist Republic.

The craft unions, the Chambers of Labour,³ the industrial federations and the General Confederation of Labour are the types of proletarian organization specific to the historical period dominated by capital. It can be maintained that they are in a certain sense an integral part of capitalist society, and have a function which is inherent in the régime of private property. In this period, when individuals are only valued as owners of commodities, which they trade as property, the workers too are forced to obey the iron laws of general necessity; they become traders in their sole property—their

3 'Camere del Lavoro': The first chambers of labour were set up in Milan in 1889 on the model of the French 'bourses de travail'. Like the British trades council, they provided a central organization for all the working class institutions in a commune or province, developed a wide range of welfare activities and planned and directed the local class struggle. Whereas the later-founded trade unions were based on the aristocracy of skilled workers, and tended towards conservatism, the Chamber of Labour united all workers, and represented the radical wing of the working-class forces.

labour power and professional skills. More exposed to the risks of competition, the workers have accumulated their property in ever broader and more comprehensive 'firms', they have created these enormous apparatuses for the concentration of work energy, they have imposed prices and hours and have disciplined the market. They have hired from outside or produced from inside a trusted administrative staff, expert in this kind of speculation, able to dominate market conditions, to lay down contracts, to evaluate commercial risks and to initiate profitable economic operations. The union's essential nature is competitive, not Communist. The union cannot be the instrument for a radical renovation of society, it can provide the proletariat with proficient bureaucrats, technical experts on industrial questions of a general kind, but it cannot be the basis for proletarian power. It offers no possibility of fostering the individual abilities of proletarians which make them capable and worthy of running society; it cannot produce the leadership which will embody the vital forces and rhythm of the progress of Communist society.

The proletarian dictatorship can only be embodied in a type of organization that is specific to the activity of producers, not wage earners, the slaves of capital. The Factory Council is the nuclear cell of this organization. For all branches of labour are represented in the Council, in proportion to the contribution each craft and each branch of labour makes to the manufacture of the object the factory produces for the collectivity; it is a class institution and a social institution. Its *raison d'être* is in labour, in industrial production, i.e. in a permanent fact, and no longer in wages, in class divisions, i.e. in a transitory fact—precisely the one that we wish to supersede.

Hence the Council realizes the unity of the working class, gives the masses a cohesion and form of the same nature as the cohesion and form the masses assume in the general organization of society.

The Factory Council is the model for the proletarian State. All the problems inherent in the organization of the proletarian State are inherent in the organization of the Council. In the one and in the other the concept of the citizen gives way to the concept of the

comrade: collaboration to produce well and usefully increases solidarity and multiplies ties of affection and fraternity. Everyone is indispensable, everyone is in his place, everyone has his function and his position. Even the most ignorant and backward of workers, even the most vain and 'civil' of engineers will eventually convince himself of this truth in the experience of factory organization; all eventually acquire a Communist consciousness, so that they can understand the great step forward that the Communist economy represents as against the capitalist economy. The Council is the best adapted organ for the mutual education which develops the new social spirit that the proletariat has successfully expressed out of the rich and living experience of the community of labour. In the trade union, workers' solidarity was fostered by the struggle against capitalism, in suffering and sacrifice. In the Council, it is positive and permanent, it is embodied in even the least moments of industrial production. It is a joyous consciousness of being an organic whole, a homogeneous and compact system that by useful work and the disinterested production of social wealth, affirms its sovereignty, realizes its power and freedom to create history.

The existence of an organization in which the proletariat is structured homogeneously as a productive class, making possible a free, spontaneous flowering of respected and capable leaders and individuals, will have fundamental effects on the constitution and spirit that informs the activity of the trade unions.

The Factory Council, too, is based on the crafts. In every department, the workers are differentiated into teams and each team is a labour unit (a craft unit); the Council is made up precisely of commissars whom the workers elect by departmental crafts (teams). But the union is based on the individual, while the Council is based on the organic and concrete unity of the craft as it is realized in the discipline of the industrial process. the team (craft) feels its distinctness from the homogeneous body of the class, but at the same time, it also feels its enmeshment in the system of discipline and order that makes possible the development of production and its exact and definite functioning. As an economic and political interest the craft is an indistinct and perfectly solidary part of the class body;

it is distinct from it as a technical interest and as a development of the particular tool it utilizes in the work-process. In the same way, all industries are homogeneous and solidary in their aim to perfect the production, distribution and social accumulation of wealth, but each industry has distinct interests where the technical organization of its specific activity is concerned.

The existence of the Councils gives the workers direct responsibility for production, leads them to improve their work, institutes a conscious and voluntary discipline, and creates the psychology of the producer, the creator of history. The workers will carry this new consciousness into the union, and the latter, instead of pursuing the simple activity of the class struggle, will devote itself to the fundamental work of imprinting a new configuration on economic life and labour technique; it will devote itself to the elaboration of the forms of economic life and professional technique proper to Communist civilization. In this sense, the trade unions, made up of the best and most conscious workers, will realize the highest moment of the class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat: they will create the objective conditions in which classes will no longer be able to exist or re-emerge.

The industrial unions in Russia are doing this. They have become the organs in which all the individual undertakings of a certain industry are amalgamated, interconnected and articulated, forming one great industrial unit. Wasteful competition is being eliminated, the main services of administration, supply, distribution and storage are being unified in great centres. Work systems, manufacturing secrets and new applications are immediately made available to the whole of the industry. The multiplication of bureaucratic and disciplinary functions inherent in relations of private property and individual enterprise is being reduced to minimal industrial necessities. The application of union principles to the Russian textile industry has made possible a reduction in the bureaucracy from 100,000 employees to 3,500.

Factory organization will bind the class (the whole class) into a homogeneous and cohesive unit that can adapt flexibly to the

industrial process of production and dominate it, bringing it under final control. So factory organization will embody the proletarian dictatorship, the Communist State that destroys class dominion in the political superstructures and in their general interconnections.

