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1921

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to take power, and that's that, and then progressively change society by means of laws and decrees. In which case, they would probably be surprised to see others ensconcing themselves in power rather than themselves and, in any event, they would, above all, have to give some thought to raising an armed force (police), required if they are to enforce respect for their own laws. In the interim, the bourgeoisie would still hold the wealth, in essence, and once the critical point of popular anger has passed, it would prepare its backlash, pack the police with agents of its own, exploit the unease and disillusionment of those who had been expecting to see the earthly paradise achieved straight away… and would seize back power by winning over the dictators or replacing them with men of its own.

That fear of reaction, used to justify the dictatorial system, springs from the fact that it pretends to make the revolution whilst a privileged class, able to take hold again of power, is still permitted to exist.

If, on the contrary, the beginning is made by complete expropriation, then a bourgeois class will no longer exist, and all the living forces of the proletariat, all existing capacities, will be employed on social reconstruction.

After all, in a country like Italy (to apply these remarks to the country in which we work), where the masses are penetrated by libertarian and rebel instincts, where anarchists represent a considerable force by the influence which they can exercise quite apart from their organisations, an attempt at dictatorship could not be made without provoking civil war between workers and workers, and could not succeed unless it were by means of the most ferocious tyranny.

In that case, good-bye to communism!

There is only one possible way of salvation: LIBERTY.

The principal justifications of dictatorship are the alleged incapacity of the masses and the necessity of defending the revolution against reactionary attempts.

If the masses were really a dumb flock unable to live without the staff of the shepherd, if a sufficiently numerous and conscious minority able to carry away the masses by persuasion and example did not already exist, then we would be able to understand the standpoint of the reformists who are afraid of a popular upheaval and fancy that they can, bit by bit, by small reforms, small improvements, undermine the bourgeois State and prepare the road to socialism; we would be able to understand the *educationists* who, underrating the influence of surroundings, hope to change society by previously changing all individuals; but we really cannot understand the partisans of dictatorship who want to educate and raise the masses "by violence and terror," and so must use gendarmes and censors as prime factors of education.

In reality, nobody could be in the position to establish a revolutionary dictatorship if the people had not previously made the revolution, thus showing effectively that it is able to make it; and in this case dictatorship would only step on the neck of the revolution, divert, strangle, and kill it.

In a political revolution proposing only to overthrow the government and leaving intact the existing social organisation, a dictatorship may seize power, place its men in the posts of the deposed functionaries, and organise a new régime from above.

But in a social revolution where all the foundations of social life are overthrown, where production must be quickly re-established for the benefit of those who work, where distribution must be immediately regulated according to justice, a dictatorship could do nothing. Either the people will provide for themselves in the various communities and industries or the revolution will be a failure.

Perhaps, at bottom (and some of them are now saying it openly) the supporters of dictatorship want to see nothing more than a political revolution in the short term; in other words, they would like

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need to talk about the freedom that would be afforded those who might not be loyal subjects of the rulers of the day.)

"*Only after the propertied have been expropriated, only in the wake of victory will the proletariat win over the masses of the population, which hitherto followed the bourgeoisie.*" (Yet again we have to ask: what is this proletariat when it is not the mass of those who work? Does proletariat therefore mean those with a certain outlook and who belong to a certain party, rather than those who have no property?)

So we will leave this wrong term of proletarian dictatorship, which leads to so many misunderstandings, and speak of dictatorship as it really is—that is, of the absolute domination of one or several individuals who, by the support of a party or of an army, become the masters of the social body and impose their will "with violence and with terror."

What their will may be depends upon the quality of those who in any particular case get hold of the power. In our case it is supposed to be the will of the communists, hence a will inspired with the desire of the common good.

This is rather doubtful already, because as a rule those who are best qualified to seize the reins of power are not the most sincere and the most devoted friends of the public cause, and when submission to a new government is preached to the masses, this means but paving the way for intriguers and ambitious persons.

