

WORKERS' CONTROL

'DIRECT ACTION'
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SYNDICALIST WORKERS' FEDERATION

BRITISH SECTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL
WORKING MEN'S ASSOCIATION

AIMS AND PRINCIPLES

THE SYNDICALIST WORKERS' FEDERATION seeks to establish a free society, which will render impossible the growth of a privileged class and the exploitation of man by man. The SWF therefore advocates common ownership and workers' control of the land, industry and all means of production and distribution on the basis of voluntary co-operation. In such a society, the wage system, finance and money shall be abolished and goods produced and distributed not for profit, but according to human needs.

THE STATE The State in all its forms, embodying authority and privilege, is the enemy of the workers and cannot exist in a free, classless society. The SWF does not therefore hope to use the State to achieve a free society; it does not seek to obtain seats in the Cabinet or in Parliament. It aims at the abolition of the State. It actively opposes all war and militarism.

CLASS STRUGGLE The interests of the working class and those of the ruling class are directly opposed. The SWF is based on the inevitable day-to-day struggle of the workers against those who own and control the means of production and distribution, and will continue that struggle until common ownership and workers' control are achieved.

DIRECT ACTION Victory in the fight against class domination can be achieved only by the direct action and solidarity of the workers themselves. The SWF rejects all Parliamentary and similar activity as deflecting the workers from the class struggle into paths of class collaboration.

ORGANISATION To achieve a free, classless society the workers must organise. They must replace the hundreds of craft and general trade unions by syndicalist industrial unions. As an immediate step to that end, the SWF aids the formation of workers' committees in all factories, mines, offices, shipyards, mills and other places of work and their development into syndicates, federated into an all-national Federation of Labour. Such syndicates will be under direct rank-and-file control, with all delegates subject to immediate recall.

INTERNATIONALISM The SWF, as a section of the International Working Men's Association, stands firm for international working class solidarity.

A. S. Ruben

STATE BOSSES

WE still live in a society in which the worker is robbed of most of the fruits of his labour. Under capitalism this cannot be otherwise, for its mainspring is the profit motive, with its inescapable division of society into—if not the haves and the have-nots—at least into those who have much and those who have little. It is clear to all but the blind that this condition prevails also in the so-called Communist societies, where in theory everything is administered by the State on behalf of the people equally, but in practice there are even greater inequalities than in most capitalist countries.

The differences between the two forms of economy are, indeed, superficial: in the one in which State capitalism masquerades as Communism, production and distribution are controlled by a few handfuls of political leaders and State officials; in the other, they are controlled partly by private capitalists, but more and more by politicians and bureaucrats. In neither case have the workers any effective say in the running—or rewards—of industry. Nor will they have until they cast aside the sham substitutes for industrial democracy with which the ruling classes have for long bemused them, and establish Workers' Control.

Unfortunately, those who consider themselves the leaders of the working classes—the Labour politicians and trade union bosses—are foremost among its betrayers. When the Labour Party came to power in 1945, it seemed to millions of ordinary men and women as if a new and juster age had dawned—an age in which class and privilege would be abolished. Yet their six years of supremacy left the capitalist structure of society, with its attendant economic and emotional insecurity for the individual worker, basically unaltered.

Nationalisation was then the great cure-all, as it remains today for very many, despite the fact that in nationalised industries like the railways the workers are shamelessly expected to accept *lower* wages for *longer* hours in *worse* conditions than workers in private industry. When they kick against such flagrant injustice by striking, or threatening to strike, they are exhorted to consider the welfare of the whole community, just as in the Corporate States of Spain and Portugal, modelled on Italy under the Fascists. The appointment of bold trade union knights to the boards of nationalised industries, with the sinister lesson of the use of troops by the Labour Government to break the great dock strike of 1945—not to mention that of the impotence of the trade unions in those countries where nearly all industry is nationalised,

the "communist" States—show clearly that *the State is the most dangerous of all bosses.*

Other ersatz Socialists have, of course, abandoned their faith in nationalisation and now champion the purchase by the State of shares in private industry. A more cynical alliance of State and capitalism is difficult to imagine. This is marrying the devil with a vengeance!