Craft and industrial unions will be the rigid backbone of the great proletarian body. They will elaborate individual and local experience and store it up, realizing that national equalization of the conditions of labour and production on which Communist equality is concretely based. But if it is to be possible to impress on the unions this positive class and Communist direction, it is essential that the workers turn their whole will and credence to the consolidation and diffusion of the Councils, to the organic unification of the working class. On this homogeneous and solid basis all the higher structures of the Communist dictatorship and economy will flourish and develop.

11 October 1919.

4 UNIONS AND COUNCILS - II

The trade union is not a predetermined phenomenon: it becomes a determinate institution, that is, it assumes a definite historical form to the extent that the strength and will of the workers who are its members impress a policy and propose an aim that define it.

Objectively, the trade union is the form that labour as a commodity necessarily assumes in a capitalist régime when it organizes to dominate the market. This form is an office of functionaries, technicians (when they are technicians) of organization, specialists (when they are specialists) in the art of centralizing and leading the workers' forces in order to establish an advantageous balance between the working class and the power of capital.

The development of trade-union organization is characterized by two facts: 1. the union embraces an ever larger number of workers; 2. the union concentrates and generalizes its scope so that the power and discipline of the movement are focused in a central office. This office detaches itself from the masses it regiments, removing itself from the fickle eddy of moods and currents that are typical of the great tumultuous masses. The union thus acquires the ability to sign agreements and take on responsibilities, obliging the entrepreneur to accept a certain legality in his relations with the workers. This legality is conditional on the trust the entrepreneur has in the solvency of the union, and in its ability to ensure that the working masses respect their contractual obligations.

The emergence of an industrial legality is a great victory for the working class, but it is not the ultimate and definitive victory. Industrial legality has improved the working class's material living conditions, but it is no more than a compromise—a compromise which had to be made and which must be supported until the balance of forces favours the working class. If the officials of the trade union organization regard industrial legality as a necessary, but not permanently necessary compromise; if they devote all the means at the disposal of the union to improving the balance of forces for the

working class; and if they make all the indispensable moral and material preparations for the working class at a given moment to be able to launch a successful offensive against capital and subject it to its law, then the trade union is a revolutionary instrument and union discipline, even when it is used to make the workers respect industrial legality, is revolutionary discipline.

The relations which should prevail between union and Factory Council must be considered from this viewpoint: from our judgment of the nature and value of industrial legality.

The Factory Council is the negation of industrial legality. It tends at every moment to destroy it, for it necessarily leads the working class towards the conquest of industrial power, and indeed makes the working class the source of industrial power. The union represents legality, and must aim to make it respected by its members. The trade union is responsible to the industrialists, but it is responsible to them in so far as it is responsible to its own members: it guarantees continuity of labour and income to the workers and their families, that is, bread and a roof over their heads. By its revolutionary spontaneity, the Factory Council tends to unleash the class war at any moment; by its bureaucratic form, the trade union tends to prevent the class war ever being unleashed. The relations between the two institutions should be such that a capricious impulse on the part of the Councils could not cause a step backward by the working class, a working class defeat; in other words, the Council should accept and assimilate the discipline of the union, while the revolutionary character of the Council exercises influence on the union, as a reagent dissolving its bureaucratism.

The Council tends to move beyond industrial legality at any moment. The Council is the exploited, tyrannized mass, forced to perform servile labour; hence it tends to universalize every rebellion, to give a revolutionary scope and value to each of its acts of power. The union, as an organization totally committed to legality, tends to universalize and perpetuate this legality. The relations between trade union and Council should create the conditions in which the movement away from legality —the proletarian offensive—occurs

at the most opportune moment for the working class, when it has that minimum of preparation that is indispensable to a durable victory.

The liaison between unions and Councils can only be established by one link: the majority or a substantial part of the electors to the Councils should be organized in the union. Every bid to link the two institutions in a relation of hierarchical dependence can only lead to the destruction of both.

If the conception that makes the Council a mere instrument in the trade union struggle is materialized in a bureaucratic discipline and rights of direct union control over the Council, the Council is sterilized as a force of revolutionary expansion—as a form of real development of the proletarian revolution that tends spontaneously to create new modes of production and labour, new modes of discipline, a Communist society. The emergence of the Councils is a result of the position the working class has won on the terrain of industrial production; the Council is a historical necessity of the working class. Thus any bid to subordinate it hierarchically to the trade union will sooner or later result in a clash between the two institutions. The power of the Councils consists in the fact that they are close to and coincide with the consciousness of the working masses who are seeking their autonomous emancipation, who wish to affirm their freedom of initiative in the creation of history: the whole mass participates in the life of the Council and feels itself to be something through this activity. Only very small numbers of members participate in the life of the union; its real strength lies in this fact, but this fact is also a weakness that cannot be put to the test without grave risks.

If, moreover, the union were to lean directly on the Councils, not to dominate but to become a higher form of them, the typical tendency of the Councils to move beyond industrial legality at any moment and unleash decisive actions in the class war would be reflected in the union. The latter would forfeit its ability to make commitments and would lose its character as a disciplinary and regulative force over the working class.

If its members establish a revolutionary discipline in the union, which appears to the masses as a necessity for the victory of the workers' revolution and not as slavery to capital, this discipline will undoubtedly be accepted and made its own by the Councils. It will become the natural form of the Councils' action. If the union office becomes an organ of revolutionary preparation, and appears as such to the masses in the practice it executes, in the men who compose it and the propaganda it develops, then its centralized and absolute character will be seen by the masses as a major revolutionary strength, as one more (and a very important) condition for the success of the struggle to which they are basically committed.

In Italian conditions, the union bureaucrat conceives industrial legality as a permanent state of affairs. He too often defends it from the same viewpoint as the proprietor. He sees only chaos and wilfulness in everything that emerges from the working masses. He does not understand the worker's act of rebellion against capitalist discipline as a rebellion; he perceives only the physical act, which may in itself and for itself be trivial. Thus the story about the 'porter's raincoat' has been as widely disseminated and interpreted by stupid journalists as the fable of the 'socialization of women in Russia'. In these conditions union discipline can only be a service to capital; in these conditions every bid to subordinate the Councils to the unions can only be judged as reactionary.

