

Social Tasks of the House Committees

Essay on Urban Social Order Without Power and Coercion

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“You did not want socialism,” wrote Herzen in 1848, “so, behold, you will have a war, a seven-year war, a thirty-year war.

In fact, we now see its beginning, and we will have a war for a full thirty years, if all people with heart, mind and knowledge do not apply all their energy to prevent it by reorganising society.

(P. Kropotkin. Open Letter to the West European Workers).

“There is no poison more despicable than power over people...”

(M.Gorky. — “Novaya Zhizn”, No. 205, of 19 December 1917).

Instead of a preface (from a letter to a teacher)

...The life around us, boiling in fermentation, daily puts forward ever new burning practical demands.

Our comrade workers are searching in the darkness for a way to those high ideals of ethical and cultural possibilities which you have so charmingly set forth in your writings.

Your works are read by many tens of thousands of Russian workers, they are more and more penetrating the labour movement. Is it not everyone's duty to help the workers in their search for practical ways to find the glittering hope for the realisation of free social orders without exploitation of labour, on moral principles? Will you not save them from many mistakes, wasted effort and sometimes useless sacrifices? Will not the people who are carried away by your ideals — I am speaking of simple, sincere workers — listen to your voice of reason, experience and love for man?

Now the struggle is going on: heavy vehicles are rumbling, shots are being fired, barricades are being built, trenches are being dug. In the search for a better future, brother has raised his hand against brother, and your voice is not being heard in this horrible junkyard, if only to keep your own many disciples — more numerous than you realise — from fratricidal warfare.

The turbulent revolution will not end with this outbreak; help us to look around, to understand yesterday so that we do not make new mistakes tomorrow and find a guiding thread for today.

Regarding the pressing practical issues of current life, you once told me:

"Look for it, I'm looking for it myself..."

We are looking, dear teacher, but you also help us, be closer to us.

Let's start with the question of war, the most urgent and most cruel question.

I've talked about it with many comrades. Again we are talking about sincere and ideological comrades who may be sacrificing their lives now for what they consider expedient and necessary.

All of them recognise, *resolutely all of them*, a moral obligation to fight militarism, German militarism no less than any other militarism; all of them in this sense accept the war not only as *self-defence*, but also as a struggle against the sworn enemy of the working people — a struggle which must be brought to a victorious end.

But how do we organise this struggle, how do we wage war in the ranks of the present state-organised army?

Here we are all lost.

You suggest that we close our eyes and join the army, as it is.

But under whose authority? How organised? Organised by whom? In the name of defending what real values?

These are the questions, the pondering of which has disorganised the army more than Bolshevik propaganda.

These burning questions cannot be silent. One cannot demand that a person sacrifice the most valuable thing he has, the *only* thing he has, and the most precious thing for his loved ones — his *life* — without answering these questions.

Self-defence against the invasion of an external conqueror — we agree with that. But how do we organise ourselves?

The thought wanders in my head: in the people's militia.

But these words need to have a *concrete* content.

The people's militia implies, first of all, a voluntary impulse. This upsurge existed at the overthrow of the autocracy, at the overthrow of the original political oppression over the masses. A secondary upsurge of the popular spirit, it seems to me, will be created only at the overthrow of economic oppression, at the destruction of the exploitation of labour.

Is this possible now and how, to what extent?

The organisation of self-defence against foreign militarism should be possible now, before, or rather during the radical overthrow of the old economic orders.

How and where do we find that initial path, that point of support for the transition from the simple to the complex, from the local to the general, from a weak unit to a strong union?

The present civil war in Moscow has raised the practical question of the same self-defence, self-defence against possible pogroms. Having trusted in the military authorities, in the police, in the Red Guards, public thought turned to the house committees to organise self-defence. The house committees are called upon to organise themselves and to unite for self-defence.

Is it not here, perhaps, that the people's militia will take root?

