

7. UNIONS AND COUNCILS

The end of the CGL's Livorno congress opens a new period in the history of the Italian working class. A new system of forces has now been established: two conceptions are ranged against each other, embodied in two distinct parties, and each can only develop and consolidate itself at the other's expense. The new period will be one of bitter struggles and polemics, and one does not need to be a prophet to foresee that the biggest struggles and bitterest polemics will rage over the factory councils, and control of production.

The Communist Party of Italy has a body of political doctrine on these questions, and an immense store of historical experience. The very discussion which is taking place today in the Russian Communist Party, on the functions of trade unions in the period of the proletarian dictatorship, shows how the problem of union organization does not cease to be actual or important simply because the working class has become the ruling class; simply because, in its struggle against the national and international bourgeoisie, it has far stronger battle organs at its disposal, such as the Red Army and the Extraordinary Commission to Combat Counter-revolution.¹² The trade-union question continues to remain a central question for the workers' state. The greater or lesser solidity of the general organization of revolutionary forces – and hence, in the last analysis, the solidarity of the revolution itself – may depend upon the solutions which the Communist Party gives to it.

The theses of the Second Congress of the IIIrd International represent the body of doctrines specific to our party. These theses state that in this historical period a new problem faces the proletariat, the problem of control; and they state that the natural and specific organs of the struggle for control are the factory councils. The councils represent the only possible form of organization of the industrial proletarian vanguard. They stand in the same relation to the unions as does big industry to the capitalist economy in general. Hence, the councils are those most interested in control and in the nationalization of industry. They organize the mass of workers employed in the big plants, in the capitalist formations which represent the transitional

phase between private property and communism, and it is they who most keenly feel the urgency of the historical thrust towards radical economic transformations. From the Marxist point of view, the factory councils are the new economic organization which presses at the flanks of the old organization, and which tends to break the latter's structures as it comes into being and develops.

The question of the councils interests the party at present not just as a new type of industrial organization, but also as a means of organizing the broad mass of workers directly creating a mechanism that can produce a new working-class leading stratum and train a new administrative personnel. Because they function as a selective mechanism in this way, the factory councils are especially disliked by the old union bureaucracy. Wherever the councils have emerged – in Italy, in Russia, in England, in the United States – the same phenomenon has occurred: in the councils, the working class always selects a predominantly revolutionary leading personnel, and supports the positions and the representatives of the Communist Party; by contrast, in the old union bodies, the positions and the representatives of reformism prevail. In October 1917 in Russia, the General Confederation of Labour was in the hands of the Mensheviks, the Central Executive Committee of the factory councils was in the hands of the Bolsheviks; the council organization provided the basis for the action of the Russian masses who followed Bolshevik slogans.

The factory councils must fuse with the unions, but the moment for this fusion cannot be fixed *a priori*. According to the theses of the Moscow congress, fusion must take place naturally, spontaneously, and the unions must base themselves firmly upon the councils, becoming the means for their centralization. A new type of trade organization will thus be created, specific to the period of the dictatorship and capable of fulfilling the tasks imposed by the needs of the workers' state. In Russia, the fusion of the unions with the factory councils took place about six months after the October Revolution. Today, after three years of the workers' state, there is a new discussion on whether the time has come to pay great attention once more to the councils, in order to prevent new forms of syndicalism and to combat the new bureaucratic sedimentations that have been forming for three years.

The Livorno congress makes it necessary for the Italian communists today to examine this question and study it deeply, so that communist sections and groups can carry out a really coordinated and centralized

overall activity. For the broad mass of Italians, the problem is an almost entirely new one. It is vitally urgent today to find a solution to it quickly; however, this must be done without sacrificing revolutionary precision or wisdom.

Unsigned, *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 5 March 1921.

8. ITALY AND SPAIN

What is fascism, observed on an international scale? It is the attempt to resolve the problems of production and exchange with machine-guns and pistol-shots. The productive forces were ruined and dissipated in the imperialist war: twenty million men in the flower of their youth and energies were killed; another twenty million were left invalids.¹³ The thousands upon thousands of bonds that united the various world markets were violently broken. The relations between city and countryside, between metropole and colonies, were overturned. The streams of emigration, which periodically re-established the balance between the excess population and the potential of the means of production in individual countries, were profoundly disturbed and no longer function normally. A unity and simultaneity of national crises was created, which precisely makes the general crisis acute and incurable. But there exists a stratum of the population in all countries – the petty and middle bourgeoisie – which thinks it can solve these gigantic problems with machine-guns and pistol-shots; and this stratum feeds fascism, provides fascism with its troops.

In Spain, the organization of the petty and middle bourgeoisie into armed groups occurred before it did in Italy; it had already begun in 1918 and 1919. The world war cast Spain into a terrible crisis before other countries: the Spanish capitalists had in fact already looted the country and sold all that was saleable in the first years of the conflagration. The Entente paid better than the poor Spanish consumers were able to do, so the owners sold all the wealth and goods which should have provided for the national population to the Entente. By 1916, Spain was already one of the richest European countries financially, but one of the poorest in goods and productive energies. The revolutionary movement surged forward; the unions organized almost the entirety of the industrial masses; strikes, lockouts, states of emergency, the dissolution of Chambers of Labour and peasant associations, massacres, street shootings, became the everyday stuff of political life. Anti-Bolshevik fasces (*somaten*) were formed. Initially, as in Italy, they were made up of military personnel, taken from the officers' clubs (*juntas*), but they swiftly enlarged their base until in