Communists want the act of revolution to be as far as possible conscious and responsible. They therefore want the choice of the moment to unleash the workers' offensive (to the extent that there is a choice) to remain in the hands of the most conscious and responsible section of the working class: that which is organized in the Socialist Party and participates most actively in the life of the organization. Therefore, the Communists cannot wish that the union lose any of its disciplinary control and its systematic centralization.

By constituting themselves into permanently organized groups in the unions and the factories, the Communists must introduce the conceptions, theses and tactics of the Third International; they must influence union discipline and determine its aims; they must

influence the deliberations of the Factory Councils and transform the rebellious impulses produced by the situation capitalism has imposed on the working class into consciousness and revolutionary creativity. The Communists in the Party have the greatest interest in this, for on their shoulders rests the heaviest historical responsibility: to promote by incessant activity relations of natural interpenetration and interdependence between the various institutions of the working class that will enliven its discipline and organization with a revolutionary spirit.

12 June 1920

5 THE PARTY AND THE REVOLUTION

The Socialist Party, with its network of sections which in their turn are the fulcrum of a compact and powerful system of ward circles in the great industrial centres; with its provincial federations, tightly unified by the currents of ideas and activities that radiate from the urban centres; with its annual congresses for the discussion and resolutions of immediate, concrete problems, which embody the highest sovereignty of the Party, exercised by the mass of the members through precise delegations, with limited powers; with its leadership, which emanates directly from the congress and constitutes its permanent executive and organ of control—the Socialist Party constitutes an apparatus of proletarian democracy which might easily in political fantasy be regarded as ‘exemplary’.

The Socialist Party is a model of a ‘libertarian’ society, voluntarily disciplined by an explicit act of consciousness. To imagine the whole of human society as a colossal Society Party, with its requests for admission and its resignations, cannot but encourage the contractualist prejudices of the many subversive spirits who are influenced by J. J. Rousseau and anarchist pamphlets rather than by the historical and economic doctrines of Marxism. The Constitution of the Russian Soviet Republic is based on exactly the same principles as the Socialist Party; the government of Russian popular sovereignty functions in forms suggestively similar to the forms of government in the Socialist Party. Hence it is not surprising that these elements of analogy and instinctive aspirations should give rise to the revolutionary myth which conceives the installation of proletarian power as a dictatorship of the system of Socialist Party sections.

This conception is at least as utopian as that which acknowledges the unions and the Chambers of Labour as the proper forms of the revolutionary process. Communist society can only be conceived as a ‘natural’ formation built on the means of production and exchange; and the revolution can only be conceived as the act of historical acknowledgment of the ‘naturalness’ of this formation. Hence the

revolutionary process can only be identified with a spontaneous movement of the working masses caused by the clash of the contradictions inherent in common human life under a régime of capitalist property. Caught in the pincers of capitalist conflicts, and threatened by condemnation without appeal to the loss of civil and spiritual rights, the masses break with the forms of bourgeois democracy and leave behind the legality of the bourgeois constitution. Society could well collapse, all production of useful social wealth might slump, precipitating men into a bottomless abyss of poverty, barbarism and death, if there is no reaction by the historically conscious masses of the people to find a new framework, to build a new order in the process of the production and distribution of wealth. The proletariat's organs of struggle are the 'agents' of this colossal mass movement; the Socialist Party is indubitably the most important 'agent' in this process of destruction and neo-formation, but it is not and cannot be conceived as the form of this process, a form malleable and plastic to the leaders' will. German Social-Democracy (understood as an ensemble of political and trade union institutions) paradoxically forced the process of the German proletarian revolution violently into its own organizational forms, thinking it could dominate history. It has created its own Councils by fiat, with a secure majority of its own men on them; it has hobbled the revolution and domesticated it. Today it has lost all contact with historical reality, except for the contact of Noske's fist on the workers' backs, and the revolutionary process follows its own uncontrolled and as yet mysterious course, which will burst forth again in unknown founts of violence and agony.

The Socialist Party achieves the same results with its intransigence in the political domain as the trade unions do in the economic field: it puts an end to free competition. With its revolutionary programme, the Socialist Party pulls out from under the bourgeois State apparatus its democratic basis in the consensus of the governed. It influences ever wider popular masses and assures them that the state of distress in which they are caught is not a passing phase, nor an unavoidable evil, but corresponds to an objective necessity: it is the ineluctable moment of a dialectical process which must overflow in violent turbulence to regenerate society. Thus the Party is identified

with the historical consciousness of the popular masses and governs their irresistible spontaneous movement. It is an incorporeal government, which functions through a myriad spiritual links; it is a radiation of prestige, only becoming an effective government in culminating movements: by an appeal to the streets, by a physical array of militant forces, poised to ward off a danger or dissolve a cloud of reactionary violence.

Once the Party has successfully paralysed the functioning of the legal government over the popular masses, the most difficult and delicate phase of its activity opens before it: the phase of positive activity. The conceptions the Party disseminates operate autonomously in the individual consciousness, and they cause new social configurations to emerge in line with these conceptions. They produce institutions that function by internal laws, an embryonic apparatus of power in which the masses realize their government, and acquire a consciousness of their historical responsibility and peculiar mission: the creation of the conditions for a regenerative communism. As a compact and militant ideological formation, the Party influences this intimate elaboration of new structures, this industry of millions and millions of social infusoria preparing the red reefs of coral whose growth will break the strength of the oceanic tempest in the not so distant future, and bring back peace to the waves, establishing a new balance of currents and climes. But this influx is organic, it grows from the circulation of ideas, the maintenance intact of the apparatus of spiritual government, from the fact that the myriads of workers who establish the new leaderships and institute the new order know that the historical consciousness that moves them has its living embodiment in the Socialist Party: it is justified by the doctrine of the Socialist Party, and has a powerful bulwark in the political strength of the socialist Party.