Could not the army, having brought the fighters home in units, reorganise itself *territorially*, into district or local companies with their own direct commanding staff, — companies ready, with a fair turn, to bring forward marching units into the active army, to partially replace and replenish it?

But in order to enthusiastically march to the defence of the motherland, it is necessary that in this motherland there should be the active, solidarity life of an anthill, a united union of free toilers, and not a struggle of capital against labour, not exploitation of man by man, not greedy profiteering at the expense of the underprivileged.

Help us to clarify our vague thoughts, dear teacher.

Moscow, 28/29 October 1917.

This essay is an experience of finding ways to transform the current social order into a friendly anthill of equal and free labourers, capable of both creating and defending themselves against external invasion.

Introduction

The world war, unprecedented in its size, both in the number of participants and human casualties, and in its technical intensity and material destruction, has shaken the ethical and economic life of nations to their very foundations.

The old social bonds of capitalist economy and elected, so-called “democratic” government are cracking at the seams.

The less developed a country is, the weaker the bonds of ordinary legal and economic relations between the various strata of society, the more violent are the forms in which this destruction manifests itself.

The fall of the old foundations, of course, puts on the line the practical task of creating new orders.

The social devastation caused by the world war was reflected in Russia sooner and more strongly than in other countries, and it faced the practical question of building new social orders earlier than others; that is why many believe that Russia is in the vanguard of the international socialist movement.

The construction of a new life may not succeed, and then, again because of Russia’s backwardness in ethical, legal, technical and economical terms, there will come a reaction as violent and unstoppable as the revolution itself.

To prevent this reaction, all cultural strata of the population, all supporters of progressive doctrines, all conscious workers of physical and mental labour must make an effort to find a common ground for their activity and lay a solid foundation for a renewed life.

Conscious, inductive human thought, embodied in science, has conquered the elemental forces of nature, subjugated and used for practical purposes the laws of life, the laws of biological development; it must also bring conscious, *systematic calculation into social development* by eliminating the empirical influence of crude, unsuitable for the new stages of civilisation, governmental power and the corresponding state apparatus.

Let the one-sided, dogmatic followers of the outdated and long-contested scientific theory of socialism once again harp on a new “utopia”: the ideas developed in this essay are based on those real factors which have been outlined and have already found a known practical application in life.

In another article¹ I pointed out some of the new factors that have arisen under the influence of the world war and the Russian Revolution and are endeavouring to restructure the way of social life on new principles.

In this essay I intend to outline the beginnings of a social order which may arise in the large urban centres, from the currently intensively active living cell of the social order under construction — *the house committees* — if the factor of inductive thought, based on knowledge, experience

¹ “Is Anarchist Social Revolution Possible?” Pochin Publishing House, Moscow, 1918.

and observation, in other words, the element of social applied science, is introduced into their activity.

I

The idea of house committees originated in the close circle of Peter Alekseevich Kropotkin, an indefatigable worker, veteran and inspirer of the international labour movement. Thanks to its inherent vitality, it spread and spread unusually quickly.

In this undertaking we found a wide practical application of the principle underlying the scientific and social outlook of our teacher, about the self-activity of the masses, as opposed to the all-governing, all-“caring” government authorities.

This self-activity of the masses has already outgrown the original purpose that gave rise to the house committees, and is striving to turn into a fruitful, broad *creativity*.

Initially, the house committees aimed at facilitating the distribution of essential foodstuffs, a task with which the governmental authority, both under the autocracy and after the revolution, was powerless to cope satisfactorily.

Gradually the house committees broadened the scope of their activities and also set themselves the goal of supplying their own group of people with consumer goods on a *co-operative* basis.

Then, during and after the October coup d'état, the house committees organised the protection of public safety in the houses themselves and tried to carry it out in the streets as well. It would probably have succeeded perfectly well in this task if they had not been prevented by the governmental power, which is always jealously suspicious, always afraid of rivalry and manifestations of independent social amateurism, and therefore always counter-revolutionary, even when it covers itself with the toga of social revolution.

