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Constructive Problems of the Social Revolution
1923

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other. Russian workers who occupied factories and workplaces in 1917–18 did not assign management [functions] to unions or to factory committees. On every occasion that workers confronted questions of the taking over production for themselves, they were resolved by the mass of factory workers, with the participation of unions and factory committees. Moreover, workplace management was taken on by the workers themselves, working through sections: technical, economic, supply, etc., – all acting faithfully within directives from the working masses in the factory. Italian workers acted in identical fashion in the factory occupations of 1920. Without doubt, similar methods will also be employed when factory occupations take place in other countries.

Libertarian Communists' every effort should work towards ensuring that all economic and social reconstruction should be concentrated wholly in the hands of workers themselves preventing power and control falling under the control or power of this or that political party.

revolutionary action, but also the places where events are decided. Workers' weakness lies in the inadequacy of their organisations, insofar as they are not ready to deal with the problems posed from one moment to the next. On one side the bourgeoisie and political parties can apply intense pressure through their well organised apparatus, on the other workers are dispersed and isolated in their activity – and invariably this leads on to defeat. It will always be like this, so long as workers fail to act in a unified manner and so long as the workplace remains a blind instrument in the hands of parties rather than the organising centre of revolutionary workers.

Even in the first days of their victory isolated workplaces or workplace collectives will have to manage production and to find supplies for themselves, dealing with the lack of a general technical apparatus and any destruction that occurs in the revolution – this will be a brief moment. The better workers' self-organisation and the greater their unity – ready for reconstruction and other struggles – the quicker they will be able to escape from isolation and dispersal; passing on invariably to a unified production system embracing all industrial sectors. Obviously, questions of the management of production will be decided not just by the detached bodies of this or that workplace or factory, but also by workers in an entire industrial sector. This is normal. The organisations of (economic) production unite only a part of the working class, and for this reason they cannot take it on themselves to resolve all problems of industry.

What is needed is that the formulation and resolution of problems should be carried through in close contact with the masses. This is the function of the best organised part of the working class, be it in [trade] unions, factory committees or other similar organisations. They must take the initiative to organise new systems of production, the defence of the revolution, etc., always in concert with the masses.

Only this way of approaching problems can avoid the violent pressure (dictatorship) of one part of the working class over an-

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to develop. Once this power was well entrenched it concentrated the nation's economy in its own hands and wiped out all forms of independent management of production. Russian workers and workers of all countries now face a well-defined problem of society in revolution. It is not enough to take overthrow governments and to take over the means of production, they need to take another decisive step; they themselves need to build up a new economy with new economic and social relations, otherwise they will be unable to preserve their freedom and independence. What will facilitate their progress? Workers themselves, and their autonomous organisations constitute the forces developing modern production. Workers must work to prevent their activity being diverted to serve the narrow interests of political parties.

What must be done so that workers impose their own will? It is essential to strengthen workers' revolutionary organisations, and then to give them, as much as mass movements, the most radical orientation. All slogans, in a revolutionary period, must return to the most important slogan of all: 'Social revolution through workers' solidarity.'

There are two concepts of the revolutionary process: in the first instance for some, revolution and the construction of a free society should be the business of small groups of professional revolutionaries; in the second instance both phases must be carried through by workers themselves. The first concept is defended by the Bolsheviks, the latter by libertarian communists. So, we must not confine all revolutionary resolution and energy within parties; rather these forces should be set to work directly within the labouring masses and their autonomous organisations. It is our business then to ensure that this energy and revolutionary will should be so forcefully and so categorically expressed within the masses that political parties are carried away and eliminate themselves.

So, the place for the headquarters of revolutionary struggles is in the workplace, the working countryside, and among the organisations of the producers. They should become not only arenas of

this sense the prelude to Russian revolutionary October and the October period itself were very instructive and worth our review. Throughout the summer of 1917, whenever a wave of factory occupations manifested itself in the workers' movement, political parties including the Bolsheviks exerted all their strength to oppose this movement. They argued that the working class was not ready to solve all the questions of production. Instead of take-overs they proposed a series of half measures such as workers' control of production.