One can feel confident that bogus partnerships on the John Lewis model, or every-worker-a-capitalist profit-sharing schemes like that of I.C.I., will be seen for what they are by intelligent workers. But the lure of nationalisation remains strong, with such fatuous modifications as the Communist Party's call for the election of trade union representatives to the boards of nationalised industries—presumably to hob-nob with the upstart knights. This would be about as effective in making industrial democracy a reality as the joint labour-management boards in some private firms.

THE OLD INEQUALITY

The reason for the persistence of the demand for nationalisation is simple: the illusion remains that nationalisation is a step towards Workers' Control. Yet how far it is from the noble vision of those great British pioneers of the idea of Workers' Control and, incidentally, of the trade union movement!

The men who founded the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union in 1834 were largely inspired by Robert Owen's ideas for co-operatives—not the phoney consumer co-operatives of the present day, but equalitarian communities of workers, who would unite their labour and share its fruits. The ultimate aim of the Grand National was the taking over by the workers of all means of production and distribution. And how far nationalisation is from the Syndicalist ideas with which such militants as Tom Mann, Jim Larkin and Jim Connolly fired the whole trade union movement in the years before and during the first world war.

It is high time for workers who really believe in Workers' Control of industry to realise that, far from being a step towards it, nationalisation is a leap in the opposite direction! It is high time for those Socialists who really wish to see capitalism abolished to realise that *Socialism has, and can have, nothing to do with the State.* State Socialism and the Welfare State are nothing but the old inequality, the old servitude, under a new name.

Under it the age-old division of society into rulers and ruled, masters and men, remains the same, as Communist Russia so tragically

shows. What boots it to change one's masters? Yet this is *all* that nationalisation—ownership by the State—means. Workers' Control can have nothing to do with the State, for the two ideas are in conflict: they are incompatible.

The State is concerned with State control, with control by politicians and bureaucrats. It cannot be concerned with Workers' Control, which is as much a denial of the usefulness of the State as it is of capitalism. A moment's reflection on this obvious incompatibility is enough to dispel the absurd pretensions of the Communists to have established Workers' Control in Yugoslavia through the setting up of officially-sponsored workers' councils, even if all the available evidence did not discredit them.

On the other hand, genuine Socialism and Workers' Control are inseparable. It is impossible to imagine one without the other. Thus, any step towards Workers' Control would be a step towards Socialism.

But the smallest step in this direction necessarily involves repudiating the official leaders of the trade unions, for they have a stake in the cosy *status quo*. To put it bluntly, they have become part of the ruling class. Whenever workers on the job use their own initiative in disputes with the management, whenever they resort to spontaneous direct action, they are undermining the powers and privileges of the constitutionalists, whose jobs rest on workers depending on them to sort things out—so often to the detriment of the workers' interests.

UNOFFICIAL ACTION

This explains their dread of unofficial strikes. They frequently spend far more effort in arguing with the men than with the bosses, and whenever their men get out of control and "disgrace" them by acting unconstitutionally, the touching sight is seen of constitutionalists and capitalists weeping on each other's shoulders. In concert with the capitalist Press, unofficial strikes are almost invariably dubbed Communist-inspired by the constitutionalists, no matter how serious the grievances of the workers concerned may be. This gives the Communists undue credit, as if they alone had the guts to fight for their rights.

The constitutionalists, like those who are said to be more royalist than the King, might be said to be more constitutionalist than the Lord Chief Justice. They are more concerned with "honouring" agreements forced on the workers by pressure of circumstances "freely entered into," as they always have it) than with championing the rights of those

they are supposed to represent. They would rather break the trade union movement than the Constitution, and the very thought of a political strike makes them turn pale with horror—as if politics do not vitally affect the interests of the workers, *including* the size of their wage-packets! Like Walter Reuther, boss of America's United Automobile Workers' Union, they are not concerned with abolishing capitalism, but with making it work.

The constant challenge to their privileged position also explains the frequency and virulence of their attacks on shop stewards, for shop stewards are delegates, rather than representatives. They do not operate on such an Olympian plane, and, because they have to meet those who elected them face to face every day and are more easily got rid of, they are less inclined to ignore their wishes in favour of constitutional burlblings. Since they are elected by the men on the job from among their own number, instead of being salaried office-holders, they represent a tendency in direct contradiction to the generally centralised, authoritarian character of trade unionism—a tendency of decentralisation, of solidarity, of direct action; a tendency, in fact, towards Workers' Control.