From the very beginning of their emergence, house committees also sought to regulate the relations between tenants and landlords; they defended the common interests of tenants over the private interests of landlords; they insisted on making repairs where they were necessary, on regulating heating in houses with central heating, etc.

The idea of expropriating land and real estate in large cities for common use¹ was floating above the public consciousness, similar to the idea of transferring all village land into the hands of the labouring peasantry. This idea became practicable only thanks to the organisation of house committees.

The governmental power that has arisen in Moscow since the October coup d'état has not, in fact, contributed a single new and fruitful thought to the realisation of this urgent task; it is only trying *to use the enormous source of profitability of real estate for its own purposes, for the domination of one party over all* — a party that disposes, by brute force and with the arrogance of ignorance, of all that is the property of all and on which the self-activity of the masses must work in order to create a solid, renewed social order, and not a mirage of socialism.

The cultural and moral centres of the country — the industrial cities of Russia — must oppose the arbitrary power not by regretting the past, even if corrected by the so-called “legal orders”,

¹ See my articles in Nos. 6 and 7 of “Anarchy” of 15 and 25 October 1917, under the titles “Be consistent!” and “They want to spend” (under the pseudonym Arsen Saryan).

not by longing for a different, “firm” power, but by the self-activity of the masses of the people – self-activity based on the ethics of the customary law of the modern cultured man, the level of which would not seem so low if it were not perverted by those in power and all political parties striving for it, i.e. for the domination of a handful of people over all.

Political parties, struggling to hold power or seeking to seize it, inevitably sow discord and enmity in society and even in the ranks of the various labour groups.

Far from party struggle, from fruitless political strife, the house committees create that firm cement of solidarity in equality and common benefit in reciprocity, without which socialism is inconceivable.

In this respect the house committees are the solid foundation on which, by fusing the whole of society into one organic whole, a new order can be confidently erected which is more in keeping with the powerful popular impulse for social justice – an impulse which the Bolsheviks used so brilliantly for their party dreams.

Having found themselves in fact masters of all rented city properties, thanks to the attempt of the Bolshevik power to seize their revenues, the house committees must use the freed resources themselves, with their own hands, or under their own direct supervision, to meet all those diverse needs of social life and the urban economy, which equally demand satisfaction, whatever the views of one or another of the city dwellers may hold.

It is only on this basis of equal satisfaction of the real needs of everyone, with the friendly participation of all, that social cohesion is possible, without which it is impossible to realise socialism.

The house committees are the basic cells of the social organism where all strata of the population, who have hitherto lived separately under one and the same roof, come together in a close circle to meet common needs and requirements in the best possible way.

In the stream of house committees, all disconnected efforts for equality and solidarity will merge into a single current.

When a committee takes care of providing each inhabitant of a house with his bread ration, when it offers each family its services to supply it with this or that product of consumption, when it organises guards for the safety of each inhabitant, there is no place for politics, no place for discord and enmity between people.

The house committees gradually develop and expand their field of activity, enter into agreements and alliances with their neighbours in the street, in the district, in the whole city, and in this development of the amateur activity of the masses, in these natural groupings, is the guarantee and starting point for the creation of a better, fairer social order, based on actual equality, on real solidarity and freedom.

It is in vain to look for true justice in the false programmes of political parties struggling to seize power and trampling, as soon as they seize it, all those freedoms, all that solidarity and that equality in the name of which they involved the masses of the people in a fierce, often bloody, struggle.

Let us dwell in more detail on the creative public role that house committees can and must play in the present stage of history, if the governmental power, which always destroys all the living sprouts of the creative forces of the people, does not kill them or stifle their development for a long time.

II

The needs of urban life can be divided into two categories: those which can be met directly by individual house committees, and those which require the collaboration or *co-operation* of more or less numerous committees, up to and including a city-wide association.

