

# THE RIGHT MOMENT FOR SOVIETS

## Foreword

The following thesis on the formation of Workers Councils or Soviets as presented by Comrade Zinoviev to the Second Congress of the Third International on behalf of the Executive Committee illustrates with clear-cut logic the fundamental unanimity of principle between the Communist Party of America and the parent organization in Moscow. Our position on the role of Workers' Councils or Soviets before, during and after the proletarian revolution, adopted at the second convention is strictly in line with the program of the Communist Congress.

The tendency to form Workers' Councils in America and elsewhere—as mentioned in the thesis—before the period of direct struggle for state power—before a "revolutionary situation" develops—is calculated to throw the whole revolutionary movement into confusion. The radical elements of the I. W. W. and the former C. L. P. have been largely instrumental in fostering these premature attempts in this country. The U. C. P. program on Shop Committees and Industrial Councils is also committed to the premature organization of Workers' Councils.

To those comrades who felt that the tentative program of the Communist Party on Shop Committees did not answer the immediate purpose, we would advise a re-reading and comparison of the Shop Committee Programs of the Communist Party and the United Communist Party in the light of the following thesis.

Editor, Communist

## THE RIGHT MOMENT FOR THE SOVIET BY U. ZINOVIEV

(Carried at the Moscow Conference of the Third International.)

1. Councils (Soviets) of Workers' Deputies appeared for the first time in Russia in 1905, at a moment when the revolutionary movement of the Russian workers was at its height. Already, in 1905, the Petrograd Council of Workers' Deputies was taking the first instinctive steps towards a seizure of power. And at that time the Petrograd Soviet was strong only in so far as it had a chance of acquiring political power. As soon as the imperial counter-revolution rallied its forces and the labor movement weakened, the Soviet, after a short period of stagnation, ceased to exist.

2. When, in 1916, at the beginning of a new strong revolutionary wave, the idea began to awaken in Russia of the immediate organization of Councils of Workers' Deputies, the Bolshevik Party warned the workers against the immediate formation of Soviets, and pointed out that it would be well-timed only at the

moment when the revolution was already beginning, and when the time had come for the direct struggle for power.

3. At the beginning of the February revolution of 1917, when the Councils of Workers' Deputies were at once transformed into Councils of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, they drew into the sphere of their influence the widest circles of the masses, and at once acquired a tremendous authority, because the real force was on their side, in their hands. But when the liberal bourgeoisie recovered from the suddenness of the first revolutionary blows, and when the social-traitors, the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks, helped the Russian bourgeoisie to take the power into its hands, the importance of the Soviets began to decline. Only after the July days, and after the failure of Kerensky's counter-revolutionary campaign, when the widest masses of the people began to move, and when the collapse of the counter-revolutionary bourgeois coalition Government was quite near did the Soviets begin to flourish again, and they soon acquired a decisive importance in the country.

4. The history of the German and the Austrian revolutions shows the same. When the popular masses revolted, when the revolutionary waves rose so high that it washed away the strongholds of the Hohenzollern and the Hapsburg monarchies in Germany and in Austria the Councils of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies sprang up with gigantic rapidity. At first the real force was on their side, and the Soviets were well on the way to become the sole factor of power. But as soon as, owing to a whole series of historical conditions, the power began to pass to the bourgeoisie and the counter-revolutionary Social Democrats, swiftly the Soviet began to decline and lose all importance. During the days of the unsuccessful counter-revolutionary revolt of Kapp-Lüttich in Germany, the Soviets again resumed their activity, but when the struggle ended again in the victory of the bourgeoisie and the social-traitors, the Soviets, which had just begun to lift their head again, once more died away.

5. The above facts show that, for the formation of Soviets, certain definite preconditions are necessary. To organize Councils of Workers' Deputies, and to transform them into Councils of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, the presence of three definite conditions is necessary:

(a) A great revolutionary impulse among the widest circles of the workmen and work-women, the soldiers, and the workers in general.

(b) An acute political and economic crisis, attaining such a degree that the power begins to slip out of the hands of the Government.

(c) When in the ranks of considerable masses of the workers, and first of all in the ranks of the Communist Party, a serious decision is begun a final, systematic, and regular struggle for power has matured.

6. In the absence of these conditions the Communists may and should systematically and persistently propagate the idea of Soviets, popularize it among the masses, demonstrate to the widest circles of the population that the Soviets are the only efficient form of government during the transition to complete Communism. But to proceed to the direct organization of Soviets, in the absence of the above three conditions, is impossible.

7. The attempt of the social-traitors in Germany to emancipate the Soviets, pervert their character, and then introduce them into the general bourgeois-democratic constitutional system, is treason against the workers' cause and deception of the workers. Real Soviets are possible only as a form of State organization, replacing the bourgeois democracy, breaking it up, and replacing it by the dictatorship of the proletariat.

8. The propaganda of the Right Wing leaders of the Independents (Hilferding, Kautsky, and others) intended to prove the compatibility of the "Soviet system" with the bourgeois Constituent Assembly, is either a complete failure to comprehend the laws of development of a proletarian revolution, or a conscious deceiving of the working class. The Soviets are the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Constituent Assembly is the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. To unite and reconcile the dictatorship of the workers with the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie is impossible.

9. The attempts of separate Communist groups in France, Italy, America, England to form Soviets not embracing the larger working masses, and unable therefore to enter into a direct struggle for power, are only prejudicial to the actual preparation of a Soviet revolution. Such artificial, hollow "Soviets" soon become transformed, at best, into small associations for propaganda of the Soviet idea, and, in the worst case, such anemic "Soviets" are capable only of comprehending the Soviet idea in the eyes of the wide masses of the people.