But the natural feelings of solidarity of the workers in all industries are not only deliberately sabotaged by the constitutionalists, who, wishing to be the fount of all action (if any), encourage other unionists to scab when unofficial strikes take place. A notable example of this was the refusal of trade union leaders to declare "black" petrol supplied by troops, during the 1953 strike of tanker lorry drivers. Rank and file action is undermined by the whole crazy structure of the trade union movement.

HOUSE DIVIDED

Orthodox trade unionism is a house divided against itself, for the unions are not designed to co-operate, but to compete. Often they indulge in really cut-throat competition with one another, like a pack of sweat-thirsty capitalists—for fields in which to organise, as with dockers' and transport workers' unions, and for particular jobs and the maintenance of differentials, as with the craft unions.

Even when, as in the London bus strike of 1958, the trade union movement as a whole is strongly sympathetic to the strikers, no effective solidarity is shown by unions not directly involved. During the bus strike, not even the railway and Underground workers serving London were called on for sympathetic action, even though their continuance of normal working amounted to strike-breaking. In such

cases the deep sympathy of the Wise Men of the T.U.C. is clearly demonstrated by their anxious appeals for restraint.

Nor can it be otherwise while unions are organised on a craft or hotchpotch, instead of an industrial, basis which would give strength and unity at the place of work, an indispensable pre-requisite for solidarity throughout the whole movement. As for the aims of the trade unions, most have no goal than the never-ending squalid scramble for a few crumbs from the rich man's table.

CONTROL FROM BELOW

WORKERS' CONTROL of industry would apply a revolutionary principle to society—organisation and control from below upwards. Present society is, and all previous societies have been, organised and controlled from the top downwards. Slave, feudal and capitalist societies handed down power, direction and privilege from stage to stage, until it disappeared before the masses, slaves, serfs or wage workers.

Present society is no exception to this rule. It is true that in some countries, such as Britain, a measure of parliamentary democracy exists, with the people having the opportunity, every four or five years, of choosing from two or more candidates to a lower chamber. But even this Hobson's Choice does not affect the House of Lords, the monarchy, the judiciary and the armed forces, the blood and sinews of class rule.

Still less does it apply to industry, where effective ownership is usually in the hands of a small group of shareholders (sometimes only one), who appoint their managers, who in turn appoint their under-managers and so on down the stairs to the foreman and the straw boss.

Nationalisation or State Socialism does nothing to abolish or lessen this principle. Indeed, under State control the principle first developed by slave society becomes intensified, bigger, the apex more remote, more rigid and more tyrannical.

All political parties uphold this principle—Tory and Liberal, Labour and Communist, Fascist and Nationalist. Are we, then, to wonder that democratic principles wither and die in the parties of the State, or that the leaders of the so-called democratic parties constantly look with sneaking admiration at the totalitarian parties, Fascist or Communism?

Syndicalism alone reverses the principle, aspiring to a society which is controlled from below, by all its members. That, like a great gulf, divides us from the political parties.

However, it must not be supposed that we have invented a new principle. Such principles come from certain human relations and are not invented. Nor do we urge something new and original, for the principle of control from below upwards was known in ancient society. Before the coming of slavery, when men were free and equal and all had free access to the means of production, as in hunting communities, society was so organised.

The best, though not the only work, demonstrating this truth is Lewis Morgan's *Ancient Society*, which was known and approved by Marx and Engels, and even by Lenin, whatever the motive of their voiced admiration.

Of course, some lunatic will accuse us of seeking to reintroduce the society of the early German tribes or the North American Indians. We only point to the social principle, one which existed for hundreds of thousands of years, and not to the technical means of production. Just as slavery can exist in atomic laboratories and about the ancient pyramids, so freedom may live among hunters or among engineers.