When the mass movement of October overthrew the coalition government and before the new 'communist' power was set up, a large part of industry was directly in workers' hands. In the natural course of things they were managing things independently; all sorts of production problems confronted them. Workers did not stop at using reserves stocks, simultaneously they took care to find new supplies for businesses and we can truly say, without exaggeration that if the production process did not stop at this moment, then that was only because of these facts; because of the autonomy and the dynamism of large masses of factory workers. The statist Bolshevik administration introduced into production later, and by decree, related to the existing production process in mechanical fashion. At that time our industry was an original phenomenon. Almost every factory had its story. Only a meticulous historian, wishing to go beyond the façade of decrees would be able to present a true picture of industry in this era.

It is most likely that a process of factory take-overs will follow the same course in other countries, running in parallel with the struggle to overthrow state power. However, the overthrow of state power and workers' take-over in industry does not guarantee the success of a revolution. Other errors are possible, errors that may negate workers' achievements. The Russian revolution is a striking example of this. After deposing [state] power and taking over industry, instead of going on immediately to organise production on a basis of self-management, workers allowed a new power

1: The Problem of Organisation in Production and Consumption.

Social ideologies – of every sort – always experience revolutionary moments, periods of open social conflict, as their time of trial. Through concrete experience life measures the validity or the inconsistency of this or that social theory, confirming or rejecting its principles. For the anarchist-communists who have lived at the forefront of the Russian revolution for five years, life has given us a series of instructive lessons. On the one hand, it confirms many fundamental principles of our theory, on the other hand it is destructive and insists that new principals, better adapted to experience, are put in place. Five years of experience of social conflict demonstrate that although our goals were beautiful and trustworthy, yet, they alone were unable to rally around themselves masses of workers, to create with them a unity of will, action and means. Yes, besides our ultimate objective, working people need to know our concrete proposals; they need to know what action needs taking and what the practical steps are that will destroy the old world and build a new life. In a word, they need to know the first concrete steps as recommended by libertarian communism for 'the first day of the revolution', the libertarian road to connect them to our ideals. It would be wrong to think that the organised libertarian movement was unable to assert itself only because of Bolshevik state repression. Bolshevik repression was just one of the reasons for our defeat in Russia. Besides that, there were others that accounted for the fate of our movement.

We believe that one of the principal problems was the lack of an agreed practical programme for the aftermath of the revolution. One cannot say that we had no practical suggestions. We had them in abundance. But most often almost all of them were based on beliefs, on contradictory or abstract desires, often becoming spiritual visions. Working people, seeking real results and practical steps

forward through revolution, were naturally unable to settle with propositions that were set out so carelessly and impractically, full as they were with contradictions and incoherence. Of the few practical proposals – those most valuable and best thought out that appeared from time to time in the libertarian movement – none found a way to emerge from narrowly confined groups. Such proposals were aborted; wider circles of workers could not adopt them. There was no appropriate propaganda for them, nor was that possible given the chronic disorganisation of our forces. The growing organisational distance between working people and anarchism facilitated the crushing of the movement by the Bolsheviks. Thus, anarchism, which sets as its task serving workers in social revolution, needs an accurate understanding of immediate practical problems, and the means to resolve them. Thus, it needs to fuse with the masses organisationally and practically and consequently it needs to enter concretely rather than abstractly into social conflict and in the reconstruction of life by libertarians. Given the above much of our work can be informed and facilitated [by a study] of the recent revolutionary period. What we have called 'the first day of the social revolution' has been sketched perfectly and summarised during this period, by the revolutionary masses, even though it was subsequently suffocated by the authorities. It is of the greatest importance for us, as anarchist revolutionaries, to analyse carefully its endeavours; linking them to the principals of our doctrine and giving them a living form that will lead to the victory of labour.

What are the tasks of the 'first day of the social revolution' – for ourselves, and for labour as a whole? We believe that they touch on two fundamental problems of the revolution: the organisation of production and consumption, on the basis of workers' independence and self-management. Before examining these questions directly, let us highlight one extremely important concept. In libertarian circles it is not unusual that consumption is considered the first principal of the social revolution, and in this view, it is counterposed to production, with the same, but opposite, significance. The

depend on them, and that might work to contradict the will of revolutionary workers.

Social revolution is above all an act of struggle for the construction of a new world, it does not tolerate the least vestige of moderation, its calls only for audacity and action. Success depends not only on the capacity of workers to organise but also on [the determination of] their spirit in decision making and on their audacity. So also, experience of mass revolutionary action and collective construction in our times categorically refutes every assertion that workers are not ready for a radical transformation of social life. This was an argument used most frequently in relation to Russian workers. But these arguments were shown to be without any foundation; Russian workers and peasants showed themselves to be quite ready and quite capable of solving fundamental problems of social revolution.

