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## *Syndicalism and Leninism*

Most of the contributions to the recent Bulletin of the Melbourne Centre for Workers' Control are searching for the essence of some abstract "workers'-control-as-a-concept", but what we have got to do is carry on the debate in the context of workers' control as it is actually being promoted in the Australian workers' movement today.

The Communist League is so concerned to thrash out a definition of workers' control pleasing to everybody that to this end they think it is important that the Workers' Control Movement be centralised. The point is: What do we want to make of workers' control? Where do we want it to lead?

Most of the contributors pretend to have some idea of what to do now but have no real strategy to lead to revolution. The final contribution in the Bulletin, by the Spartacist League, shows that workers' control can only be useful as a slogan when it is part of a Transitional Programme leading from today's conditions to proletarian revolution -- a workers' state.

### THE POINT OF PRODUCTION

The Link collective sees some of the ways in which workers' control can lead to only a kind of workers' participation in management, and it understands the importance that the factory committee consciously "counterposes itself to management as an alternative power." But other dangers they do not see. For Link, workers' control is strictly limited to the factory level: "...workers' control means the struggle to overthrow the capitalist relations (and organisation) of production... There is a qualitative difference between workers' control as a slogan, and the other moments of a revolutionary movement; precisely because the demand is centered around the worker at work (at the point of production) [the parenthetical remark is in the original], not at home or in the community." Outside the workers' control movement lies the "socialist movement" where theory is discussed, and the "total counter-hegemonic movement" where other sections of society struggle to escape from bourgeois ideology.

This economist-syndicalist view of the struggle against "capitalist relations (and organisation) of production" fails to understand that this struggle can only be successful through a total social revolution including the shattering of the existing state and the building of new proletarian-based organs for the protection of the revolution. Unless workers' control is developed as part of a strategy for the attainment of working class revolutionary hegemony over all the oppressed in society then it must inevitably either become part of the capitalist system or alternatively achieve its very highest expression in an intense period of many isolated factory seizures and general strikes, making it impossible for capitalism to operate smoothly, yet unable to smash it. This paves the way for fascism which grows out of frustration with proletarian turbulence in the absence of a strong alternative to the existing organisation of society, that is, in the absence of a revolutionary vanguard party of the working class. Such fascism is based on the growing armies of unemployed and the discontented middle classes. Having no strategy for building a workers' state, the most revolutionary path of syndicalism leads the proletariat to the door of revolution -- then splatters the proletariat against it.

As Gramsci notes in his discussion of economism-syndicalism in *The Modern Prince*, this deviation derives from a simplistic view that the ideological superstructure is directly reflective of the economic base. Thus Link sees all the exploited as being of about the same class consciousness, as being more or less homogenous, although fragmented, isolated in different worksites

and subject to the "individualising" effects of the bourgeoisie. Their own central task is merely to link-up (horizontally, as it were) the particular consciousnesses of the class at its existing level, to communicate between factories in each district, to urge workers to talk about their oppression, and to explain that workers are exploited as a class.

In fact, the consciousness of the working class is mediated through a vast structure of ideological institutions which in essential matters is only indirectly moved by economic factors. The consciousness of the working class is of a great number of different levels, and particularly the leaderships and activists of the existing political and trade union organisations express a far higher concern over social issues than do individual rank-and-file members of the class. The working class is molded and led by the more advanced consciousness of its activists, who are the crystallised expression of reformist consciousness and tend to see themselves as expressing a general class interest. It is essential to the contradictory nature of the organisations that they both express the consciousness of the class and to a considerable degree organise, centralise and link-up the muted actions and consciousness of those sections of the class, and on the other hand limit and deform that consciousness. The main directing institution of the existing consciousness of the class is the Australian Labor Party, which is certainly incapable of sustained defence of even the most basic interests of the class, let alone of leading to a revolution.

#### ALTERNATIVE LEADERSHIP

There are of course also isolated shop-floor elements of consciousness and action which run counter to the influence of the Labor Party and the other mechanisms working in the interests of the bourgeoisie, but these are capable of only a small degree of centralisation by such simple and direct horizontal machinery as that of Link. This is why Link finds it necessary to confine itself to a small area ("we have defined the bounds of communication" as being among the "metal workers living in the Eastern suburbs" of Melbourne). What is needed is not the horizontal linking-up of the working class's consciousness at its present level, but the assembling of the working class in a party built from the top down in political struggle against all agencies of false consciousness in the workers' movement. The nucleus of the alternative leadership, and the scientific Marxist consciousness it embodies, will develop in this struggle through the most conscious layers of the working class on a Transitional Programme which transcends the day-to-day consciousness, transforming it into revolutionary consciousness. A scientific understanding of the entire system of social relations is much deeper than simply a sense of exploitation in the production process.

So, although Link's main operational proposal, the building of shop committees, is good, unless these are used consciously as an instrument for making revolution they lead nowhere. No matter how strong each shop committee is, without revolution each factory remains bound within the capitalist economy, the private ownership of production, and the forces of bourgeois law and order. Furthermore, the demands proposed by Link including the right to fire and the right to elect foremen, makes it clear that whatever they might say, Link's plans could in fact make these committees organs for the better management of capitalism.

Factory committees and workers' councils are highly important -- they are nothing less than the 'embryonic institutions of the future workers' state -- but the struggle to bring them forth on the national scale and to actually achieve that workers' state through the expropriation of the bourgeoisie and its state cannot be confined, as Link would like, to organisation at the point of production -- let alone to small geographical areas or occupational groups within the class. This must be a political struggle within and against the existing institutions of the working class.

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