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# Trade union, works council and workers' council

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2004

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## CONCLUSIONS

All the historical cases we have seen are instinctive movements of the class, lacking ideological maturity, except perhaps the kibbutzim, although these did not seek to change the capitalist system.

The cases of Yugoslavia and Algeria demonstrate that self-management, and therefore communism, cannot be established from above. It is something that the workers must impose, or else it will not exist.

However, there is one case in which communism was sought and realized by the workers, or at least by some workers from the bottom up. That case is the Spanish Revolution of 1936. Unlike all the previous cases, the failure of this revolution was not due to theoretical inadequacy or because the workers who carried it out lacked clear ideas. To put it down, it took the army of an entire country, in cahoots with the support of all the bourgeois democracies of the Western world, which preferred to look the other way while Nazi-fascism supplied its murderers with weapons. This revolution was not betrayed (or was it?). Like the Paris Commune, it was a revolution crushed. Rather than explaining how self-management was achieved there, how the workers' councils functioned, and how work was organized, we have the opportunity to give the floor to some of its protagonists.

Let them tell us what the greatest celebration of the 20th century was like.

*Note: The exhibition concluded with the screening of the documentary Living Utopia.*

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According to UN data, at the end of the last century, there were 350 million people in the world who owned as much wealth as half the world's population. The search for methods to change this state of affairs requires a deeper understanding of methods for achieving equality. Methods for achieving communism, the only form of social organization that would allow for equality, justice, and freedom for human beings, and that could therefore guarantee the perpetuation of the species in the short and medium term. Obviously, when we talk about communism here, we are referring to a social system in which things are shared, belong to all societies, and are managed by them. Under no circumstances should this communism be identified with state capitalism.

### **Union**

It is a stable workers' association, created with the intention of continuity or permanence and with defense objectives, and sometimes other political and social interests. Action within the company is carried out by the union representative or the union branch. Types of unions: reformist, conformist, revolutionary, Correa, yellow, company, guild, etc. Internationally, union groups or federations emerge, such as the ICFTU, the CMT, the CES, the IWA, etc. (the first two have agreed to merge).

### **Workers' Council (WC)**

Also called the Workers' Committee, this is the representative body of the company's personnel. Depending on the historical development, this body has been immersed in functions of economic self-management, co-management, and self-management of struggles in revolutionary or highly combative moments.

It can also be simply an information and grievance body with varying negotiating capacity, highly regulated by the System's legislation. We will call this latter version of the representative body the Works Council (WC).

### **Self-management**

This means management by the workers themselves, self-government. The word comes from the Serbo-Croatian: "samo

upravljaje.” From a Marxist perspective, self-management is often referred to as simple **co-management** or participation in the management of the company. From anarchist perspective, self-management means the comprehensive management of the entire society by the citizens themselves, both in its economic and political aspects.

## FORMS OF INTEGRATION INTO THE SYSTEM

Capitalism’s desire to perpetuate itself as a social system has led it to attempt countless measures to integrate workers into the system. Hence, both reformist or conformist unionism and Works Councils are omnipresent figures in almost all developing countries.

The basic strategy, in addition to modifying production conditions, has been the introduction of a bourgeois-minded ideology (productivism) among workers, as opposed to the ideology of the proletariat (abolition of wage labor and its replacement with liberated labor).

In the social and labor world, the attempt at integration is carried out through the following basic practices: Transfer of power that does not endanger the system (co-determination, priority for employing members, facilities for intervening in personnel management, etc.), in exchange for abandoning the class struggle *de jure* or *de facto*. Direct state subsidies. Indirect subsidies (e.g., money for elected union representatives). Granting of administrative premises and infrastructure. Subsidies for training courses (which represent larger amounts than indirect subsidies). Negotiation fees. Union hours...

advocating for the non-division between leaders and executors. This movement brings together anarchist organizations and organizations that proclaim themselves Bolshevik (Trotskyist and pro-Chinese). Its structures are opposed to the Bolshevik hierarchical organization and are used by these groups as a temporary compromise from which they hope to profit for their organizations.

The traditional “left” parties are frightened by the extraparliamentary movement and behave like allies of De Gaulle. Some PCF militants behaved similarly to the Guerrillas of Christ the King during the Spanish transition. The French May represented the first mass break with Stalinism and concluded with significant wage increases for workers. It also represented the return to the social life of anarchism. However, on June 30, the right-wing parties won the elections.