The needs of both categories should be based on the needs of the special *house treasuries*. Such funds currently exist in the hands of the *treasurers* of the house committees. With the expansion of the committees' activities, especially with the receipt of more or less significant sums of money from the sale of waged labour, the question of creating local groups of *district* house committees, with separate current accounts for each of them, naturally arises. At the same time, the *areas where the treasuries are to be united* and their number must not be specified by any administrative authority, even if that authority claims to be arch-revolutionary and democratic. These funds will arise by themselves, by the free initiative of a few committees in different points of the city, and will gradually unite the other committees.

These same treasuries can also serve individual families and individuals, thus becoming personal savings and expenditure treasuries, secured by the profitability of the neighbourhood's real estate.

The period of organisation of the district banks will be followed, as a result of the demands of practical life, by their unification into a common city union of district banks or into a *city bank*.

The city bank would retain the foundation of the inviolability and complete independence of both personal and household current accounts, and would become a solid and reliable factor in the economic life of the city.

The city banks of the capitals and other large cities, having united in a union, will become a powerful financial organ of the country, will take into their own hands the issue of their own currency, will introduce the metric coinage system and will give the bankrupt state bank, created by the authorities for their domination, the opportunity to liquidate with the least possible material disruption for the working people. At the same time, the union of city banks will displace all private capitalist banks in the large urban centres, which will have become redundant.¹

Having thus organised their financial apparatus, the house committees, like individuals, will not lose full rights over their current accounts.

¹ In the order of the idea presented, it is interesting to note the following report from Petrograd, which appeared in the "Russkiye Vedomosti" of 24 November 1917, No. 257:

"*Private bank coupons*. — In view of the fact that the State Bank does not release cash to private banks, an idea has arisen among the latter to issue their own coupons, which would be circulated among the clients of the banks on a par with credit tickets. These coupons would represent special obligations, signed by the members of the board of private banks, to pay the amount stamped on the obligations with credit tickets upon the customer's request. For the first time the idea of issuing such coupons arose in Petrograd, when the question of evacuating the banks was being solved. At present the issue of coupons is under discussion and development. It is quite possible that we will have private bank tickets in circulation along with the state ones."

What the private banks tried to organize by free initiative is all the more feasible by the union of city banks.

But nowadays, due to the conditions of the capitalist economy, the profitability of not all houses is proportional to the number of tenants, and therefore the city bank should make a per capita equalisation of the sums on current accounts for each house committee, in proportion to the number of tenants. In this way, the proportionally equalised current accounts will be at the inalienable and unlimited disposal of each committee.

III

The house committees will use their current accounts directly, to fulfil those general needs which they can satisfy themselves – more expediently and better than the governmental municipal authority.

Thus, the house committees will organise the *external security* of the city by hiring reliable agents personally known to them, instead of recruiting bureaucratically any town guards, militiamen or Red Guards who have never lived up to their expectations.

The house committees will take the work of *public welfare* into their own hands as a matter of urgency. Assistance to all the incapacitated, the old, the widows, those burdened with young children, the weak, the orphans, and those numerous disabled people, the victims of war, who more and more often meet in the streets with outstretched hands, can be properly provided *where they live*.

Only in this way will the abuse of the feeling of compassion for the neighbour and the disgraceful phenomenon of insufficient or no help for the suffering neighbour, which is disgraceful for a cultured society, be prevented.¹

It will not be difficult for every town to take measures to prevent, for as long as public charity is being organised in the province, an overwhelming influx of needy people.

Then the house committees will have to take care of the fate of those landlords whose properties are transferred to their jurisdiction. *The people's conscience is sensitive to any injustice*. The house committees must ensure the existence of the incapacitated former landlords and help those of them who do not have a definite profession and earnings to adapt to the new living conditions by finding them suitable jobs, at least in the management and supervision of the houses.

I will not dwell on further details of the direct functions of the house committees, which they can perform individually or in direct alliance with their neighbours in the street: they are as varied and multifaceted as life itself. I will only point out that they will also take over all the functions of identification, registration, issuing of various certificates, etc., which used to be concentrated in police stations and now in commissariats in order to keep the public more reliably dependent on the authorities.