Were it not for the betrayal by the Bolsheviks within the working class – making use of workers' desire for social revolution to create a Bolshevik state – then without doubt Russian workers would have been able to work out and solve for themselves all important problems. Further, experience in the Russian revolution suggests the simple thought that particular mutual relationships exist between workers and every form of national economy. This or that economic form is possible only because workers at work are ready to manage them in their own interest. Furthermore, it is wrong to argue that a takeover of industry should depend on stocks of raw materials. Incomparably more important than the question of raw materials are the new structures of production based on workers' self-management created by this take-over. To base choices on such risky matters on circumstances such as smaller or greater stocks of raw materials is wrong.

Revolutions are based on workers' mass action creating irreversible facts. The success of factory occupations depends for the most part on how successful workers from particular factories may be, in establishing links with sectors providing raw materials. In

struggle available to the state, to avert the mortal danger of social revolution. In consequence workers' occupation of factories and workplaces will coincide with violent armed confrontations with the power of the state. In this sense, workers' and peasants' first steps are the most critical moments for the revolution. Workers must, of necessity, break with long-held submissiveness and humility and move directly on to the offensive. And this is not easy. All forces inclined to moderation, calm and compromise will hesitate, and will be opposed. Such people will put up many arguments to demonstrate that, to one degree or another and 'given the circumstances' social revolution is doomed to defeat; they will apply the brakes on its development. So, let us quickly refute an anti-revolutionary argument that always and everywhere undermines revolutionary creativity. Their arguments and conclusions are usually as follows: workers as a whole are not ready to manage production by themselves. They lack both necessary knowledge and sufficient experience. There are insufficient raw materials in factories and workplaces. And if workers take over industry it will be a disaster. Neighbouring countries are not yet ready for social revolution. And if it starts in one country only, it will inevitably suffer defeat. The country lacks abundance of goods, and in the absence of the latter, the revolution needs to put in place regulations for the distribution of raw materials. Order and rationing are needed. It follows that the modern libertarian type of social revolution is not possible. These and many other arguments are invariably advanced on every occasion that workers aspire to decisive action and the taking over of industry into their own hands. It is not difficult to see in such arguments firstly the inherent moderation of individuals and of masses, and secondly the conscious influence of the ruling classes trying to mobilise and reinforce this moderation with theoretical and scientific considerations, thus using these for their own ends. However, the revolutionary experience of workers can decisively overcome both this, and all such calculations that

revolution should start with the sharing out of produce, rather than the harmonious organisation of production – so say the partisans of this view – since the goal of the revolution is the satisfaction of the needs of all needy people. The partisans of the 'ideology of consumption' then go on to the following position, [that] the artisans and creators of the social revolution appear to be not only workers, but all people in general considered as consumers. They deny that means of production, land, culture, etc., belong only to workers and assert that they should be at the disposal of all people. Moreover, they assert that all future social organisations should be constituted not by workers alone, but also by everyone, by all consumers.

So, we have before us two erroneous positions on social revolution. Although they present contradictions (based on obvious misunderstanding) we need to struggle resolutely against the ideologies of separated production-ism and consumptionism. Let us begin by refuting the first.

When we say that the creators and artisans of the social revolution, the owners of productive wealth, the organisers and the initiators of a free society should be workers exclusively, it goes without saying that we understand that these should include those who do not participate actively in production – children, old people, the infirm (including those of the old wealthy class). Consequently, the principal of production includes all the active working population presenting itself as the foundation of the new society, as well as all those who for various reasons are obliged to place themselves outside the society of work.

All can organise themselves as consumers, for example, in sharing food, and the management of housing etc. They will create organisations of a purely consumer form, in such cases, and thus these bodies will not lose their labour character. Every individual is a consumer, and really, the biggest consumers are those who take their profits from work and the misery of others, that is to say, the wealthy classes and people in government. Obviously, we must

have a negative attitude to such 'consumers', because it would be vain to talk of constructing a life for workers insofar as we have not overcome them. Only when they themselves have become workers will they acquire the same consumer rights as all workers.