The Party remains the superior hierarchy of this irresistible mass movement. It exercises the most effective of dictatorships, a dictatorship born of its prestige, of the conscious and spontaneous acceptance of an authority that is acknowledged as indispensable to the success of the work undertaken. It would be disastrous if a

sectarian conception of the Party role in the revolution claimed to materialize this hierarchy, and fix in mechanical forms of immediate power an apparatus governing the masses in movement, forcing the revolutionary process into the forms of the Party. The result would be to divert a number of men and to 'dominate' history, but the real revolutionary process would escape the control and influence of the Party which would unconsciously become an organ of conservatism.

The propaganda of the Socialist Party insists on these irrefutable theses. The traditional relations of capitalist appropriation of the product of human labour have changed radically. Before the War, Italian labour agreed without serious or explosive resistance to the appropriation of 60 per cent of labour-produced wealth at the hands of the tiny capitalist minority and the State, while the tens of millions of the working population had to be content with a scarce 40 per cent for the satisfaction of elementary needs and higher cultural life. Today, after the War, a new situation has emerged. Italian society only produces one half of the wealth it consumes; the State is colossally in debt to future labour, that is, it is progressively enslaving Italian labour to the international plutocracy. To the two groups who take a slice out of production (the capitalists and the State) it has added a third, purely parasitic one: the petty-bourgeoisie of the military-bureaucratic caste which formed during the War. It seizes precisely that half of the wealth which is unproduced and becomes a debt to future labour: it seizes it directly as stipends and pensions, and indirectly because its parasitic function presupposes the existence of a whole parasitic apparatus. If Italian society only produces fifteen billion lire of wealth while it consumes thirty, and these fifteen are produced by a daily eight hours labour on the part of the tens of millions of the working population who receive six to seven billions as their wages, a capitalist balance-sheet can only be reestablished normally in one way: by forcing the tens of millions of the working population to give for the same mass of wages, one, two, three, four or five hours more labour daily. This is unpaid labour, labour which goes to increase capital, so it can return to its accumulatory function; which goes to the State so that it can pay its debts; or which consolidates the economic situation of the salaried petty-bourgeoisie and rewards it for its armed services to the State

and Capital in forcing the working population to exhaust itself at machines and on patches of earth.

In this general situation of capitalist relations, the class struggle cannot be aimed at any goal other than the conquest of State power by the working class so they can turn this ruthless power against the parasites and force them to return to the ranks of labour, and abolish at one stroke the monstrous slice they grab today. To this end the whole labouring masses must co-operate, they must become a conscious formation according to the place they occupy in the process of production and exchange. Thus every worker and every peasant is summoned by the Councils to collaborate in the effort of regeneration, and to constitute the apparatus of industrial government and dictatorship: the present form of the class struggle for power is embodied in the Councils. This, then, is the network of institutions in which the revolutionary process is developing: the Council, the trade union, the Socialist Party. The Council is an historical product of Italian society, defined by the necessity to dominate the productive apparatus, born of the conquest of self-consciousness by the producers. The union and the Party are voluntary associations, stimulants of the revolutionary process, 'agents' and 'administrators' of the revolution; the union co-ordinates the productive forces and imprints on the industrial apparatus a communistic form; the Socialist Party, the living and dynamic model of a social life in common that unites discipline with freedom, gives the human spirit all the energy and enthusiasm of which it is capable.

27 December 1919

6 TWO REVOLUTIONS

Any form of political power can only be historically conceived and justified as the juridical apparatus of a real economic power. It can only be conceived and justified as the defensive organization and developmental condition of a determinate order in the relations of production and distribution of wealth. This basic (and elementary) canon of historical materialism sums up the whole complex of theses we have been trying to develop organically with respect to the problem of the Factory Councils. It sums up the reasons why, in dealing with the real problems of the proletarian class, we have given a central and preeminent place to the positive experience determined by the profound movement of the working masses in the creation, development and coordination of the Councils. We have therefore maintained: 1. that the revolution is not necessarily proletarian and Communist if it proposes and obtains the overthrow of the political government of the bourgeois State; 2. nor is it proletarian and Communist if it proposes and obtains the destruction of the representative institutions and administrative machine through which the central government exercises the political power of the bourgeoisie; 3. it is not proletarian and Communist even if the wave of popular insurrection places power in the hands of men who call themselves (and sincerely are) Communists. The revolution is proletarian and Communist only in so far as it liberates the proletarian and Communist forces of production, forces that have been developing within the society ruled by the capital class. It is proletarian and Communist in so far as it advances and promotes the growth and systematization of proletarian and Communist forces that can begin the patient, methodical work necessary for the construction of a new order in the relations of production and distribution: a new order in which a class-divided society will become an impossibility, and whose systematic development will therefore tend to coincide with the withering away of State power, with a systematic dissolution of the political organization that defends the proletarian class, while the latter itself will dissolve to become mankind.

The revolution that is achieved by the destruction of the bourgeois

State apparatus, and the construction of a new State apparatus, concerns and involves all the classes oppressed by capitalism. Immediately, it is determined by the brute fact that, in the conditions of famine left by the imperialist War, the great majority of the population (made up of artisans, small landowners, petit-bourgeois intellectuals, extremely poor peasant masses and backward proletarian masses) are no longer guaranteed even the elementary needs of daily life. This revolution tends to have a predominately anarchistic and destructive character and to manifest itself as a blind explosion of anger, a tremendous release of fury, without any concrete object, which only results in a new State power if fatigue, disillusionment and hunger finally impose the necessity for a new constitutional order and a power to enforce respect for that order.

This revolution may result merely in a constituent assembly that tries to heal the wounds inflicted on the bourgeois State apparatus by popular anger. It may go as far as Soviets, the autonomous political organization of the proletariat and the other oppressed classes, but which in this case do not dare go beyond their organization to change economic relations, so that they are cast aside by the reaction of the propertied classes. It may go as far as the complete destruction of the bourgeois State machine, and the establishment of a situation of permanent disorder, in which the existing wealth and population dissolve and disappear, shattered by the impossibility of any autonomous organization. It may go as far as the establishment of a proletarian and Communist power which is exhausted by repeated desperate attempts to create in an authoritarian manner the economic conditions necessary for its survival and growth, and is finally overturned by capitalist reaction.

