

Letter on Workers Councils
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- 1952

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I would like to make some critical and complementary remarks about Comrade Kondor's observations on "Bourgeois or Socialist Organisation" in the issue of "Funken" for December 1951. When firstly he criticises the present-day role of the trade unions (and parties), he is completely right. With the changes in the economic structure the function of the different social structures must also change. The trade unions were and are indispensable as organs of struggle for the working-class under private capitalism. Under monopoly and state-capitalism, towards which capitalism increasingly develops, they turn into a part of the ruling bureaucratic apparatus, which has to integrate the working class into the whole. As organisations maintained and developed by the workers themselves they are better than any apparatus of compulsion for installing the working class as a section within the social structure as smoothly as possible. In today's transitional period this new character comes to the fore ever more strongly. This realisation shows that it would be wasted effort to repair the old relationship. But at the same time it can be used to give the workers greater freedom in choosing the forms of struggle against capitalism.

The development towards state-capitalism - often propagated under the name Socialism in Western Europe - does not mean the liberation of the working class but greater servitude. What the working class strives for in its struggle, liberty and security, to be master of its own life, is only possible through control of the means of production. State socialism is not control of the means of production by the workers, but control by the organs of the state. If it is democratic at the same time, this means that workers themselves may select their masters. By contrast direct control of production by workers means that the employees direct the enterprises and construct the higher and central organisations from below. This is what is called the system of workers councils. The author is thus perfectly correct when he emphasises this as the new and future principle of organisation of the working class. Organised autonomy of the productive masses stands in sharp contrast to the organisation from above in state socialism. But one must keep the following in mind. "Workers' councils" do not designate a form of organization whose lines are fixed once and for all, and which only requires a subsequent elaboration of the details. It means a principle - the principle of the workers' self-management of enterprises and of production.

This principle can in no way be implemented by a theoretical discussion about the best practical forms it should take. It concerns a practical struggle against the apparatus of capitalist domination. In our day, the slogan of "workers' councils," does not mean assembling fraternally to work in co-operation; it means class struggle - in which fraternity plays its part - it means revolutionary action by the masses against state power. Revolutions cannot, of course, be summoned up at will; they arise spontaneously in moments of crisis, when the situation becomes intolerable. They occur only if this sense of the intolerable lives in the masses, and if at the same time there exists a certain generally accepted consciousness of what ought to be done. It is at this level that propaganda and public discussion play their part. And these actions cannot secure a lasting success unless large sections of the working class have a clear understanding of the nature and goal of their struggle. Hence the necessity for making workers councils a theme for discussion.

So, the idea of workers councils does not involve a program of practical objectives to be realized - either tomorrow or in a few years -, it serves solely as a guide for the long and heavy fight for freedom, which still lies ahead for the working class. Marx once put it in these words : the hour of

capitalism has sounded; however he left no doubt about the fact that this hour would mean an entire historical epoch.