PAYING THE PIPER

It is hard to turn men's minds to the idea of a new society, though men often welcome new names for old ideas, but society does change, nevertheless. Chattel slavery must have seemed eternal to the slave, as well as his master. We have enormous written evidence of medieval man's attitude to feudalism. Except in its dying stages, man believed that the existing social relations were eternal.

Today, the politicians, like feudal lords and Hindu priests, tell us that present social relations are for all time. Only the names and details may change. For ever must society be governed from the top.

The chief argument against Workers' Control, usually advanced by some brand of Socialist politician, is that the workers have no sense of responsibility. One might think that this trait could not exist in any human being, but only among supermen. Of course, all human vices and virtues may exist in any number of human beings in any class—generosity and greed, feeling or callousness, sense or dullness, love or hatred. The truth is that certain kinds of persons tend to rise or fall where there is some movement allowed among the social ranks and

certain human attributes tend to develop, perish or be repressed in different social circumstances.

Certainly the modern wage worker, no less than the chattel slave of old, is deliberately discouraged from developing a sense of responsibility for anything beyond the strict limits of his job. Nor do the parties usurping the name of Labour or Communist depart from this practice. The old saw, "the boss knows best," becomes "Whitehall knows best," or "the party or Moscow knows best."

Not only is the inquisitive worker told to mind his own business, but the creation of the "Welfare State" would almost seem to be designed to force him into a condition of social apathy. It seems the modern party deems it essential to success to have a massive give-away programme, definite and indefinite. But while the 19th century politicians were accused of buying their votes, they at least bought them with their own money. The modern politician buys his votes with the fruits of taxation. Naturally, nothing is said of increased taxation at an election, but much of the State benefits which will fall, presumably, like manna from heaven.

To confer these benefits on the electors, however, heavy taxation must be levied and money which the worker might use to house himself, care for himself in sickness, by personal or mutual aid, and to provide for his old age is snatched away from him by his "benefactors."

Long before the birth of the "Welfare State," intellectuals said: "Why should the worker save for his old age, sickness or any other eventuality? Let us have a part of his wages and we shall take from his shoulders this responsibility and spend it for him, for we know better than he."

Yet social responsibility is there, however discouraged, needing only the stimulus of social difficulty to arouse it. How often in London one witnesses the gallant efforts of workers to fulfil their social duty, despite dense and poisonous fog, delivering newspapers, milk and food, running public transport, keeping alive the arteries of a great city, straining far beyond the line of duty.

BY THEIR OWN WILL

The air-raids on London revealed a working class with a far higher sense of social responsibility than their rulers. The code of conduct framed by the Government and its "experts" and backed by heavy penalties, was shattered by the first bombs.

In the first weeks of aerial bombardment, amid fire and high explosive, the workers of London refused to obey orders to stay in the

shelters and themselves fought fires and organised fire-watching in their streets. By their own will they worked during raids and alarms, delivering milk, baking bread, running buses, maintaining gas, electricity and water supplies, keeping open and supplied the shops and markets, keeping alive the great city which Acts of Parliament ordered to close down at the first siren sound.

Even without the dramatic backcloth of war, in the daily ritual of work most workers show a job responsibility which is greater than their wage price. Often the greater responsibility pays the lower wage. Workers, like other persons, have a sense of human solidarity and are happiest when that sense is allowed expression.

But aspiration needs opportunity and form. The opportunity must be given by the socialisation of the means of production. Syndicalism gives the form.

In the revolutionary syndicate, organised to fight in the class war, to defend wages and shorten the working day, is the embryo of the future society. A working-class organisation should be so formed and so live that it pictures the future society. A democratic society does not spring from dictatorship, or a classless society from a middle-class dominated party. Sow weeds and you gather not wheat; plant thistles and you pluck no figs.

The Syndicalist method of union organisation is based on industry — a union for miners, one for builders, another for railmen and so on. The industrial union is based on the job: the miners at their pit, the weavers at their mill. The jobs are federated to their district union; the district union to the national. All unions are federated on a national level in a general federation of labour.

So much for vertical organisation. Horizontally, all unions are federated in town or local bodies and, if necessary, in district federations.

BOSSES LOCKED OUT

Such federations give the workers the best chance of success in strikes, being more efficient than the old idea of the craft unions-cum-political party, as most of our trade and Socialist critics admit. But such syndicates, based always on federal and delegate principles and always controlled from below, provide a rudimentary organisation for taking control of industry.