In Germany, Austria, Bavaria, the Ukraine and Hungary, we have seen these historical developments unfold; the revolution as a destructive act has not been followed by the revolution as a process of reconstruction towards Communism. The existence of external conditions— a Communist Party, the destruction of the bourgeois State, highly organized trade unions and an armed proletariat—is not enough to compensate for the absence of another condition: the existence of productive forces tending towards development and

growth, a conscious movement of the proletarian masses in favour of substantiating its political power by economic power, the will on the part of the proletarian masses to introduce proletarian order into the factory, to make the factory the nucleus of the new State, and to build the new State as an expression of the industrial relations of the factory system.

That is why we have always maintained that the duty of the existing Communist nuclei in the Party was to avoid particularistic obsessions (the problem of electoral abstentionism, the problem of the constitution of a 'true' Communist Party) and instead work for the creation of the mass conditions in which it would be possible to resolve all particular problems as problems in the organic development of the Communist Revolution. In fact, can a Communist Party really exist (one which is an active party, not an academy of doctrinaires and petty politicians who think and express themselves 'well' where Communism is concerned) if the masses do not have the spirit of historical initiative and the aspiration towards industrial autonomy that should be reflected and synthesized in the Communist Party? Since the formation of a party and the emergence of the real historical forces of which parties are the reflections do not occur all at once out of nothing, but according to a dialectical process, is not the major task of the Communist forces precisely that of giving consciousness and organization to the essentially Communist productive forces that must be developed, and which by their growth will create the secure and lasting economic base of the political power of the proletariat?

Similarly, can the Party abstain from participation in electoral struggles for the representative institutions of bourgeois democracy, if one of its tasks is the political organization of all the oppressed classes about the Communist proletariat, and to obtain this it must become the governmental party for these classes in a democratic sense, given that it can only be the party of the Communist proletariat in a revolutionary sense?

In so far as it becomes the party of 'democratic' trust for all the oppressed classes, in so far as it keeps in permanent contact with

every group of working people, the Communist Party leads all sections of the people to acknowledge the Communist proletariat as the ruling class that must replace the capitalist class in State power. It creates the conditions in which it is possible to identify the revolution that destroys the bourgeois State with the proletarian revolution, with the revolution that expropriates the expropriators and inaugurates the development of a new order in the relations of production and distribution.

Hence, in so far as it claims to be the specific party of the industrial proletariat, and works to provide a precise consciousness and a policy for the productive forces produced by the development of capitalism, the Communist Party creates the economic preconditions for the State power of the Communist proletariat. It creates the conditions in which the proletarian revolution can be identified with the popular revolt against the bourgeois State, the conditions in which this revolt becomes an act liberating the real productive forces that have accumulated within capitalist society.

These various series of historical events are not detached and independent; they are moments in a single dialectical process of development during which relations of cause and effect interlace, reverse, and interweave with one another. But the experience of revolutions has shown that, since Russia, all other two-stage revolutions have failed and the failure of the second revolution has prostrated the working classes in a state of demoralization which enabled the bourgeois classes to reorganise in strength and begin the systematic annihilation of every bid by the Communist vanguard to reconstitute itself.

For those Communists who are not content to chew monotonously the cud of the basic principles of Communism and historical materialism, and are alive to the reality of the struggle, grasping reality as it is, from the viewpoint of historical materialism and Communism, the revolution as the conquest of social power for the proletariat can only be conceived as a dialectical process in which political power makes possible industrial power and industrial power political power. The Soviet is the instrument of revolutionary

political struggle which permits the autonomous development of that Communist economic organization whose Central Economic Council is established on the basis of Factory Councils, and settles the plans of production and distribution, thereby suppressing capitalist competition. The Factory Council, as a form of producers' autonomy in the industrial field and as the basis of Communist economic organization, is the instrument of a mortal struggle against the capitalist régime in so far as it creates the conditions in which class-divided society is suppressed and any new class division is rendered 'materially' impossible.

But for Communists alive to the struggle, this conception will not remain an abstract thought; it will become an incitement to struggle, a stimulus to greater efforts of organization and propaganda.

Industrial development has produced a certain degree of mental independence and a certain spirit of positive historical initiative in the masses. These elements of the proletarian revolution must be given form and organization; the psychological conditions for their development and generalization throughout the labouring masses must be created by the struggle for the control of production.

We must promote the organic constitution of a Communist Party which is not a collection of doctrinaires or little Machiavellis, but a party of Communist revolutionary action, a party with a precise consciousness of the historical mission of the proletariat and the ability to guide the proletariat in the realization of that mission—hence, a party of the masses who want to free themselves from political and industrial slavery autonomously, by their own efforts, through the organization of the social economy, and not a party which uses the masses for its own heroic attempts to imitate the French Jacobins. To the extent that it can be achieved by party action, it is necessary to create the conditions in which there will not be two revolutions, but in which the popular revolt against the bourgeois State will be able to find the organizational forces capable of beginning the transformation of the national apparatus of production from an instrument of plutocratic oppression to an instrument of Communist liberation.

3 July 1920

8 Toward a Renewal of the Socialist Party

1. In Italy at the present time, the class struggle is defined by the fact that industrial and agricultural workers throughout the national territory are irrevocably determined to pose the question of the ownership of the means of production in explicit and violent terms. The intensification of the national and international crises which are steadily annihilating the value of money demonstrates that capital is in extremis. The present order of production and distribution can no longer satisfy even the elementary demands of human life, and it only survives because it is fiercely defended by the armed might of the bourgeois State. Every movement of the Italian working people tends irresistibly towards the realization of a gigantic economic revolution that will introduce new modes of production, a new order in the productive and distributive process, and give the initiative in production to the class of industrial and agricultural workers, by seizing it from the hands of the capitalists and landowners.