### Rebirth of Trade Unionism in Spain during the Dictatorship

The birth of the Workers’ Commissions marked the rediscovery in Spain of the assembly-based workers’ council movement: workers gathered in an assembly to elect a workers’ commission to meet with employers and convey their demands, which was dissolved once the conflict was resolved.

In 1956, the first workers’ commission was formed: that of La Camocha. In 1963, the provisional workers’ commission of Vizcaya was formed. In 1964, the PCE dissolved its Workers’ Union Opposition to “join” the CCOO. In 1966, the constituent manifesto of the CCOO was drafted, and they organized nationally.

From the beginning, the CCOO was a swarm of different Marxist parties, all of which needed a Correa union according to classical Marxist theories. Thus, in 1976, the CSUT and SU split, promoted by the ORT and PTE parties.

Using Lenin’s tactic of penetrating autonomous workers’ organizations to rein them in, after the end of the process, the PCE managed to form a Correa union.

members, an executive body, and committees that oversee the various branches of activity (production, healthcare, education, etc.). The kibbutzim are part of the Hisdrait trade union organization.

#### **Argentina, today**

In 2001, capital flight occurred, which in March led to the appropriation of bank deposits (popularly known as "the corralito") implemented by Minister Felipe Cavallo. Self-management then emerged, not as an offensive by the working class, but as a sign of resistance to the strike in more than 170 companies with approximately 10,000 workers. In these companies, it was found that approximately 65% to 70% of expenses went to owners and managers. Therefore, loss-making companies with owners and managers cease to be so without them.

While the government wants to open the door to corporations and share capital, the MNER (National Movement of Recovered Companies) seeks to transfer credits to workers. Although they are independent of political parties and the state, they also seek representation in the political system through candidates.

This experience comes to represent control of the means of production within the framework of the capitalist system. However, we must remember that the cooperative, if it wants to survive, must abide by the laws of the capitalist system. No matter how well-intentioned its founders are, they cannot avoid this. The underlying reason is private property.

## **SELF-MANAGEMENT OF STRUGGLES**

#### **1968: French May**

On May 3, riots broke out between police and students. The latter called for workers' solidarity, leading to the general strike of May 25, which created an atmosphere of civil war in the streets.

The "March 22" student movement rediscovers assemblyism, adopted by factory workers and neighborhood action committees,

## **SYNDICALISM AND COUNCILISM**

#### **Syndicalism**

Worker-led associationism emerged with the Industrial Revolution. Modern trade unions have their origins in the First International. After its dissolution, workers' parties of Marxist origin created related unions because, as Kautsky and Lenin agreed, the class consciousness of the proletariat does not come from within, but must be incorporated from without.

Furthermore, over time, anarchist-inspired workers' societies gave rise to Revolutionary Syndicalism.

#### **Councilism**

There are two theories that favor self-management and, therefore, the need for a Workers' Council or Committee: anarcho-syndicalism and Marxist self-management councilism.

Self-management councilism is a reinterpretation of Marxism that seeks to avoid bureaucratism and, like all Marxisms, presents itself as a transcendence of anarchism. It studies the organizational object (the Council) and offers recipes for achieving the dictatorship of the proletariat through it. It contrasts the council with the union. Its main theorists are Paul Cardan and Anton Pannekoek, for whom the OCs are composed of delegates elected (and revocable) by the workers. The most important text of self-managing Marxist councilism is Anton Pannekoek's book *Workers' Councils*, in which he states that a change of leadership in companies and the state is not enough to abolish capitalism. It is necessary to abolish the function of management itself: workers must have direct control over the means of production.

#### **Anarcho-Syndicalism and the Workers' Committee**

Anarcho-syndicalism does not contrast the Council with the Union. By promoting self-management, it promotes the Council, which is essential for the former. In the future society, the Union will disappear, but never the Council or Workers' Committee.

Anarcho-syndicalism considers Marxist self-management councilism, in its most radical form, to be an anarchist manifestation that doesn't recognize itself as such; it's simply the theorization of a circumstantial phenomenon that can offer spectacular results in exceptional moments. Once these moments have passed, the encephalogram of activism flattens out, and the continuity of the working class's struggle for rights, revolution, and education can only be ensured by a permanent organization: the Union.