¹ There is information that in Kronstadt this has been put into practice, and the incapacitated receive some assistance from the house committees according to the established living standards.

IV

In the second place are the public tasks and needs of the population, which cannot be met by the direct agreement of individual house committees, due to the physical impossibility of direct joint discussion of the issues or the technical and professional incompetence of the house collectives. Such are the tasks of public education, medical and sanitary service (which includes special care homes for the elderly, homes for the incurable insane, for incorrigible congenital criminals suffering from moral or volitional instability); such are the tasks of sewerage, water supply, provision of electric power to dwellings, factories and plants, tram traffic, telephone service, etc.

All such present public services should naturally be taken over by the trade unions of each such branch of public service. By eliminating the pernicious policy of discord among the workers of different categories of the same enterprise, the trade unions will become an organic association of technical supervisors, foremen and common labourers for the common good and will cease to be an arena of violence and numerical oppression over technical knowledge.

All these public services will continue to exist as long as they are subsidised by the house committees concerned, and those that become generally recognised, such as transit, medical services, water supply, sewerage, electricity, etc., should be *free of charge*, thereby reducing the unproductive costs of detailed accounting, control, etc.

The public services that have lost their importance will be doomed to abolish themselves due to the cessation of subsidies from the house committees, but instead, due to new needs and general progress, new units and whole branches of public services will emerge, thanks to the initiative of technical and professional groups supported financially by the house committees.

Let me explain with an example: let us assume that a given city is densely populated (as, for example, Moscow, where families of 400,000 souls live in one room each) and that after the equalised settlement of the inhabitants within the limits of hygienic norms and practical conveniences, it will still be necessary to build a number of houses, perhaps entire blocks.

A group of specialists headed by architects will work out a detailed design of the buildings, draw up estimates, work plans and even appoint experienced managers for the proposed buildings, according to a tender announced by the house committees or on their own initiative.

The initiators of such a project, after discussing it in detail in the special and general press¹ and making the necessary corrections, will address a survey to the house committees and, in accordance with the results of the survey, in case of a sufficient number of house committees agreeing to support it financially, the project will be further developed and the city bank will open a corresponding loan to the organisers.

There is no doubt that the wide-ranging undertakings of common benefit will meet with the almost unanimous support of the population represented by the house committees.

¹ One can imagine how the very character of the periodical press will change when it, instead of a fruitless, harmful, enmity and malice-inspired political struggle and poisonous politics, engages in the discussion of generally useful practical questions.

The inhabitants of the most unsanitary old dwellings will be relocated to the new dwellings, in line with the categories established by the sanitary doctors and, if necessary, by drawing lots between families of the same category.

Let us take another example: let us assume that there is a need for a new hospital in a given urban area. A group of doctors, superintendents, pharmacists, paramedics, etc., with the participation of architects, develops a detailed design for the new institution, cost estimates and a scheme of rules for its operation. After receiving financial support from the interested house committees, the initiative is put into action.

If a general and vital trade union of technical workers in one or another branch of public services² is organised in the city, the house committees will probably finance them en bloc, in the total amount, leaving the managing body of the trade union to take care to use the allocated budget as rationally as possible and to develop the cause. But if one or another organisation ceases to meet the general demands and needs, it will be doomed to gradual decline and complete extinction by the termination of the financial support of the house committees.

There is no doubt that in such a situation the funds of the house committees, which are received from hired fees for flats, will not be enough and they will have to go to self-taxation. But at the same time all state and municipal taxes, both direct and indirect, will be abolished, and, in general, the tax burden will be lightened for the population in comparison with the benefits of urban amenities, which they will enjoy, which will become voluntary self-assessment. We see the origin of such voluntary self-assessment for general needs in the present house committees, in that they *collect* a monthly fee to organise the delivery of bread rations or make a special contribution to cover the general costs of procuring consumer products, etc.

² Similarly to the All-Russian Zemstvo and City Unions, at the beginning of their activity.