2. The industrialists and landowners have achieved a maximum concentration of class discipline and power: a line promulgated by the General Confederation of Italian Industry⁶ is immediately carried out in every factory in the land. The bourgeois State has created a body of armed mercenaries⁷, organized to function as an executive instrument carrying out the wishes of this new and powerful organization of the propertied classes; it tends to restore capitalist power over the means of production by a widespread application of the lock-out and terrorism, forcing the workers and peasants to let themselves be expropriated of an increased quantity of unpaid labour. The recent lock-out in the Turin engineering factories⁸ was an episode in this plan of the industrialists to bring the working class to heel: they profited by the lack of revolutionary co-ordination and concentration in the Italian workers' forces with a bid to smash the solidarity of the Turin proletariat and drive into oblivion the prestige and authority of the factory institutions (Councils and shop commissions) that had initiated the struggle for workers' control. The length of the agricultural strikes in the Novara area and Lomellina show that the landowners are prepared to destroy production so as to reduce the agricultural proletariat to despair and

starvation, implacably subjecting it to the hardest and most humiliating conditions of labour and existence.

3. The present phase of the class struggle in Italy is the phase that pre-cedes: either the conquest of political power by the revolutionary proletariat and the transition to new modes of production and distribution that will make possible a rise in productivity—or a tremendous reaction by the propertied classes and the governmental caste. No violence will be spared in this subjection of the industrial and agricultural proletariat to servile labour: a bid will be made to smash inexorably the working class's institutions of political struggle (the Socialist Party) and to incorporate its institutions of economic resistance (unions and cooperatives) into the machinery of the bourgeois State.

4. The workers' and peasants' forces lack revolutionary co-ordination and concentration because the leading institutions of the Socialist Party have shown no understanding at all of the phase of development that national and international history is at present traversing, nor of the mission resting on revolutionary proletarian institutions of struggle. The Socialist Party is a spectator of the course of events. It never has an opinion based on the revolutionary theses of Marxism and of the Communist International; it does not launch slogans which can be adopted by the masses; it does not lay down a general line, or unify and concentrate revolutionary action. As a political organization of the vanguard of the working class, the Socialist Party should develop an overall action to raise the working class to the level from which it can win the revolution, and win it lastingly. Since it is composed of that part of the working class that has not let itself be demoralized and prostrated by the physical and spiritual oppression of the capitalist system, but has succeeded in maintaining its own autonomy and a spirit of conscious and disciplined initiative, the Socialist Party should embody the vigilant revolutionary consciousness of the whole of the exploited class. Its task is to focus in itself the attention of all the masses so that its directives become the directives of all the masses, so that it can win their permanent trust and become their guide and intellect. Hence it is essential that the Party live permanently immersed in the reality of

the class struggle fought by the industrial and agricultural proletariat, that it be able to understand its various phases and episodes, its manifold manifestations, drawing unity from this manifold diversity. It should be in a position to give a real leadership to the movement as a whole and impress on the masses the conviction that there is an order immanent in the present terrible disorder, an order that will systematically regenerate human society and make the means of labour suit elementary vital needs and civil progress. But even since the Bologna Congress⁹, the Socialist Party is still a merely parliamentary party, immobilized within the narrow limits of bourgeois democracy and preoccupied solely by the superficial political declarations of the governmental caste. It does not possess the features of party autonomy which should characterize the revolutionary proletariat, and the revolutionary proletariat alone.

5. After the Bologna Congress, the central institutions of the Party should immediately have initiated and carried through an energetic drive to homogenize and unify the revolutionary membership of the Party, in order to give it the specific and distinct features of a Communist Party belonging to the Third International. But the polemic with the reformists and opportunists has not even been started; neither the Party leadership, nor Avanti!¹⁰ has counterposed a truly revolutionary conception to the ceaseless propaganda the reformists and opportunists have been disseminating in Parliament and in the trade union organizations. Nothing has been done by the central organs of the Party to give the masses a Communist political education, to induce the masses to eliminate the reformists and

6 The General Confederation of Italian Industry (Confindustria): Militant organization of Italian capitalists; originally founded in 1910, on the basis of a Turin industrialists' league. Re-established in 1920 under the leadership of Gino Olivetti.

7 The Royal Guard; see note 6 above.

8 When daylight saving was introduced in the Fiat works in Turin without consulting the internal commission, a worker was dismissed for turning back the clock. Protest by the workers resulted in a lock-out on March 28th 1920. This incident, the so-called 'clock-hands strike', led to the Turin general strike of April, 1920.

opportunists from the leadership of the unions and co-operatives, or to give individual sections and the most active groups of comrades a unified line and tactics. The result is that while the revolutionary majority of the Party has not found any expression of its thought or executor of its intentions in the leadership or the press, the opportunist elements, on the contrary, have been strongly organized and have exploited the prestige and authority of the Party to consolidate their positions in Parliament and the unions. The leadership has allowed them to centralize and to vote for resolutions that contradict the principles and tactics of the Third International, and are hostile to the Party line. The leadership has granted absolute autonomy to subordinate institutions, allowing them to pursue actions and disseminate ideas that are opposed to the principles and tactics of the Third International. The Party leadership has been systematically absent from the life and activity of the sections, of the institutions and of individual members. The confusion that existed in the Party before the Bologna Congress and could be explained by a wartime regime has not disappeared; it has even increased terrifyingly. It is natural that in such conditions the confidence of the masses in the Party should have declined and that in many places anarchist tendencies have tried to gain the upper hand. The political party of the working class only justifies itself when by a strong centralization and co-ordination of proletarian action, it counterposes a real revolutionary power to the legal power of the bourgeois State and limits its freedom of initiative and manoeuvre. If the Party cannot unify and co-ordinate its efforts, if it reveals itself as a merely bureaucratic institution, with no spirit or will, the working class tends instinctively to build itself another party, and it moves over towards those anarchistic tendencies that bitterly and ceaselessly criticize the centralization and bureaucracy of political parties.