Any counterposing of consumption to production is not only meaningless but also damaging, for the confusion it brings into anarchism, making it appear as nebulous liberalism. It will tend to make it appear that libertarians aspire to a social order in which all will be satisfied, without consideration of the class to which they belong. Libertarian communism cannot allow such ideas. Either one thing or the other: either social order will be based on labour, and all, other than the old, children and the infirm, will be producers, or from the first days of the revolution labour values will not be upheld in some places, nor by all, and so struggles will continue between workers and their enemies.

Let us now refute another false notion held by some comrades: those who say revolution must not begin with the organisation of production, but by a general redistribution. It goes without saying that from its first days onwards the revolution will look after the needy, using existing stores. But this would be only an act of social equity, and one of the means of making more cohesive the further organisation of the revolutionary forces of labour. This act will not resolve the social question. Workers need to make it their business to install social conditions that will give general and definite satisfaction to all their needs, and not to distribute everything at once. Some days after their initial victory an inevitable economic destruction will follow, in consequence of general revolutionary upheaval. An organised counter-revolution will intervene. Workers will need to fight back mobilising all their strength and willpower to avoid immediate defeats. What resources will they have if everything is redistributed? This would be ostrich behaviour – like endangered ostriches who leave their bodies exposed but hide their heads in the grass. Capitalist society has accumulated reserves and is rich only because of the continuous reinforcement it receives

factories and taken power, had yet not rid itself of the influence of political parties. Moreover, having neglected to organise armed self-defence in [good] time, it was compelled to surrender to capital the positions that it had so magnificently won, and had then to experience the full horror of ferocious repression.

Civil war will be long and hard. The ruling class and its subclasses will resist to the utmost, using any means to achieve victory, because their long-term future will be at stake. The revolutionary class of town and country needs to understand in time this facet of the revolution, it needs to take such measures as may be needed to win through. [But] It is not through such severe preventative measures, through its organised fighting force, that it can accomplish and guarantee in [real] life the constructive tasks of the revolution.

2. On the occupation of factories and workplaces

In the first part, we set out that the foundations of the revolution are constituted through its positive and creative energy. The most important and most urgent task consists of the organisation of the country's entire economy: industry and agriculture in the first place, based on principles of equality and general workers' self-management. The new mode of production must be unified, including all important areas of work in its entirety, so as not to fall back into bourgeois contradictions. Obviously, such fundamental tasks can only be achieved if they are preceded by revolutionary workers' struggle against capital. It is impossible to start constructing a new economy with new social relations so long as state power is unbroken, and protects servility as the order of things, and so long as workers have not got their hands-on factories and workshops.

The economy, the production system and its workings are the foundations on which depends the well-being and lives of the ruling classes. For this reason, the latter will try every means of armed

is purely a technical question of circumstance, one that can be resolved by workers on the spot alone, organs for storage and supply will be created for these tasks.

These then are its principal features, the constructive task of the first day of the social revolution. Workers must prioritise efforts to accomplish all this, this then becomes the indispensable prerequisite for the character and successful outcome of the revolution. However, it is well to remember that the outcome will depend not only on good intentions, but also on the degree of resolution with which workers approach and carry out the conflictual side of things.

The life of all unproductive elements in contemporary society is thrown into question by the social revolution, provoking desperate resistance and leading to bitter civil war. However great the initial defeat suffered by the bourgeois classes may be, they will retain a capacity to resist; for many years they may go on the offensive against the revolution, trying to recapture whatever they have lost. Large military units of workers will be needed for extended campaigns against these forces. In revolutionary times one should not forget that capitalism, in addition to the current ruling elites, secretes within itself many other embryonic groups; they will seek to wage bitter armed struggles to install their dictatorship and to dominate the country. There were many offensives of this type on the side of the ruling classes during the Russian revolution: the movements of generals Kornilov, Kaledin, Krasnov, Koltchak, Yudenitch, Denikin, Wrangel and many others.

Political parties – from semi-monarchists, semi-republicans, cadets to the left wing of Social-Democracy – the Bolsheviks – are examples of groups who aspire to power. Judging from experience in Russia the latter are as dangerous as the former. Indeed, it is not the defenders of the old world that defeated the Russian revolution, but the Bolsheviks who conquered power for their own party. In turn, the Italian example shows how the working class, which in many places throughout the country had occupied

from workers in their hundreds of millions. If this provisioning should abruptly cease, notwithstanding existing stocks, capitalism would be gravely weakened. The workers' immediate and essential task consists precisely in taking away this immense network from the bourgeoisie, making it serve themselves. This is the only way in which social revolution can be accomplished.