V

In these complex conditions of relations between individuals, house committees, trade unions, etc., disagreements and disputes may arise; there may also be abuses and violations of the public interest, of which each individual citizen, a group of them, or whole institutions have the right to complain. Special conciliatory, judicial and correctional institutions will be needed to settle these conflicts, as well as for measures against anti-social elements, the so-called criminals inherited from the modern system.

All disagreements of a personal and material nature can be *optionally* resolved by conciliation (magistrates') institutes of competent persons with a legal education, invited to this position by the district council of house committees on the feedback of the professional union of lawyers. In case the parties disagree with the ruling of the justice of the peace, the case shall be submitted to the *compulsory* proceedings of arbitration courts and courts of honour, with the participation, as necessary, with an advisory vote, of legal specialists, and also of pedagogues, psychologists and doctors.

All compulsory judicial laws should be completely abolished, but in their place legal thought, freed from the clutches of power, will create scientific works to clarify and formulate new legal and ethical norms. All conciliation courts, courts of arbitration and courts of honour will use them not as obligatory frozen laws deadening life, but as reference books for the correct solution of a given dispute or case, as doctors use special works for the correct treatment of a patient.

No executive power would be needed for such courts, for all those who are mentally and morally abnormal in their mental and moral relations and in their manifestations of will would be placed under the care of physicians and pedagogues in appropriate special institutions, while the rest would hardly shirk voluntary submission to arbitration courts and courts of honour chosen by themselves, otherwise they would place themselves outside the legal relations of the given society, so to speak, "outside the law", outside the social solidarity of their house community.

VI

In a brief sketch of the ways of the forthcoming social construction, closely connected with the development of the basic cell of the modern urban social organism — the development of the house committees — the outlines of the organisation of the main economic functions: production, exchange and distribution of the products of consumption are still to be outlined.

The starting point for socialist production, exchange and distribution should be all the present factories, plants and commercial enterprises, which, with all their real estate, dead and living inventory, stocks of raw materials and goods, and the money capital sold in gold currency at the liquidation rate from the state bank, will be transferred to the asset of the city bank and distributed to the current accounts of the house committees, in proportion to the number of members capable of productive labour. In this way, the entire productive population of the city will receive the common labour inheritance of the preceding generations at their direct actual disposal, without fragmentation, without practicable division. Following the real property equality created in this way, the population of the city will resort to the tried and tested forms of co-operation to organise the production, exchange and distribution of consumer products, for in practice *socialism is the extension of co-operation to the whole of society*.

The co-operative principle, extended to the whole of society, will find a practical application in the present apparatus of capitalist production and trade, placed in the hands of factory, trade and food professional committees — not the present factory committees, usually composed exclusively of ordinary workers and craftsmen, unprepared to carry on the business of production independently; but committees in which both experienced accountants and the so-called technical supervision, i.e. representatives of the scientific professional community, will be represented.

If we put aside the power which, because of the seizure and retention of which political parties sow strife and discord between the workers of scientific knowledge and physical strength, by assuring the latter of the superiority of numbers over right and reason, there is no doubt that such a fusion in a factory committee of physical labour, technique and administrative experience at the beginning of economic co-operation will be possible. Would not a hired engineer prefer to work with the labouring people, from whose milieu he often came, than to serve his master? After all, engineers are the same as hired proletarians, only better paid in former times, just as craftsmen were better paid than labourers. But even then they abandoned service if the capitalist master tried to mock their professional rights and human dignity. The same thing makes them recoil from the working class, but if the workers approach them not with a sense of hostility instilled by political demagogues, but with trust and an offer of public solidarity in co-operative labour, there is no doubt that they will prefer to work with the working people for the common good of all, including themselves, than to serve the private interests of the capitalist.

