

The Soviets and The I. W. W.

By I. E. Ferguson

A NEW political form has seized upon the imagination of people everywhere as the highest expression of democracy. Not the democracy of phrases and abstract personal liberties, which vanish upon touch, but mass democracy—a democracy which reaches out in a conscious effort to bring ever widening circles of industrial and rural workers into the active administration and control of the national economy.

It seems a strange perversity that at this late day in the history of the proletarian revolution in Russia there are yet among us, in such radical organizations as the I. W. W. and the Socialist Labor Party, many who cannot transpose in their own minds the Dictatorship of the Proletariat as the outward expression of a real democracy of the working class. There is dictatorship in that there is exclusion from suffrage, exclusion of the exploiting groups which have up to this moment used the state power for the bourgeois class purposes, have used this power ruthlessly and brutally, even in the countries which make the greatest pretense out of the hollow forms of bourgeois democracy, as in the United States.

The proletarian revolution contrasts with the 18th century bourgeois revolutions in honesty. The bourgeois revolutionists, some with sinister cunning, others with generous zeal and glow of love of liberty, used the slogans of "liberty, fraternity, equality" as if these meant what they said. The masses responded, under the impulse of their oppressions, and in the faith of Reason and Liberty. Then came the black night of bourgeois rendering of blood and bone and soul into avid profit.

The proletarian revolution does not conceal its problems and difficulties—from whom shall it conceal, if it is in truth of the masses? Nor does it deal in hypocrisies with its enemies. It is the Socialist dealing in hypocrisies which finally brought the Socialist parties to the level of their own hypocrisies. The hypocrisies offered for bourgeois consumption converted themselves into the justification for working class betrayal.

Even the Liberals, with generous instincts and love of liberty in confusion with compelling upper class loyalty, nevertheless are swept off their feet by the honesty of the proletarian revolution. They are sickened of their own sham democracy, but the bonds of social caste hold them firm. At most they talk for the masses; they do not act with the masses.... The Liberals accept the marking off of the limits of proletarian democracy during the transitional revolutionary period, under the name dictatorship, as a welcome relief from the phrase-democracy which is nothing other than finance-dictatorship as against the whole people.

Not so the I. W. W., in its official literature. Not so the S. L. P. There are those who value phrases like their fellows cling to opiates.

The Soviets are a form in process of evolution. At the moment they are a blend, not without confusion, of the initial unit both in the Communist political control and of the Communist economic administration. As the reconstruction advances, the political functions diminish and the economic functions come to the forefront. Even now, with the Red Army fighting on some fifteen fronts, there is already a tremendous alteration of the national budget away from mili-

tary expenditure in favor of educational and economic expenditure. With the intervention out of the way, the Soviet government would already exhibit itself as almost entirely a communist administration of national economy. It goes without saying that such an administration for a great country like Russia, especially immediately following the world war destruction and the czaristic chaos, requires a span of years for adjustment in detail. But the actual achievements up to date, and the cementing of the confidence of a vast unenlightened people in the proletarian democracy, and the winning of the acquiescent tolerance of political minorities ranging from Anarchists to Liberals, and the drawing together with the industrial proletarians of the peasantry and large elements of the petty bourgeoisie—these testify to the high adaptability and democratic appeal of the Soviets in operation.

The official literature of the I. W. W. describe the Soviets as a makeshift substitute for industrial unions. An analysis of these I. W. W. writings shows that the root of the argument is nothing other than the anarchist conception of the proletarian revolution—that the revolution is the elimination of the state, as against the Communist conception that the revolution is the elimination of the private property system of exploitation, with the disappearance of the state as a necessary sequence of the passing of class exploitation.

Careful reading will show that the idea of the industrial union prepared in advance of the revolution for taking into itself all the functions of social reconstruction is not only a phantastical myth, not only an evasion of the obvious reality that the industrial union comes into life under capitalism as an immediate fighting weapon for better conditions of labor (and that this is its whole equipment as an industrial union), but also a mischievous boomerang against the revolutionary movement itself, since it leads to the negation of everything except the unions built according to this theory. The I. W. W. insists that it came into being in direct responsiveness to the life needs of the workers in the mines, in the forests, on the docks and in the shops. And so do all other unions come into being under like impulse. The difference is that the I. W. W. was built out of such elements and under such conditions of capitalistic exploitation that it took on a special character of desperate struggle, and that it required a kind of organization and methods of action which were in fundamental antagonism to the dominant trade unionism. Under like conditions of exploitation, and with the craft groups losing control as the unskilled and semi-skilled come to the front in unions such as those of the steel workers and the miners and the machinists and the longshoremen, the trend toward aggressive industrial unionism takes its way throughout the labor movement. This process is helped by the agitation and example of the pioneer I. W. W. But the I. W. W. becomes a perverse element in the labor movement when it loses sight of the realities which brought it into life and insists that it is its theory, not its example, which is of importance; when it insists that the whole revolutionary agitation in the United States can be nothing except one continuous hallelujah to the I. W. W.

The I. W. W. is capitalizing the sympathy which it has won by the capitalistic brutalities against it as an offensive against the Communist movement in this country. It goes to unbelievable extremes in its official denunciation of mass action and Dictatorship of the Proletariat, conceptions which are the essence of the world proletarian revolution now in full swing. It still makes attacks upon the Communist Party for advocating political action, even though the Communist Party puts overwhelming emphasis on industrial organization and action as the most effective means of political assertion by the workers of the United States today. Again it is the anarchist infusion which explains why these I. W. W. propagandists shun anything done in the name of political power, even though it is the politics of the revolution itself, not the Socialist politics of parliamentarism against which the Syndicalist movement was a protest. The Syndicalists set up the general strike in opposition to the indirect, futile, wheedling method of legislative reformism. The Left Wing Socialists accepted the challenge, and in the European countries, in Australia and in Canada there is the closest cooperation between the radical unionists and the revolutionary Socialists, who in almost all the countries now differentiate themselves as Communists.

This opposition of radical unionism to Communism and Sovietism is a distinctive American phenomenon. In other countries one cannot discover the line between the revolutionist within the union and the revolutionist as an advocate of Dictatorship of the Proletariat. The mass action conception, even more, has its practical exemplification in the activities of the Syndicalists.

The I. W. W., for the moment, lines up with the Scheidemann-Ebert-Kautsky regime against the Communist movement, the cardinal principle of which is: All power to the Soviets. All power to the special new organs of power, political and industrial, by which the working class makes itself the ruling class of society, using this power for dictatorial inroads upon the private property system of labor exploitation.

The I. W. W., for the moment, refuses to realize that the struggle for proletarian class power and the process of revolutionary reconstruction will determine new forms of organization and management, just as the struggles in the capitalist industries have produced unions of one kind and another. The I. W. W., for the moment, refuses to concede that Sovietism does not in the least negate the immediate importance of the industrial union movement in the class struggle; that Sovietism does not at all negate the potential usefulness of pre-revolutionary industrial unions as units within the general Soviet system.

In other words, there is nothing for the I. W. W. to surrender to the general revolutionary movement in the United States except an arrogant conceit, and failing this, the present official policy of the I. W. W. will result in a miserable betrayal of all the splendid courage and sacrifice that have gone into the making of I. W. W. history.

The Communist Party stands for a unity of revolutionary proletarian propaganda in the United States, a unity based on the Manifesto and Program of the Communist International.