So, for us, it is essential principal of the social revolution *that production and consumption should be organised on a class basis*. In what spirit can this task be considered? The Russian revolution has much rich experience to bring to bear on this question. One of its most important lessons is that without settling the problem of land and food there can be no question of organising industrial production based on self-management; in revolution these three aspects cannot be disassociated.

The easiest, and most obvious question is that of land. Indubitably after the first victories in the revolutionary whirlwind, peasants will seize both land and the means to cultivate it. It is desirable that peasants work in collective and communal fashion, otherwise, because the agricultural economy is a part of the general economy of the country, the latter would be unable to avoid bourgeois contradictions in a communist society. However, this is a problem that peasants alone can solve for themselves, and this obliges us, both now and in the future, to carry through among them comprehensive propaganda for the libertarian organisation of the agricultural economy. Progress will depend also on the way in which urban workers create communist production in the factory; also, whether their work in relation to peasants is conducted not in isolation from each other but through collectives, which would influence greatly affect the direction peasants might take.

Finding a solution to rural problems will greatly facilitate solving food supply issues, and the problems of industrial production will not be solved without also solving these rural problems. Industrial production, in the early days of the revolution, will indubitably be so messed up, and unfit for the needs of rural and urban workers

that workers will need to ask the peasantry for help. Such aid, of decisive importance for the revolution, will be possible only if there is a revolutionary collaboration between workers and peasants.

Wayward and fatal Bolshevik food politics, during which cities went to war against the country for bread, show obviously and demonstrably that – in Russia and in similar countries at least – the revolution cannot succeed without a revolutionary agreement between workers and peasants. In the matter of production workers need to consider the needs of peasants, and similarly peasants must not delay the supply of food and raw materials to the city; a direct agreement is needed back and forth between industry and agriculture. Mutual aid between the two toiling classes will make indispensable common organisms for liaison and supply. This alone might guarantee both the development of a new mode of production, and the further success of the entire revolution.

What should this new mode of production be like? It needs to conform with workers' objectives for social revolution. The fighting proletariat has as its objectives the conquest of liberty and social independence, the general satisfaction of its needs, all from the national economy, which will not be owned by any way by any particular group or by anyone in particular. The features and characteristics of the new mode of production follow on from the above. The system of production and the means of production in their entirety belong to everyone and to no one in particular, neither to groups nor to individuals. Thus, it will not be state capitalism (which can presently be seen in Bolshevik Russia), the creation of a group of state officials working in the interest of the governing party, which is, like all [forms of] capitalism neither fashioned in workers' interest, nor created by workers themselves. And a new mode of production cannot be built on a basis of co-operatives either, for that would mean that small groups of producers would manage a business for their own particular and limited interests. In addition to the fact that tools and the means of production belong to the toiling population and may not be used separately by

groups for their own ends, there is this, that all branches of the economy will not give an equal return, some will be more productive, others less, and still others; hospitals, schools, will produce no revenue. All sectors of production can exist and work only within a collective economic framework. To avoid falling back into bourgeois contradictions, the new system of production must be the creation of workers alone, of workers in every business and of all sectors and branches of labour. Workers will introduce into production firm principles of equality and fraternity, replacing the hierarchical system now in place in workplaces. It will be workers' desires in the widest sense that will decide everything.

In the revolutionary period federations of producers, or soviets of industrial unions will unite together the majority if not all workers. They will manage production along lines decided by workers in general assemblies, conferences and congresses. This is how workers already consider these affairs, especially Russian workers in the Don basin, in the Urals and in Petrograd[1] and in the centre of Russia. Through experience, they feel the solidarity of such production, which sooner or later should come under their own control to serve their own interests. The foundations of the mode of production, that we have defined, will determine subsequent development of a society self-managed by workers and peasants. Just as production is the common work of all, so there will be produce for all, shared equally by all producers. Such produce will be a common store for food supply. Those entitled, workers and their families, will be able to get everything they need. Obviously in the beginning such demands will be, by necessity, limited to the minimum. Experience shows that in the first days of every revolution stores will not suffice for long. Decisions on sharing out of produce will vary with circumstances, and the same [considerations apply] in relations between town and country: means of exchange (money or vouchers of an equivalent value) or none will be defined, this

[1] St Petersburg