The factory workers, already organised in their factory, are more aware of their problems and nearer a solution than are the civil servant

or professor, who may never have been in their county, much less their factory.

Of course, a factory cannot solve its own problems, any more than a person can solve his alone, but the factory unit is already in living relationship with its neighbours through the district federation.

In line with this Syndicalist method of organisation is its ultimate strike method, the general, stay-in strike. Instead of leaving the factories, workers strike by staying in them and reverse the old employers' method by themselves locking out the boss.

Following Syndicalist propaganda, the stay-in strike has been tried in a local or limited way on several successful occasions. These include Italy, 1920; the French stay-in strike of 1936, which won a big wage increase, holidays with pay and a 40-hour week; the very successful stay-in strike of the American automobile workers in 1937; and several lesser occasions.

But the Syndicalist aim is, of course, not to return the factories to the employers in return for a wage increase, or to limit the action to one district or industry, but to build up the action until it becomes general, the Social General Strike, and to retain control by the permanent lock-out.

INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY

Once having locked out the employing class, the workers must face the task, not only of producing, but also of directing their own efforts. Now we hear the ancient slave-owner propaganda of defeatism, to so instil in the minds of the slaves, by constant repetition, the idea that they cannot succeed against or without their masters. So that, in fact, they will fall down at the very sight of Rome. In modern times the chief priests of defeatism are the Socialists and Communists.

Without the owners, the shareholders, how would we know what to do? In fact, most workers do not know who their employers are. Anonymous shareholders, absentee coupon-clippers, banks and money-lenders, how could we walk without their guidance? Or the experts of Whitehall? Why, even the Labour Party now prefers private capitalism to nationalisation!

The direction of industry by Government is direction by amateurs. A tailor's cutter or a fox-hunting squire may be made Minister of Mines, or a miner put in charge of the Post Office, then a few weeks later put in charge of shipping.

A Member of Parliament will speak and vote on all manner of technical problems he does not understand, his voting being binding on

the industry he may not know—farming, building, engineering, chemistry, the lot. In his own constituency he may represent scores of major industrial groupings without necessarily understanding any one of them.

Workers' Control of industry is true democracy, industrial democracy as the basis of freedom and co-operation in all other spheres. The workers in the factory, mill or mine meet as metal workers, weavers or miners, decide the general direction of their common affairs and elect—always with the right of recall—their factory committee of delegates. The job of the meeting and committee is to run, in association with other similar concerns, the factory in which they work, controlling all things which are particular to that factory.

Here will operate the principle of control from below. Electing a committee, each will have to decide whom he considers the best workman, the man with the greatest knowledge of the job, the person best able to aid the co-ordination of factory activities.

But in the present system of control from above, does a man seek to pick out for promotion a man better than himself? Does a foreman choose as charge-hand a man who will be his formidable rival for office, or a manager promote a foreman better than himself, so that his own job may be endangered? Our opponents who shout about "human nature" should study the habits of the promotion-seeking animal.

As to the question of getting agreement among workers in a factory on a work problem, people disagree most about those things of which they know least. Men have killed one another disputing the nature of angels or the topography of heaven. It has been known that one Communist has, literally, tried to strangle another Communist, while disputing the details of "collective" farms, about which neither had information and would never have a sight.

NO MASTER PLAN

But as to the things about us, our daily work, it is surprisingly easy to get agreement. In any case theories are soon proved right or wrong. Indeed, workers of different nations working on one job can, without even knowing one another's languages, easily agree. Obvious cases are port and engineering workers and seamen.

From the factory would go delegates to the district industrial council of the industry, which would deal with affairs common to that area, as, for example, the Durham District Miners' Council or the Birmingham Engineers' Council. From the districts would go delegates

to a national council of each industry and, from each industrial national council, delegates to the General Economic Council of Labour.

Of course, other forms of liaison will be needed in industry, but the Syndicalist idea, unlike political or religious creeds, can be flexibly used without being destroyed. An engineering factory or district can co-operate with a steel mill or a section of a transport syndicate or a power station, in any manner which occasion demands.

