

Communist Party and Soviet Institutions

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THE reasons which have brought to a standstill the further development of our revolution and forced it, without a battle, to commence a gradual recession from the already attained positions, are universally acknowledged to be: the intricacy of the international situation, the tardiness in the rise of the West-European revolution, the petty-bourgeois routine and manner of living of the majority of the population, the colossal economic breakdown, etc. This summary, however, lacks one factor which is exerting a negative influence upon the development of the Russian Revolution: **This is the conservatism of the Soviet organizations themselves,—a conservatism which is conditioned by the material (social) status of the numerous army of the Soviet employes as well as by the distinct psychology which is beginning to crystallize in consequence of their material position.**

To clarify this question let us approach it in a manner similar to that of a sociologist who undertakes to analyze the genesis and structure of one or another social group and to investigate its group interests and aspirations.

The November Revolution having destroyed the old governmental apparatus and having removed the officials connected with it, confronted the working class with the necessity of creating a new governmental machine adapted to the transformed social order. A wide field was opened for men of organizing capacity, and tens of thousands of people acquired the possibility of utilizing their talents and abilities in the Soviet institutions. Of what elements was recruited the vast army of Soviet employes who swarmed into various commissariats and commissions, departments and branches, bureaus and committees?—

Of course, first of all there is the category of the old much-tried party men; but if, however, we desire to be sober realists, we must recognize that only an insignificant number of them are so active and untiring as to think of the subsequent development of the revolution, of its extensions; the majority of the old party men, exhausted by the many years of emigrant wandering, the nerve-wrecking "underground" work and the life of the revolutionary fraught with dangers,—now after the triumph of the proletariat cling to their quiet and peaceful work for the Socialist reconstruction. This group is inclined to consider its place in the Soviet organization as a natural consummation and culmination of their hard preliminary work, and they involuntarily begin to regard with hostility and concealed fear every determined measure which endangers the tranquillity attained by them through such hard labor.

Still another element was anxious to work for the Soviet organizations, i. e. a certain semi-intellectual stratum possessing a limited education, which under the old regime had not much of a chance; but now, due the sabotage of the highly trained technical personnel, anybody with a smattering of scientific training and an elementary grasp of arithmetic and grammar suddenly became a valuable and necessary man.

These semi-intellectuals (clerks, scribes, petty officials, etc.) who under the old regime could not even think of a "career", at the present time, as a result of the November Revolution which created a tremendous demand for all sorts of technicians

and specialists, have "emerged into society"; they are on the whole (we do not speak of isolated "idealistic" individuals or groups) interested in conserving their privileged position; and this position is really a privileged one; a certain "weight" and respect in the eyes of people of their "circle", a fair salary, greater security in regard to victuals, a multiplicity of minor privileges—all these advantages combined induce the average Soviet employe to hold-on to his job and by no means dispose him toward revolutionary daring.

The army of Soviet employes comprises also that politically indifferent "public" which is ready to serve anybody, under any regime, and has now "wormed its way" into the Soviet institutions. Finally, we shall mention the mass of every kind of technicians and specialists who undoubtedly do not sympathize with the Soviets for which they consented to work only on the highest salaries, so great is the need of the new republic in trained men.

This group is evidently the most reactionary; only the spur of an income (and not seldom the dollar-hunting impulse) impels the members of this group to give their knowledge and experience to the working class. The mere existence of the Soviets frightens them, and they are only willing to put up with them, provided the Soviet will be rebuilt and adapted to the middlemen and become acceptable for the broad sections of the bourgeois democracy. Because the dominant power attributes importance to this group, appreciates it, therefore this group is able to exert a pressure from within upon the policy of the Soviets, tending in a conservative and even reactionary direction.

Such is the composition of that new social group which is designated as the personnel of the Soviet employes. In view of the limited culture and backwardness of Russia and lack of intellectual elements, the personnel could not be other: the general background is made up of partly tired and partly altogether unreliable groups, while small knots and nuclei of active and tireless workers represent the exception.

From our analysis it follows that the personnel of the Soviet employes, being largely interested in the preservation of its privileged position and its purely professional interests, is prone to assert itself as a **conservative** social group; hence the distrustfulness towards the working classes, the desire to isolate itself from them, to barricade itself, **the disposition to get away from party control**, (against which the provincial party papers vehemently protest), its fear of perturbations, the insufficient attention to the wants of the workers, the disposition to compromise, the desire to adapt the terrifying Soviet power to the middle-class, the official red-tape, etc.

We are far from the assertion that the Soviet personnel has already been converted into a new-style bureaucracy, as hopelessly detached from the masses as happened, for instance, with the higher-up elements of the German trade-unions,—but doubtless there is such a tendency in evidence. Certainly, this does not depend upon the evil-will of

separate individuals, or upon the idiosyncrasy of the Russian Revolution: such a danger threatens every revolution, because the capitalist class has taken all measures to sap in the bud the independent action of the masses and to habituate them to the thought that the management of the government must be carried on apart from them and be left to the care of especially trained men. At any rate, we must see to it that the November Revolution shall not be utilized for the aggrandizement of a comparatively small group, and for that there is but one means: the participation of the broad masses in the political work, the facilitation and the strengthening of the control by the workers over the personnel which is called upon to attend to their needs, the abolition of the privileges enjoyed by the political workers.

Finally, the Party itself, being considerably better safeguarded against disintegration, must extend its control over the Soviet factions and must make all the political workers accountable and responsible to the Party.

It was more than once pointed out that the power of the Soviet of Workers' and Peasants' Delegates is the highest achievement of our revolution. This is, of course, correct, but we should not forget that the Communist Party is always and everywhere superior to the Soviets. And this is entirely comprehensible: only the Party functions as the defender of the interests of the world-proletariat, of the international working class; while the Soviets are the representatives of the labor democracy in general, and its interests particular interests of the petty-bourgeois peasantry, do not always coincide with the interests of the proletariat.

The Left Communists are the most determined adherents of the Soviet power, but of course only to the extent to which the Soviet power follows a strictly proletarian line of action and does not permit itself to be diverted, under the influence of conditions referred to in the beginning of the article, in the direction of petty-bourgeois politics.

Our comrades are apt to charge that we introduce disorganization into the well-ordered work of the Soviets, that we are enemies of the Soviets "from the left". Such a view is indicative of a lack of understanding. A real thoroughgoing dictatorship of the proletariat, a no-compromise policy, a renunciation of all opportunistic measures—such are the demands of the left Communists.

We do not deny that the pursuance of a strictly proletarian course in the foreign and internal policy is fraught with terrific dangers, involving perhaps a temporary downfall, but we presume that in the interests of the world-proletarian movement it is preferable to fall under the onslaught of external enemies, but to fall as a truly proletarian power, rather than to save our existence through bargaining with conditions, by means of a repudiation of the principles of Communism and the "rebirth" of the Soviet power which will be converted into an empty shell, a "form" of proletarian Soviets with an entirely unproletarian content. This second course spells the disintegration, the decay of the Soviet power, the disappointment of the working masses of Russia and Western Europe.