But let us suppose that the new rulers, the dictators who will put into practice the aims of the revolution, are true communists, full of zeal, convinced that upon their work and their energy the happiness of mankind depends. They may be men of the Torquemada and Robespierre type, who, for a good purpose, in the name of private or public salvation, would strangle every discordant voice, destroy every breath of free and spontaneous life – and yet, powerless to solve the practical problems which they withdraw from competent handling by the interested parties themselves, they must willingly or unwillingly give way to those who will restore the past.

Here is the explanation from Lenin, or whoever wrote on his behalf (see *Avanti* of 20 July).[1]

"*Dictatorship means a toppling of the bourgeoisie by means of a revolutionary vanguard (which is revolution rather than dictatorship), in contrast to the notion that one must first secure a majority by means of elections. By means of the dictatorship the majority is obtained, not the dictatorship by means of the majority." (Fine. But if we have a minority that has to win over the majority after it has seized power, all talk of a dictatorship of the proletariat is a lie. The proletariat is obviously the majority.)*

"*Dictatorship means the use of violence and terror.*" (By whom and against whom? Since the supposition is that the majority is hostile and, according to the dictatorship rationale, it cannot be a matter of an unrestrained mob that lays hands on public assets, the *violence and terror* must be those deployed against all those who do not bend to the whims of the dictators, by goons in the service of those dictators).

"*Freedom of the press and of association would be tantamount to authorizing the bourgeoisie to poison public opinion.*" (So, after the installation of a dictatorship of the "proletariat," which is supposedly made up of the totality of workers, there is still going to be a bourgeoisie that, instead of working, will have the means to poison "public opinion," and a pubic opinion open to being poisoned, and separate from the proletarians who would be setting up the dictatorship? There will be all-powerful censors who will determine what can be published or not published, and prefects to whom one will have to apply for permission to hold a meeting. There is no

[1] The article in question was a correspondence from Berlin signed "Geselle" and titled "Come Lenin rinunzia alla Dittatura del Proletariato" (How Lenin gives up the dictatorship of the proletariat). In response to "a legend borne out in social democratic circles," according to which "Lenin and the Russian would be softening their theories" to broaden the Third International's base, the article listed ten statements about the dictatorship of the proletariat, whose acceptance was a precondition for admission to the Third International.

I

The conditions within society at present cannot last forever—and we may state today that they cannot last much longer.138

Everybody is agreed on that—those who give it any thought, at any rate.

There are no more conservatives in the proper sense of the term.

Instead, there are folk who aim to profit from the present moment and enjoy their privileges for as long as they may without worrying if, after them, the deluge will come. There are also rabid reactionaries who would like to turn back the clock, drown any attempt at liberation in blood, and subject the masses to the rule of the sword. All to no avail. The reaction may manage to dye the rising dawn a brighter blood red; but it will never succeed in preventing the coming catastrophe.

The masses refuse to be cowed any longer.

As long as the belief was that suffering was a punishment or some test set by God and that all of the evils borne down here would be repaid one-hundred fold in the next world, a system of iniquity could be installed and endure, a system whereby a handful of men impose their will on others, exploiting and oppressing them according to their whim.

But such belief has never been all that effective because it has never stopped folk from looking out for their own interests on this earth, which is why religion has not managed to snuff out progress entirely. And such belief has dwindled considerably: it is in the throes of disappearing. Even the clergy are obliged, in order to rescue religion and at the same time to be saved, to adopt the air of wanting to resolve the social question and ease the workers' afflictions.

From the moment that the workers' eyes are opened to the place that they occupy in society, it is impossible for them to carry on toiling and suffering forever, producing their whole lives long on behalf of their masters and with no prospect before them save the

heartbreak of an old age when they will not have even the guarantee of shelter and bread. Since they are the producers of all wealth and know that they can produce in order to more than meet the needs of all, it is impossible for them to want to resign themselves forever to a wretched existence with the constant threat of unemployment and hunger. Being better educated, refined through contact with civilization, even it be for the benefit of others, and having tasted the strength that they can derive from unity and courage, it is impossible for them to make do with remaining a scorned lower class and for them not to stake their claim to a great share in life's joys.