Some industries, will have special needs to co-operate directly with other industries, as coal mining with railways and shipping. This can be done quite easily, without breaking through any "grand plan."

HOW IT WORKS

RAISE the question of Workers' Control in your trade union branch and someone is sure to object: "It sounds all very nice in theory, but it isn't practical. The workers are not capable of controlling their own jobs, let alone industry as a whole."

Socialists and Communists join in the same cry, conveniently ignoring the fact that whenever Workers' Control has been applied on anything more than a purely local scale, it has worked—and worked well. We can find many examples of this success in the international working-class movement since the first world war.

The early Soviets in the Russian Revolution (1917); the Italian engineering workers' occupation of the factories (1920); the social revolution with which the Spanish workers answered the military-Fascist insurrection in 1936; the workers' council movement in the Hungarian uprising of 1956; and the agricultural collectives (*Kibbutzim*) in Israel today, are all examples of this deep-rooted revolt against both private capitalism and nationalisation.

In each of these countries, workers have asserted their dignity as human beings and their right and ability to control directly the means whereby they live. And in each case the result—temporary though outside causes may have made its duration—has shown that Workers' Control is no Utopian dream, but the highly efficient basis for a free and truly Socialist society.

The Soviet principle in the Russian Revolution of 1917 was essentially in sympathy with Syndicalism. These Soviets, or committees, were freely-elected organs of expression and administration for the Russian revolutionary workers, peasants and soldiers. They were in

direct opposition to the idea of party organisation and government and to the dictatorial aims of the Bolsheviks.

Owing to the lack of a widespread Syndicalist movement in Russia—the first number of the Petrograd Syndicalist paper *Goloss Trouda* ("The Voice of Labour") appeared only August 11, 1917, six months after the revolution had begun—the free Soviet movement was a ready target for the politicians of the left-wing parties and more particularly for the power-hungry Bolsheviks, led by Lenin and Trotsky.

It is significant that these men, particularly Lenin, disguised their real goal—the conquest of political power—with libertarian slogans during the revolutionary period. They never intended that the Soviets, in which the Russian workers and peasants found active expression for their struggle towards Workers' Control, should survive within the framework of the Bolshevik State they themselves aimed to create.

Voline, who returned from political exile to Russia in 1917 and played a prominent part in the Anarcho-Syndicalist movement in Petrograd (now Leningrad) and the Ukraine during the revolutionary period, describes the bitter struggles between the two opposed conceptions, Bolshevik and Libertarian, in his book *The Unknown Revolution*.

BOLSHEVIK BARRIER

One incident happened at the end of 1917. Some workers from the Nobel petroleum works came to the headquarters of the Anarcho-Syndicalist Union in Petrograd, seeking advice. Their factory, with some 4,000 workers, had been deserted by the old employers. After many meetings and discussions, the workers had decided to run the factory themselves. They asked the Bolshevik government for help and were told that nothing could be done, since it was impossible to obtain either raw materials, fuel, orders, transport or the necessary funds. Some 90 per cent of industry was in a similar situation, said the Commissariat of Working People, but the government would deal with the matter shortly.

The factory committee prepared to undertake production without government support, seeking the means for this by their own initiative. They were warned that the factory would be closed if they persisted—a threat that angered the hungry workers.

Voline was delegated by his organisation to address a mass meeting at this factory, which was also attended by members of the central government. On receiving the assurance of the workers that they had themselves prepared everything—fuel, rolling stock, raw materials and

orders—in collaboration with the railway workers, Voline advised them to start production.

Chliapnikoff, the government spokesman, made it clear that if the workers did take over, all would be sacked and their "leaders" could expect no mercy. He warned the Syndicalists that the Bolshevik authorities were preparing repressive measures against them.

This incident, far from being isolated, was typical of thousands throughout Russia. The revolutionary upsurge and initiative of ordinary workers constantly came into sharp conflict with the rigid refusal of the Bolshevik to permit anything contrary to authoritarian, centralised State control.

The fact remains that, during the early years of the revolution, before it was possible to enforce this stranglehold, Workers' Control was widespread and successful.