The earnings of the enterprises will be used to pay the wages of all participants of collective labour, according to the living standards worked out by the professional *council of workers' del-*

egates of all public services, productive, trade and food co-operatives of the given city, and the surplus will go to the city bank.¹

From this surplus a part will be allocated for insurance of enterprises against accidental losses, against fire, against temporary reduction of profitability below the sum of expenses, and the rest will be transferred to a special fund for endowment of productive capital to the rising young generation. The same fund will receive a corresponding share of the total capital of each person who drops out of the ranks due to incapacity or death.

The development of old enterprises and the emergence of new ones will take place on co-operative principles, according to the system of initiative founding groups, as in the creation of public services.²

These are the general features of the possible new social order of the cities, the outlines of which are emerging in the present life, with the world war subsiding, but with more and more revolutions, civil and internecine wars breaking out.

Only systematic social construction will bring organised order into life and establish a solid and free social order, which cannot arise from the bitter struggle of political parties, these ugly creations of the outmoded capitalist system.

The house committees are the fulcrum that Archimedes would have demanded in order to turn the capitalist order into a socialist order by the lever of social revolution and thereby realise the first condition of lasting peace, *social peace*, for the realisation of true, economic, equality and contentment for all.

¹ Living standards for workers of all professions, in fairness, should not be arithmetically the same, but proportional to the number of souls in the family fed by each worker, like the rations given to refugees and soldiers' families during the war.

² This very system is essentially the basis for the emergence of capitalist joint-stock enterprises and modern co-operatives.

VII

But socialism cannot be realised on a world-wide or even, in the beginning, on a broadly international scale. Like capitalism, from which it is born, socialism will establish itself fully in the great urban centres and adapt to itself, by its cultural and economic influence, the underdeveloped capitalist provinces and villages, the backward countries, the so-called “spheres of influence” of the present capitalist states and their colonies.

The main mistake of the socialist parties is that they failed to understand in time the complex conditions of the protracted world war, which with its monstrous destruction brought to the fore the tasks of social construction on new principles.¹ They rushed from one extreme to another: they completely subordinated the interests of socialism to the self-defence of capitalist state coalitions, or they rushed to the opposite extreme and openly professed unconditional defeatism. Meanwhile, from the very beginning, on the day after the revolution, it was necessary to *begin to organise the independent defence of socialism by the military methods of capitalist statehood*.

The struggle against the warring state is only possible in state form, in other words, socialism must use for its establishment the technical means, forms of organisation and methods of warfare of militarist states.

The socialist centres, these “free cities” of tomorrow, in order to establish themselves and acquire world influence, must first of all demonstrate their *defensive capacity* in front of aggressive capitalism.

I have outlined above what practical forms socialism can and aspires to take, not the programmatic socialism of political parties fighting among themselves to seize power, but practical socialism, born out of the historical creativity of the masses.

Let us now consider by what means the socialism that is being built in the industrial centres can shield its development from the external invasion of capitalist statehood and establish itself, as a mature epoch of historical development, in a federative union with the provinces.

There is no doubt that the socialist centre, the city, is able to make extensive use of all the technical and living resources of militarist statehood in order to break the military power of capitalism with its own weapons and, having freed the further development of mankind from the dominating influence of capitalism, to direct civilisation along socialist lines.

The modern army is a product of capitalist statehood, and is kept together mainly by violence and fear of punishment. As soon as the state weakens, discipline falls and the army begins to decay. This is what has happened in our country, the same thing has partly begun in Italy, the same thing will happen in the whole of Europe if the present war lasts long enough. There, too, it will destroy the state, as it did in ours, and the war itself could end on the ruins of capitalism, for lack of fighters.

¹ This peculiarity of the outbreak of war was predicted at the very beginning of the war by P.A. Kropotkin. “*The current war*,” he wrote on 21 September (4 October) 1914, “*is creating a new history*. It sets new conditions of social construction for all peoples”. (“Letters on Current Events.” — Moscow, Zadruga Publishing House, 1918).

But this is not yet the case, and it is impossible to foresee whether this process of the decomposition of statehood in Western Europe will end in the near future or not. Therefore, the peoples of Russia are faced with the task of establishing the defence of the country on new principles.