## SELF-MANAGEMENT AND COUNCILS IN HISTORY

### **Paris Commune (1871)**

It took place in the context of the Franco-Prussian War. Power passed into the hands of delegates and deputies of the people (municipal councilors), elected by universal suffrage. In the factories, the organization of the capitalist system was destroyed.

Within a month, the Commune was crushed by the French army. It has been said that the Commune was the greatest celebration of the 19th century.

### **USSR**

St. Petersburg, February 1905. The St. Petersburg Soviet represented 200,000 workers (150 enterprises and 16 unions). It had 562 delegates and 31 members on the Executive Committee: 22 workers' delegates and 9 representatives of the three parties (Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and Socialist Revolutionaries), despite the anarchist origins of this new organization, as Volin tells us in his book *The Unknown Revolution*. The soviets expanded until they were crushed by reaction.

1917: The February revolutionary wave swept away the tsars, but the war continued. February 27: Petrograd Soviet, with a Menshevik majority supporting Kerensky's government.

self-management were promulgated, granting co-management of factories, but not of the economy or politics.

The WC is electoral (secret ballot), and the candidates belong to the Communists (League or others). The WC elects a management council to which it delegates executive powers. The latter appoints a director from outside the company (through a competition), who forms his own team of technocrats (bureaucratic self-management). The work unit can meet at any time, and the factory assembly approximately once a year. The 1965 reform abolished planning, giving rise to a socialist market economy and all that this entailed for wages, consumerism, hellish work, and, consequently, the death of co-management.

### **Algeria**

In 1962, after the end of the Liberation War, certain properties left vacant due to the abandonment of the owners of the metropolis were taken over. In 1963, a system of self-management was officially established for these enterprises, covering 30% of agriculture and 10% of industry.

However, the workers felt like wage earners, ordered around by people who didn't work for them, who drove to the company, etc. The director and the management committee performed the functions of the former employers. There was no elimination of power. Members were elected to manage, and no real decisions were made in assembly. In 1965, Ben Bella fell, and with it co-management.

### **Israel**

The kibbutz is a collectivist agricultural operation. They began in the 1920s, growing in popularity until 1947 (the founding of the State of Israel), when they comprised 8% of the Jewish population. From then on, they declined due to the imposition of pro-capitalist and hierarchical ideas promoted by various governments.

They are based on the agrarian collectivist ideas of Tolstoyan anarchism. Kibbutzim typically have between 200 and 500 members, for whom everything is shared, except for personal items. There are no salaries. They are structured around a general assembly of



In this context, "revolutionary committees of armed students and workers" were created, and the WCs rapidly expanded. Moscow reinstated Nagy, which did not prevent the general strike from breaking out on October 25.

On the 28th, the "Greater Budapest" council was elected by district delegates (representing two million inhabitants). In all localities, the councils took charge of affairs. Moscow accused them of being pro-capitalist, and from November 4 to 11, the second intervention took place with troops ten times larger (Trotsky's tactic), resulting in fighting and the arrest of all council members. The tactics used by the people (soap-soaked streets, fake mines, Molotov cocktails, and Hungarian flags raised on Russian tanks) are now history.

1968, CZECHOSLOVAKIA (Prague Spring): Forms of workers' control and WCs sponsored by the government emerged between March and August. They were crushed (Trotsky's tactics).

1970, POLAND: Price increases provoked an uprising in Settin, Gdansk, and Gdynia. WCs were created. They forced, for example, Gierek (party leader) to discuss the gathering in Settin Square with the workers. However, these WCs did not seize political power, in order to avoid a development similar to that in Hungary. The WCs survived for several months, until repression or integration into the system triumphed (Lenin's and Trotsky's tactics).

## **REGIMES THAT HAVE CLAIMED SELF-MANAGEMENT**

### **Yugoslavia**

After World War II, a one-party state was established. In 1948, the break with the Cominform occurred, leading to the economic blockade of the USSR. During that year and the following year, some WCs formed spontaneously. In 1950, decrees on

Lenin's tactic was to place members of his party at the head of the soviets, using supra-revolutionary language to direct them and subordinate them to his party leadership. Once this maneuver was completed, he would spread his April slogan: "All power to the soviets."

September: Soviet elections, which the Bolsheviks won in the main elections. October 24 and 25: Revolution and seizure of power in Petrograd. Trotsky organized the Red Army.