The same picture presented itself three years later in Italy. In reply to a lock-out by the engineering employers, the workers seized possession of the factories, threw up barbed wire entanglements, armed themselves—with the help of workers in the armament industry—**AND CONTINUED PRODUCTION.**

Journalist George Selde reported: ". . . day by day more and more factories were being occupied by the workers. Soon 500,000 'strikers' were at work building automobiles, steamships, forging tools, manufacturing a thousand useful things, but there was not a shop or factory owned there to boss them or to dictate letters in the vacant offices. Peace reigned."

The movement lasted for several months. It was a complete success. Unfortunately, Syndicalist influence was not strong enough to convince the workers that they could hold on to the factories indefinitely and push the movement to a complete social revolution throughout Italy, for which the situation was undoubtedly ripe. But the workers were NOT thrown out of the factories by the Fascists as Socialist "historians" sometimes claim. They voluntarily handed them back to their old capitalist owners, on the promise of wage increases.

During their occupation, however, the Syndicalist-operated factories throughout industrialised Northern Italy had shown the ability of the workers to run affairs themselves.

REVOLUTION IN SPAIN

It was in another Mediterranean country, Spain, that Workers' Control reached its widest application. This came as the natural result of years of patient propaganda and preparation by the Spanish

Anarcho-Syndicalist movement, the National Confederation of Labour (CNT).

During 1936 it became obvious to the Spanish capitalist class, the landowners and the military caste that a social revolution could not be long delayed in that country. Bitter strikes were widespread, clashes between police and workers frequent, and the land-hunger of the dispossessed peasantry was crying for satisfaction. It was to prevent such a working-class revolution taking place that the Spanish generals, led by Franco, staged their military *coup d'état* in July of that year.

The action of the CNT workers prevented the immediate success of this Fascist insurrection. Faced with the indecision of a weak Republican government, the workers seized whatever arms they could, formed militias and fought back, defeating the generals in the greater part of the country.

Immediately, throughout loyalist Spain, workers began taking over the factories, mills, mines and transport systems and placing them under their own, direct control.

The extent and depth of this movement has never been appreciated by the working class of other countries, who have been deliberately misled by Socialist half-truths and Communist lies. Tribute to it was surprisingly paid in, of all unlikely places, the House of Commons on March 6, 1958, when Labour M.P. Fenner Brockway, who spent some time in Spain during the revolution, said:

"The philosophy of the CNT is the Anarcho-Syndicalist philosophy. . . . I had the good fortune to visit some of these CNT fishing towns, where the whole population lived in equality and where the catch was divided equally among them. Except in Israel, I doubt very much whether there are any communities in the world which express the spirit of co-operation and of equality in the same manner as did these villages I saw in Spain."

The railway system in Catalonia was taken over by the workers on July 21, 1936, and their control rapidly spread throughout the rest of the country. It was exercised on the basis of station committees, composed of six delegates, which in turn were represented on a national rail transport council.

MUTUAL AID

Telephone communications were another example of speedy working-class action. The four exchanges in Barcelona were taken over immediately, the Fascists in that city had been vanquished. Nearly three-quarters of the telephone installations had been damaged during

the fighting. But, within a few days, all were repaired by the maintenance engineers, new lines had been laid to blood banks, union headquarters, etc. And the exchanges were controlled by the workers.

Similarly with all other industries. Useless bureaucracy and high salaries were eliminated. Industry, for the first time, functioned for the benefit of the community, not for the profit of shareholders.

One small example was the bakeries of Barcelona. Before the revolution, the city was served by 745 of these, many working with antiquated ovens in insanitary conditions. Under Workers' Control all was changed . . . the syndicates eliminated wastage, modernised working conditions and plant, producing better bread at a lower cost.

The same principle was applied to agriculture. Encouraged by the propaganda of the CNT Agricultural Federation, the peasants seized the big farms and estates, which had been abandoned by Fascist-supporting landowners, and worked them on a collective basis of mutual aid. This voluntary collectivisation found its widest expression in the region of Aragon, where enormous progress in productive techniques of farming was made by the revolutionary peasantry.