But where do we begin and how do we do it?

The front has been destroyed, the advanced intelligence “delegations” of the enemy have already penetrated into the capital and the military coalition of the central empires is free to do whatever it pleases on the territory of Russia in the imminent near future.

What is to be done?

One professor of medicine taught his students: “If a sick person is very ill, assume that he will inevitably die, and then coolly begin to discuss: what can be done to save him?”

Let’s say that our case is hopelessly lost...

But Russia is not Belgium, you can’t traverse it in a few hours. Even to occupy it, without resistance, requires huge forces and means. Will the coalition of the Central Empires find them immediately and in sufficient size, when the war continues on the Western European fronts? Will it risk spreading its weary troops over the vastness of Russia?

So we will have some time to gather our forces, if not in the hope of successfully repelling the enemy’s advance, then at least to save the remnants of that technical and material apparatus which is now perishing on the fronts and can be seized by the Central Empires.

It is necessary to take all the fighting and material equipment of the armies to the rear, with a gradual retreat to the enemy if necessary, while the peoples of Russia have time to organise their fighting power. In 1918, perhaps, we shall have to fulfil the precept of 1812 in a new form and with new methods.

The matter is not patient, it must be organised with the speed and orderliness of a military operation.

But where do we get the means when the treasury is empty? Where do we get the men when a great part of the army is scattered at home?

The industrial centres — the cities, first of all the heart of Russia — Moscow — must take the lead in creating armies of despair and armies of socialist hopes.

Each city district must field *its own company*, maintained by the district treasury of house committees. The district companies, united, form regiments, divisions, corps and even a whole Moscow Army.

It is not a question of defending this or that periphery, once forcibly annexed to Russia, or of preventing the cutting up of new territories, but of the very salvation of Socialism, of transferring all the land in the villages and towns, with all the real estate, to the people, of putting factories and plants into the hands of the workers.

Every modern army requires a cadre of professional officers trained in theory and experienced in practice. This cadre is already ready: it is all those ideological officers, who now, humiliated, insulted, senselessly thrown away from the cause of self-defence and the salvation of socialism, so necessary for the working people, are doomed to inaction or are looking for means of subsistence on the side, in physical and other labour.

The cadre officers, at the invitation of the district unions of house committees, must as soon as possible organise *district recruitment commissions* and hastily train *district companies*, clothed, shod and subsidised by the district house committee coffers. Armed with the still enormous combat equipment surviving from the Tsarist army, the district companies will move marching units

to the front to save what can still be saved, to delay or at least impede the triumphal invasion of the enemy as long as it is possible to conclude an independent peace and to ensure further free socialist government.

Enough of demagoguery, enough of pseudo-democracy! Professional knowledge cannot be created, nor valued by general elections and mechanical vote counting. Elections only make sense according to professional categories of knowledge.

The new army must be strictly disciplined and led by a professional union of military specialists — the officers.

We must cast aside blind partisanship, narrow class divisions — these fruits of theories already experienced by the rapid development of history.

We, in industrial Russia, have no organised, struggling bourgeoisie: capitalism has been overthrown into the dust, production has been destroyed.

The time has come for socialist construction, the time has come to establish socialist production on the ruins of capitalism, to unite the whole of society, to stop the aimless internecine strife and to raise the people's militia to fight the only immediate enemy — the military coalition of the central empires, which started this war to assert the domination of their powerfully developed capitalism on the world market.

In this struggle between Russian socialism and German militarism, all the ideological officers will be with the people. They are only waiting for the call to stand up for the people's interests and for the socialist fatherland, with all the youthful energy of some and the combat experience of others.

The heart of Russia must suggest and show by example the way to self-defence, without which no personal freedom, no economic equality, no social brotherhood is conceivable.

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Alexander Atabekian
Social Tasks of the House Committees
Essay on Urban Social Order Without Power and Coercion
1918

Original translation of Социальные задачи домовых комитетов (Очерк городского общественного строя без власти и принуждения).

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