Today the proletarian knows that, as a rule, he is doomed to remaining a proletarian for life, unless there is some widespread alteration to the social order. He knows that that alteration cannot come about without the aid of other proletarians, and this is why he looks to union for the strength needed to impose it.

The bourgeois and the governments that represent and defend them know this as well, and in order to avoid their being swept away in some awful social cataclysm, they appreciate the need to take some sort of steps; especially since there is no dearth of intelligent bourgeois who appreciate that society, as it stands at present, is a nonsense and, deep down, damaging even to those who are its beneficiaries.

So, sooner or later, by fits and starts or gradually, change must come.

But what will be the substance of that change and how far will it go?

Today's society is split into the propertied and the proletarian. It can change by doing away with the status of proletarian and by making each and every one co-owner of society's wealth; or it can change whilst retaining the distinction that underpins it but guaranteeing the proletarians better treatment.

In the first case, men would become free and socially equal; they would then organize society according to the wishes of each and

the distribution of articles of daily use; that all real bourgeois be placed under the necessity of merging with the mass of the former proletarians and of working like them in order to enjoy the same benefit as they. And all this must be effected quickly, on the same day as the victorious insurrection or the day after, without waiting for orders from central committees or any other authority whatever.

This is what the anarchists want and this also would naturally happen if the revolution is really to be a social revolution and not limited to a simple political change which, after some convulsions, would lead everything back to the starting-point.

For either the bourgeois class is rapidly stripped of its economic power or it will soon take back also the political power of which the insurrection deprived it. And to strip the bourgeois class of its economic power it is necessary to organise immediately a new economic order founded upon justice and equality. The economic services, at least the most important ones, admit of no interruption and must be satisfied quickly. "Central committees" either do nothing or begin to act when their work is no longer needed.

In opposition to anarchists, many revolutionists have no confidence in the constructive power of the masses; they believe themselves to be in possession of infallible recipes for universal happiness; they fear a possible reaction; they fear perhaps more the competition of other parties and other schools of social reformers, and they want, therefore, to possess themselves of all power and to replace the "democratic" government of to-day by a dictatorial government.

Dictatorship they mean; but who would be the dictators? Of course, so they think, the chiefs of their party. They still use the words *dictatorship of the proletariat*, either from habit or from a conscious desire to evade plain explanations; but this is to-day an exploded farce.

the government, which opposes every social change. For this insurrection, since here we live in a monarchy, the union of all the anti-monarchist forces is desirable, and possibly essential. It is necessary to be prepared, morally and materially, in the best possible way, and it is before all necessary to profit by all spontaneous movements and to endeavour to make them general and to transform them into decisive movements, in order that, whilst the parties are preparing themselves, the popular forces shall not be exhausted by isolated outbreaks.

But after the victory of the insurrection, after the fall of the government, what must be done then?

We, the anarchists, wish that in each locality the workers, or, more properly, that part of the workers which has the clearest insight of their position and the readiest spirit of initiative, should take possession of all the instruments of labour, all wealth, land, raw materials, houses, machinery, foodstuffs, etc., and should sketch out as far as possible the new form of social life. We wish that the agricultural labourers who now toil for their masters should no longer recognise the rights of any landlords, and should continue and intensify their work on their own account, entering into direct relations with the industrial and transport workers for the exchange of products; that the industrial workers, leading engineers and the technical staff included, should take possession of the factories, and should continue and intensify their work on their own account and that of the community, transforming rapidly all those factories which produce useless or harmful things into establishments for the production of articles which the people most urgently need; that the railway workers should continue to run the railways, but for the use of the community; that community or voluntary workers, locally elected, should, under the direct control of the masses, take possession of all available habitations, to shelter as best the hour will permit all the most indigent; that other committees, always under the direct control of the masses, should provide for the food supply and

every person, and the full potential of human nature could develop in its infinite variations. In the second case, the proletarians as useful and well-fed cattle, would resign themselves to their slavish condition and be happy with their kindly masters.

Freedom or slavery. Anarchy or slavishness.