It should be stressed that this movement, like that of the Ukrainian peasants (*Makhnovichina*) during the Russian Revolution, had nothing in common with State collectivisation. Indeed, where the regional Government of Catalonia published its "Decree of Collectivisation" on October 24, 1936, it was only setting a reluctant seal of legality to social changes which were already an accomplished fact.

EFFECTIVE ANSWER

Remember, too, that the situation in Spain during the three years of civil war was hardly calculated to help the workers in their constructive efforts. On the one hand, the primary concern was the military struggle against the united forces of European Fascism, helped by the sea and air blockade of the "Non-Interventionist" Powers, including Britain. On the other, the Spanish Communist Party, which gained power and prestige through its control of Russian-supplied armaments (paid for in gold!) bitterly opposed the socialisation of industry and agriculture by the workers of the CNT, whose membership had risen to near one and a half million.

Despite these handicaps, however, the Spanish Revolution effectively answered those in doubt the ability of rank-and-file industrial workers to operate and control their own jobs in the interest of society. Its lessons have never been studied or understood by British workers,

still tied to the outdated wage-bargaining machinery and bureaucracy of orthodox trades unionism.

Examples of Workers' Control in operation can be found in the post-war period, too. Experience of harsh Bolshevik dictatorship, the bitter reality of State Socialism in practice, has fostered and developed the ideas of industrial democracy among the workers of the East European Satellite States, particularly Hungary and Poland.

Obviously these ideas can find no open expression while the party dictatorship persists in these countries, but their widespread existence was shown during the Hungarian Workers' Revolution of October, 1956.

The organisational expression of this revolution was found in the workers' councils, which sprang up all over Hungary. Irresistibly the movement swept towards Workers' Control. Factories, transport, health services and mines were directly and democratically operated by those who worked in them.

On October 27, Radio-Kossuth, which was a voice of the insurrectionary workers, announced that the National Association of Trade Unions had decided that, henceforward, the factories would be run by the workers' councils, thus assuring control of industry by the people. Information from all over the country, said the radio station, showed the formation of these factory committees to be universal.

ISRAELI EXAMPLE

A month later, on November 24th, the daily paper *Nezakarat* proclaimed: "The workers' councils, born of the revolution, have as their mission the realisation of democracy in the true sense of the word: the direct management of enterprises belonging to the people."

For the Hungarian Revolution was not merely a revolt against the tyranny of one-party dictatorship: it found its positive expression in the demand for a new form of society, based on social responsibility and free co-operation. It showed that the principles of Syndicalism, far from being—as Marxists hopefully claim—fossils from the dead past of the workers' movement, have still a living, vital role to play.

Another application of Workers' Control is in the agricultural collectives of present day Israel, the *Kibbutzim*. These communities, however, are not all of recent date. Many of them go back to the years after the first world war, when they were founded by immigrant Jews from Eastern Europe, particularly Russia and Poland, who brought with them the social ideal of a free communist society.

Marxists have consistently derided the *Kibbutzim* as "back-garden Socialism," idealistic Utopias which could not possibly survive. As is not unusual, they were wrong. Today the *Kibbutz* movement has revolutionised the economy of this tiny Middle East country. The use of modern farming techniques has transformed arid deserts into arable land.

Equally important, however, this has been done through the principle of voluntary collectivisation and Workers' Control. There is no uniformity in the internal administration and day-to-day management of the Israeli communities, but most are organised on the basis that members contribute their labour power to the common pool and live on a basis of social equality. Decisions of policy are taken by general assemblies of all members and those who handle the administrative work are elected and mandated by such meetings. In many of the settlements, money is not used internally—as was the case in some of the Spanish collectives—and is kept only for necessary contact with the outside world.

In fact, the *Kibbutzim* present the strange paradox of a libertarian society within a capitalist State. This is a unique phenomenon, to be explained only by the heterodox collection of social ideas which make up the Zionist movement, and we do not believe such duality can be repeated in other capitalist countries. The scope of the Israeli collectives is obviously limited by the economy within which they operate.

Workers' Control, as we have earlier pointed out, signals a NEW form of society, in which the employer-worker relationship of capitalism will be a relic of the slavish past. It heralds the end of the wage-system treadmill on which the world's workers have laboured far too long.

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How Labour Governed—1945-1951	SWF pamphlet	6d
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