6. The Party has been absent from the international movement. Throughout the world the class struggle is increasing in scale. Everywhere workers are forced to renew their methods of struggle, and often, as in Germany after the military coup,¹¹ to rise up with arms in their hands. The Party has not bothered to explain these events to the Italian working people, or to justify them in the light of

the ideas of the Communist International. It has not taken the trouble to carry out the vast educational activity needed to make the Italian working people conscious of the fact that the proletarian revolution is a world phenomenon and that each single individual event must be considered and judged in a world context. The Third International has already met twice in Western Europe: in December 1919, in a German city; in February 1920, in Amsterdam. The Italian Party was represented at neither of those two meetings. The Party's militants were not even informed by the central organs of the discussions and deliberations that took place at them. There is a ferment of polemic in the Third International about the doctrine and tactics of the Communist International; this has even led to internal splits (for example, in Germany¹²). The Italian Party has remained completely cut off from this vigorous debate of ideas which is steeling revolutionary consciousness and building the spiritual unity of action of the proletariat in every country. The central organ of the Party does not have its own correspondents in France, England, Germany or even in Switzerland; a strange state of affairs for the paper of the Socialist Party that represents the interests of the international proletariat in Italy, and a strange state of affairs for the Italian working class, which has to obtain its information from the warped and tendentious reports provided by bourgeois papers and news agencies. As the Party organ, *Avanti!* should be the organ of the Third International. There should be a place in *Avanti!* for all the reports, polemics and discussions of proletarian problems that are relevant to the Third International. *Avanti!* should contain a ceaseless polemic, in a spirit of unity, against all opportunist deviations and compromises; instead, *Avanti!* stresses manifestations of opportunist thought, such as the recent speech in parliament by Claudio Treves in which was interwoven a petit-bourgeois conception of international relations and a defeatist counter-revolutionary theory designed to demobilize proletarian energies¹³.

10 *Avanti!*: The official daily newspaper of the PSI, founded in 1896.

11 The Kapp putsch of March 1920 was defeated by a general strike in Berlin. The Weimar government had to use Freikorps divisions to suppress armed workers in Berlin and the Ruhr who hoped to extend the movement into a proletarian insurrection.

This absence from the central organs of any preoccupation with keeping the proletariat informed of the events and theoretical discussions that are unfolding within the Third International can also be observed in the activities of the publishing house. It is still publishing unimportant pamphlets or writings spreading the ideas and opinions of the Second International, while it neglects the publications of the Third International. Writings by Russian comrades that are indispensable to an understanding of the Bolshevik Revolution have been translated in Switzerland, in England and in Germany, but they are unknown in Italy: Lenin's *State and Revolution* is just one example of many. When works are published, they are execrably translated, and errors of grammar and of simple common sense often make them incomprehensible.

7. The above analysis has already revealed the indispensable renovation and organization we feel must be carried out by the Party's membership. The Party must acquire its own precise and distinct features from a petit-bourgeois parliamentary party it must become the party of the revolutionary proletariat in its struggle for the advent of communist society by way of the workers' State: a homogeneous, cohesive party with its own doctrine, tactics and rigid and implacable discipline. Non-Communist revolutionaries must be eliminated from the Party, and its leadership, freed from preoccupation with the preservation of unity and balance among the various tendencies and leaders, should turn all its energies to the organization of the workers' forces on a war footing. Every event in national and international proletarian life should be analysed immediately in manifestos and circulars by the leadership, using them to promote the arguments of Communist propaganda and the

12 The 'Bremen Radicals', one of the left-wing Socialist groups that united in January 1919 to form the German Communist Party (KPD), split away later the same year and formed the German Workers' Communist Party (KAPD) on an abstentionist and ouvrierist platform.

13 Claudio Treves was one of the leaders of the reformist wing of the PSI. The speech in question, known as the 'expiation speech' was made on March 30th, 1920. Treves argued that while the bourgeoisie could no longer maintain its power in Italy, the proletariat was unable to seize power from it. Hence the tragedy and 'expiation' of the ruling classes.

education of revolutionary consciousness. The leadership should keep constantly in touch with the sections, and become the motor centre of proletarian action in all its manifestations. The sections should promote the constitution of Communist groups in all factories, unions, co-operatives and barracks, ceaselessly diffusing through the masses the ideas and tactics of the Party, and organizing the creation of Factory Councils for the exercise of control over industrial and agricultural production. It should pursue the necessary propaganda for an organic conquest of the unions, the Chambers of Labour and the General Confederation of Labour, and should form the trusted elements that the mass will delegate for the formation of political Soviets and for the exercise of the proletarian dictatorship. The existence of a cohesive and highly disciplined Communist Party with factory, trade union and co-operative cells, that can co-ordinate and centralize in its central executive committee the whole revolutionary action of the proletariat, is the fundamental and indispensable condition for any experiment in Soviets. In the absence of such a condition every proposed experiment should be rejected as absurd and useful only to the opponents of the idea of Soviets. Similarly, we should reject the proposal of a little socialist parliament,¹⁴ for it would rapidly degenerate into a tool of the reformist and opportunist majority in the parliamentary group for the dissemination of democratic utopias and counter-revolutionary projects.

8. The leadership should immediately prepare, compose and distribute a programme of revolutionary government by the Socialist Party, examining the concrete solutions that the proletariat, when it is the ruling class, will give to all the essential problems—economic, political, religious, and educational—that assail the various strata of the

¹⁴ This was a proposal to bring together in an assembly the socialist Deputies and spokesmen from the major political, trade union and co-operative organizations of the Party, to work out proposals for an alternative government policy, and to put pressure on the existing government. The reformists would have been in a majority in such an assembly.

Italian working population. Basing itself on the idea that the Party's power and activity is founded solely on the class of industrial and agricultural workers, who are totally without private property, and that it regards the other strata of working people as auxiliaries of the strictly proletarian class, the Party must issue a manifesto in which the revolutionary conquest of political power is explicitly proposed, in which the industrial and agricultural proletariat is invited to prepare itself and arm itself, and in which the principles of Communist solutions to present problems are indicated: proletarian control of production and distribution, disarmament of mercenary armed bodies, control of local government by workers' organizations.