Those two potential solutions lie at the root of two divergent trends represented in their most logical and coherent manifestations, by the anarchists on one hand and by the so-called reformist socialists on the other. With this difference: the anarchists know and state what they want, which is the destruction of the State, and society freely organized on a footing of economic equality; whereas the socialists are at odds with themselves; they purport to be socialists when their activity has a tendency to husband and perpetuate the capitalist system by rendering it more humane; and they thereby renege upon their socialism, the primary meaning of which is abolition of the division of people into the propertied and the proletarian.

The task of anarchists—and, let me say, or all real socialists—is to oppose this trend towards slavishness, towards a state of attenuated slavery that would strip humanity of its finest qualities, deny the operation of society of its finest potential—and, in the meantime, helps sustain the impoverishment and degradation into which the masses are thrust, by persuading them to be patient and to trust in the providence of the State and in the kindness and understanding of their masters.

All allegedly social legislation, all state measures designed to "protect" labour and guarantee workers a modicum of well-being and security, as well as all measures employed by astute capitalists to chain the worker to the factory by means of bonuses, pensions, and other benefits, unless they are lies or snares, are indeed a step in the direction of that state of enslavement, which poses a threat to the emancipation of the workers and the progress of humankind.

A legally prescribed minimum wage; legal limits placed upon the working day; mandatory arbitration; legally enforceable

collective bargaining; legal status for workers' associations; government-prescribed hygiene measures in factories; state insurance against sickness, unemployment, accidents at work; old-age pensions; profit-sharing schemes, etc., etc.—these are all measures designed to ensure that the proletarians stay proletarians forever and the propertied propertied forever; all measures that afford the workers slightly more comfort and security (if that), but that rob them of what little freedom they have and that have a tendency to perpetuate the division of mankind into masters and slaves.

To be sure, until such time as the revolution gets here, it is a good thing—which brings revolution closer—for workers to try to earn more and work fewer hours and in improved conditions. It is a good thing for the jobless not to starve to death, for the sick and the elderly not to be abandoned. But these and other things can and should be won by the workers themselves, through direct struggle with their masters, through their own organizations; by means of individual and collective action and by nurturing every person's sense of personal dignity and awareness of his rights.

Gifts from the State and *gifts* from the bosses are poisoned fruit that carry within them the seeds of slavery. And should be refused.

II

If awarded and accepted as advantageous concessions granted by the State and the bosses, all reforms that leave the division of people into the propertied and the proletarian—and, therefore, some people's right to live off other people's toil—unaltered, cannot help but dampen the rebelliousness of the masses against their oppressors and lead to the introduction of a state of slavishness whereby humanity would be irreversibly split into ruling classes and slave classes. Once this is acknowledged, there is no other option but revolution: a radical revolution that demolishes the entire machinery of the State, expropriates those who cling to society's wealth,

and places everybody on an equal footing, economically and politically.

That revolution will, of necessity, be violent, although violence per se is obnoxious. It has to be violent because it would be a nonsense to expect the privileged to wake up to the woes and injustice that sprout from their privileges and to make up their minds to forego them of their own volition. It has to be violent because transitory revolutionary violence is the only way of ending the greater and enduring violence that holds the vast majority of people in slavery.

We welcome reforms, if they are possible. They have a fleeting contribution to make and can rouse the masses to more ambitions and demands, provided that proletarians keep it well in mind that bosses and governments are their enemies and that whatever they grant is wrested from them by force or fear of force and would quickly be snatched back, should that fear be lifted. If, instead, reforms are secured by means of agreement and collaboration between the ruled and the rulers, they cannot help but strengthen the chains binding the workers to the chariot of the parasites.

Besides, these days, the danger of reforms lulling the masses to sleep and successfully consolidating and perpetuating the bourgeois order seems to have passed. Only deliberate treachery by those who have managed to win the workers' trust through their socialist propaganda could attach value to them.

The blindness of the ruling class and the natural evolution of the capitalist system, accelerated by the war, led to this, that any reform whatever which would be acceptable to the owners of property is powerless to solve the crisis under which the country labours.

Hence the revolution is imposing itself, the revolution is coming.

But how must this revolution be effected, and what development must it take?

It is, of course, necessary to begin by that insurrectional action which will sweep away the material obstacle, the armed forces of