10. Soviets without a revolution are impossible. Soviets without a proletarian revolution inevitably become a parody of Soviets. The authentic mass Soviets are the historically elaborated form of the dictatorship of the proletariat. All sincere and serious partisans of Soviet power should deal cautiously with the Soviet idea, and, while indefatigably propagating it amongst the masses, should proceed to the direct realization of such Soviets only under the conditions indicated above.

## Communist International Appeal to the C. E. C. of the Communist Party AND THE COMMUNIST LABOR PARTY ON UNITY.

Dear Comrades,

From reports of comrades representing both groups of the Communist Movement in America, who have arrived from the United States, it was made possible for the Executive Committee of the Communist International to learn the differences in the ranks of the American comrades—differences that led to an open split and to the formation of two Communist parties.

The matter has been discussed at a full meeting of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, at which, in addition to the members of the Executive Committee, there were also present representatives of the Communist organizations of France, Sweden, Hungary, Finland and South Slavonia. The Executive Committee of the Communist International came to the following conclusion:

The split brings much harm to the revolutionary movement in America. It will lead to the division of the revolutionary forces, to harmful duplication and unnecessary friction and unjustifiable waste of energy on internal struggles. And this is going on when the concentration of the forces of the American bourgeoisie has reached an unheard of height, when in view of the onward sweeping world revolution the American working class has before it the greatest possibilities and the brightest hopes.

A close study of the documents from both sides has convinced us that there are no serious differences in the programs of the two parties. There are certain differences on the question of organization. There was some disagreement on the question of how to break with the social-patriotic party. But that is all. This does not even in the smallest degree justify a split and it must by all means be liquidated. As long as the two parties stand on the platform of the Communist International and we have no reason to doubt that this is the case—unity is not only possible, but absolutely necessary. The Executive Committee categorically insists on its immediate realization.

The necessity for immediate unity is dictated also by the fact that the two parties represent, so to say, different sides of the Communist Movement in America, which could well supplement each other, in one party (C. P. A.) are mainly the language elements, united in so-called "national federations". The other party (C. L. P.) represents mainly the American or English speaking elements. In the first are on the one hand, often better trained theoretically and are more closely connected with the traditions of the revolutionary struggle

of the working class of Russia, they are, on the other hand, much less connected with the mass movement and the mass organizations of the American workers, who are gradually entering the broad road of the class struggle.

If the elements of the C. L. P. have not as yet gone through a similar theoretical school, they have the tremendous advantage that through them the party can most easily exert its influence on the great masses of the actual American workers who, in the coming decisive class battles will play the most important part.

On one hand propaganda is best developed; on the other agitation.

Thus the two parties naturally supplement each other and only by bringing them together will it be possible to create a strong Communist party in America, which is to become the leader of the mass movement and the approaching Communist revolution.

For the purpose of bringing about unity in the shortest possible time, the Executive Committee of the Communist International recommends that the two parties immediately call a joint convention, the decisions of which shall be binding for both parties. For the purpose of calling this convention as well as for the purpose of coordinating the work of the two parties until the convention, a bureau consisting of an equal number of representatives must be created. As a basis for unity the principles laid down in the platform of the Communist International and the decisions of the Executive Committee of the Communist International must be taken.

In addition to this the Executive Committee desires to point out the following:

1) The Communist Party must strive at the earliest moment to unite within its ranks all the elements that recognize the necessity of conquering power and establishing the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. It is self-evident that this recognition must be one of action and not purely theoretical and in words. It must bind every one who desires to be a party member to the unlimited struggle for the overthrow of the power of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of the power of the working class. If this condition is fulfilled and an agreement reached on the main and fundamental points, differences of opinion on other questions, such as the questions of the use of parliamentary and other legal means, about using this or that method of struggle, about various forms of organization, etc., are not important.

Such differences of opinion are unavoidable in the countries where it is necessary to

build a Communist Party of elements having different political origins (Left Wing Socialists who have severed their connection with the old parties; non-partisans who have accepted the principle of the increasing class struggle; anarchist and syndicalist, who recognize the necessity of the seizure of power and the establishment of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, etc.) To split on account of these differences, differences that are now, in the period of immediate revolutionary struggle for power only of secondary importance, is absolutely not to be allowed. The one thing the party must demand from each organization and from each individual member in case of a division of opinion, is absolute discipline, unconditional obedience to the rule of the majority. A thorough discussion of questions before they are finally acted upon by the party is necessary and free criticism should be allowed. But after the party has accepted a certain decision, all the party members, including those who disagree with it, must, without fail, get in accordance with that decision. The greatest freedom to those who think differently during the time of discussion on one hand, and, on the other, the strictest discipline in bringing the party decision into life these are the elementary conditions without which the creation of a strong party of proletarian revolution is impossible.

2) A full break with the old Socialist parties (S. P. and S. L. P.) is the self-evident condition for the creation of a Communist Party in America. This condition does not mean, however, that the Communist Party cannot accept individual comrades as well as whole organizations that previously belonged to these parties, who have decisively accepted the point of view of the organized class struggle and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. The Communist Party must be a mass organization and not a narrow, closed circle. "Separation" from non-Communist elements must be understood as keeping away from actual social-traitors and from the "centrist" elements of the old parties, but by no means in the sense of repulsing former members of the old parties who have severed all connections with them.

The doors of the Communist Party must be wide open to the proletarians, who, although not having a knowledge of all the details of Communist theory, are true to the cause of the proletarian revolution and who are actually involved in the struggle against the domination of the bourgeoisie. The Communist Party will serve them as the best school of Communism.