1918: The soviets disappeared as organs of power that had replaced the state (six months in power). For Lenin, the soviets must be the "social part" (correctors of the state bureaucracy) in the ascending order of council, party, and state. The soviets allowed the Bolsheviks to seize power in their name. The struggle for this dominance and its subsequent elimination extends until 1921.

To eliminate them, they merge them with the unions, but the unions become infected with self-management. At the 10th Party Congress, they are liquidated, along with the Workers' Opposition. Trotsky promises a bloodbath to eliminate the entire Opposition. This will be his tactic to destroy the soviets.

1921. Kronstadt: the sailors rise up in arms in solidarity with the striking workers of Moscow and Petrograd. They demand "All power to the soviets, not to the party." They are crushed by Trotsky's troops.

1921: Ukraine, which had become a region of self-governing communes during the civil war, led by Makhno, was crushed. With the Makhnovchina, the last bastion of the Russian Revolution was liquidated. Nothing of communism remained, only a new version of the exploitation of man by man: that of State Capitalism.

### **Germany**

1917: Wave of strikes, with no reliable organization (social democrats integrated into the system and a very small anarcho-syndicalist organization). 1918: Collapse of the front and desertion of millions of soldiers. Workers' councils are created in Berlin,

Hamburg, the Ruhr area, etc. The main aspiration of the people is peace, which is soon fulfilled.

Social democratic policy is the traditional one of the time: attempting the nationalization of the means of production as a path to socialism.

April 7, 1919: Proclamation of the Workers' Council Republic in Bavaria, heavily influenced by the anarchists Gustav Landauer and Enta Muhsaur. On May 3, the Free Corps crush it, and Landauer is murdered by the soldiers.

The old organizations (unions and parties, including the Spartacists) view the councils as rival organizations. They maneuvered, demanding that the various currents be represented in the councils in proportion to their numerical importance. Thus, from then on, the councils' representation was made up of members of the Social Democratic Party, Spartacists, trade unions, consumer cooperatives, etc., meaning that the delegates no longer received instructions from the assemblies but from their various organizations.

1920: Unifying conference of the WCs in Hanover. The council organization AAUD (General Workers' Union of Germany) was founded, where member organizations were entitled to maximum independence. Later, the AAUDE split, fighting against legal unions and WCs and rejecting parliamentarism. The AAUDE rejected the existence of paid leaders, "neither membership cards nor statutes."

The KPD (German Communist Party) launched the well-known slogan of all power in the soviets, but considered them to be bodies subject to external instructions (Kautskyism). The original KPD was torn between parliamentarism and anti-parliamentarism (from which the KAPD was born, a communist party that played a role in debate and ideological dissemination with respect to the AAUDE, similar to the FAI in Spain).

The movement's failure was due to the pact between the Social Democrat Ebert and the army and the ensuing repression, as well

as the integration into the system caused by the parliamentary resolution establishing the "rights" and "duties" of the WCs, which from then on would be called works councils (WCs).

### **Italy**

Workers' Councils were founded in 1919 at Fiat in Turin (a large workers' meeting), during the process of renewing the positions of the "internal commission" (a type of collaborationist works council).

The assembly of executive committees of the factory committees represented 30,000 workers (one representative elected per workshop). The movement radicalized, supported by a fraction of the Socialist Party (Gramsci) and the Piedmontese anarchists. It was opposed by the majority of the Socialist Party (PSI) and the trade unions. For Gramsci, the Workers' Unions (COs) were the "historical principle that must lead to the foundation of a Workers' State."

March 15, 1920. The COs began a strike to occupy factories and launch production (self-management). Avanti (the organ of the PSI) refused to publish the appeal of the Turin Socialist section. Meanwhile, the city was taken by 20,000 soldiers recruited from southern Italy, and on April 24, the workers' movement was crushed.

### **The People's Republics**

1953, GDR: Workers demand a "metalworkers' government." The Red Army (Moscow) dissolves them with tanks. WCs are created throughout the country, requiring the use of force to liquidate them one after another. (Trotsky's tactic).

1956, POLAND: Insurrection in Poznan and throughout the country, where WC are created. It affects two million (out of eight) Polish workers between 1956 and 1957. The WC are subsequently integrated by the bureaucracy (Lenin's tactic).

1956, HUNGARY: On October 22, the Petofi Circle (communist intellectuals) calls a demonstration in solidarity with Poland. All of Budapest is in the streets. The political police fire, but the workers and the army take up arms. Then Moscow's tanks intervene.