9. On the basis of these considerations, the Turin Socialist Section proposes backing an agreement with those groups of comrades from all sections who would like to meet together to discuss these proposals and approve them; an organized agreement that will prepare for a congress in the near future, devoted to discussion of the problems of proletarian organization and tactics, and which will examine the activity of the executive organs of the Party in the meantime.

8 May 1920

9 POLITICAL CAPACITY

Today, the engineering workers are to approve or reject, by referendum, the motion voted by the congress of their Federation¹⁵. The result of this consultation of factory guilds is not difficult to predict. The referendum is an exquisitely democratic and counter-revolutionary form; it serves to valorize the amorphous mass of the population and to crush the vanguards that lead those masses and give them a political consciousness.

So the vanguard of the proletariat should not be demoralized or disorganized by this outcome of the revolutionary movement. Its quality as a vanguard will be verified by the strength of mind and political capacity it succeeds in demonstrating. Have the groups of workers which have been at the head of the movement in the last few days taken the exact measure of their powers to act and the forces of passive resistance that exist within the masses? Have they acquired a consciousness of their historical mission? Have they acquired a consciousness of the inner weaknesses which members of the working class have revealed, weaknesses which are not individual, that do not lower our assessment of the revolutionary spirit of the proletariat in the present historical phase, but which can be traced to the general relations of a trade organization? Have they transformed their experiences into an active and operative consciousness? Are they skilled in identifying the deepest hidden feelings that move the popular mind, and the negative feelings, the inhibiting impulses that fatigue, and immobilize the most generous and daring impulses?

The political capacity of the proletarian vanguard (and hence the real revolutionary capacity of the Italian working class) will depend on the attitudes that emerge from today's referendum. Many perils threaten the working class; these perils are not external, they are primarily internal. The greatest danger is the lack of a 'spirit of

¹⁵ The decision by the engineering workers' union (FIOM) to end the month-long factory occupation throughout Italy was submitted to the workers' approval by referendum on September 24th 1920. A small majority approved the agreement.

adaptation' to higher circumstances, a spirit of critical, conscious and deliberate adaptation, which cannot and must not be confused with opportunism. Rather, it is their lack of this spirit of adaptation that leads the working class into opportunism, or, what comes to the same thing, to the triumph of the opportunists among the masses, to the maintenance of the leadership that has brought the revolutionary movement to its present pass. The revolutionary vanguard needs to consider and analyse the events that have just taken place, not according to its own wishes, passions and will, but objectively, as external data to be subjected to political judgment, and as a historical movement susceptible to conscious extension and development. From a merely objective point of view, the working class can register a great step forward. As a mass guided and disciplined in the factory by its direct representatives, it has proved itself capable of industrial and political self-government. This fact, which should be elementary for revolutionary Communists, has consequences of incalculable social importance. The middle classes of the population have compared the strength of the proletariat with the inadequacy of the entrepreneurial class. Half a century ago, the proletariat was still, as Marx put it, a sack of potatoes, a generic imponderable, an amorphous conglomeration of individuals without ideas, without will, and without a unitary perspective. Today it is the entrepreneurial class that has become a sack of potatoes, an aggregate of the inept and the imbecile, without political capacity, without internal power. The revolutionary events of the past few days have illuminated this position of the two classes competing for the government of society's production. The prejudices and follies that the capitalist-owned press had disseminated in public opinion have collapsed; the middle classes are lining up with the proletariat, convinced that this young and energetic class holds the key to civilization and human progress. From the test that both classes have had to undergo, the proletariat has emerged higher in public estimation, while capitalism has revealed even further its deficiencies and incapacity. This new political situation has definitely put forward the proletariat as a ruling class; it is a spring that drives it irresistibly towards the conquest of power.

Why, then, did this not happen immediately? Or at least, why has no

attempt been made to reach this goal? The answer to this question must be sought in the tactics pursued until today, culminating in the referendum. The leadership of the proletarian movement bases itself on the 'masses', that is, it asks the masses for prior permission to act, consulting them in the forms and at the time it chooses. But a revolutionary movement can only be based on the proletarian vanguard, and must be led without prior consultation, without the apparatus of representative assemblies. Revolution is like war; it must be minutely prepared by a working-class general staff, just as a war is by the Army's general staff. Assemblies can only ratify what has already taken place, exalt the successful and implacably punish the unsuccessful. It is the task of the proletarian vanguard to keep the revolutionary spirit constantly awake in the masses, to create the conditions which keep them ready for action, in which the proletariat will respond immediately to the call for revolution. In the same way, the nationalists and imperialists, with their frantic preaching of patriotic vanities and hatred against foreigners, are trying to create the conditions in which the crowd will approve a war that has already been agreed on by the general staff of the Army and the diplomatic service. No war would ever break out if prior permission had to be obtained from the masses to declare it; parliaments approve wars because they know they have already been inexorably decided, because they know that they will be thrust inexorably aside if they oppose them. Similarly, no revolutionary movement can be decreed by a workers' national assembly. To call for such an assembly is to confess one's disbelief in it beforehand; it amounts to exercising a prejudicial pressure against it.

The proletarian vanguard, which today is disillusioned and threatened with dissolution, must ask itself whether it is not itself responsible for this situation. It is a fact that in the General Confederation of Labour, there is no organized revolutionary opposition, centralized enough to exercise control over the leading offices and capable not only of replacing one man by another, but one method by another, one aim by another and one will by another. This is the real situation, which lamentations, reproaches and oaths will not change, only tenacious and patient organization and preparation. It is thus essential that the groups of workers which

have been at the head of the masses accept the facts as they are, in order to alter them effectively. The masses must be kept firm and united behind their programmes and slogans; it must be made possible for an energetic general staff to emerge from among them which is able to conduct wide-scale collective action with intelligence and daring. Today, we have the referendum; its result must not be the occasion for dismay and dissolution, but rather a call for tighter, more disciplined and better organized action. The emancipation of the proletariat is not a labour of small account and of little men; only he who can keep his heart strong and his will as sharp as a sword when the general disillusionment is at its worst can be regarded as a fighter for the working class, or called a revolutionary.

24 September 1920

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