

Lying for Leninism

An analysis of G. Zinoviev's letter to the I.W.W.

Anarcho

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In January 1920, G. ZINOVIEV, President of the Central Executive Committee of the Third International, sent a letter to the **Industrial Workers of the World**. It appeared in a 1920 issue of *One Big Union Monthly*, a regular publication of the IWW that appeared up until about World War 2.

It is an interesting document. Given what Zinoviev wrote in the letter and the actual conditions that existed in Russia at the time, we can safely say that Stalinism did not invent doublethink or systematic lying as a political principle. As we will prove, the arguments and descriptions of Zinoviev amount to little more than a deliberate distortion. In plain words, lies pure and simple.

It may be argued that Zinoviev lied because of the dire situation the Russian Revolution was facing. By lying, he helped ensure that the revolution was not defeated by gaining supporters for it in America and elsewhere. However, such a position fails to understand the power of truth nor the corrupting influence of lies. As the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci once wrote, “*to tell the truth is a communist and revolutionary act.*” A **real** social revolution cannot base itself on lies as those taking part in it must be in a position to understand it, criticise it and make the appropriate decisions to push it forwards. If only a few have the truth, only they will have meaningful power. Clearly, by systematically lying in his letter, Zinoviev showed that Bolshevism and Soviet Russia were not communist nor revolutionary. By lying Zinoviev did not defend the revolution, he betrayed its spirit just as the Bolsheviks had betrayed its promise.

It may be argued that this critique is based on hindsight. Perhaps, but the facts we document here were known at the time. As Kropotkin argued (in his “*Letter to the Workers of Western Europe*”) one year before Zinoviev wrote his letter to the I.W.W.:

*“the Russian revolution ... is trying to reach ... economic equality ... this effort has been made in Russia under a strongly centralised party dictatorship ... this effort to build a communist republic on the basis of a strongly centralised state communism under the iron law of a party dictatorship is bound to end in failure. We are learning to know in Russia how **not** to introduce communism.”* [Kropotkin’s **Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 254]

Clearly, Kropotkin and other anarchists **at the time** were well aware of the failures of the Bolshevik experiment, failures Zinoviev fails to mention in his letter. As such, this analysis has strong similarities with the work of anarchists in Russia at the time. Given that their critique was a product of their experiences during the revolution, it cannot be said that my analysis is purely the benefit of hindsight.

I shall present an anarchist analysis of Zinoviev’s comments. His words are indented while mines are not. In addition, I will concentrate on the divergence between Zinoviev’s rhetoric and the reality of the Bolshevik Russia. His analysis of the class struggle in the USA at the time will not be discussed.

The Communist International to the I.W.W. An Appeal of the Executive Committee of the Third International at Moscow

COMRADES AND FELLOW WORKERS:

Now is no time to talk of “building the new society within the shell of the old.” The old society is cracking its shell. The workers must establish the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, which alone can build the new society.

An article in the ONE BIG UNION MONTHLY, your official organ, asks, “Why should we follow the Bolsheviks?” According to the writer, all that the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia has done is “to give the Russian people the vote.”

This is, of course, untrue. The Bolshevik Revolution has taken the factories, mills, mines, land and financial institutions out of the hands of the capitalists, and **transferred them to the WHOLE WORKING CLASS.**

This is, of course, untrue for two reasons.

Firstly, the Bolsheviks may have given the Russian people the vote, but they ensured that it counted for nothing. The Bolsheviks centralised power into the hands of the Council of People’s Commissars, effectively reducing the soviets to bodies carrying out the orders flowing from the top. Moreover, they also systematically disbanded, by force, soviets which had non-Bolshevik majorities elected to them. Needless to say, marginalising and disbanding soviets hardly equals giving the working class a meaningful vote. The Bolsheviks may have claimed to be in favour of soviet democracy and power, but their actions proved otherwise.

Secondly, the Bolsheviks did take “the factories, mills, mines, land and financial institutions out of the hands of the capitalists” but they were not “transferred” into the hands of the working class. Rather they were transferred into the hands of the state and run by state appointed managers. The working class did not manage or control the means of life, others did. As such ownership was purely formal and hid the continued wage slavery of the workers by judicial forms. Ultimately, ownership is a juridical concept. What matters is whether workers manage their own work. If they do not, then they are still alienated from both the means of production and the product of their labour. The Bolsheviks had not changed the social relationships within society, just who was telling the working class what to do. The net effect of nationalising the means of life simply meant different bosses for the workers. The Bolsheviks claimed to be creating socialism but their actions proved otherwise.

Alexander Berkman provides an excellent overview of what had happened in Russia after the October Revolution:

“The elective system was abolished, first in the army and navy, then in the industries. The Soviets of peasants and workers were castrated and turned into obedient Communist Committees, with the dreaded sword of the Cheka [political para-military police] ever hanging over them. The labour unions governmentalised, their proper activities suppressed, they were turned into mere transmitters of the orders of the State. Universal military service, coupled with the death penalty for conscientious objectors; enforced labour, with a vast officialdom for the apprehension and punishment of ‘deserters’; agrarian

and industrial conscription of the peasantry; military Communism in the cities and the system of requisitioning in the country ... ; the suppression of workers' protests by the military; the crushing of peasant dissatisfaction with an iron hand..." [**The Russian Tragedy**, p. 27]

The aim of this analysis is to show the realities of Bolshevik rule, as summarised by Berkman, and the rhetoric of the Bolsheviks, as summarised by Zinoviev. In the analysis that follows I will prove that the two do not meet. Zinoviev was a leading member of the Communist Party who took an active part in the Russian Revolution, Civil War and party meetings. There is no way his letter could have been a product of ignorance and so we have an example of the systematic lying usually associated with Stalinism.

Before continuing, it is useful to indicate some of the hidden meaning behind Bolshevik terminology. Once you understand that certain expressions are mere euphemisms then Bolshevik rhetoric becomes easier to decode and understand.

The key to understanding Zinoviev's claims is to understand that for Bolshevism there exists a great confusion between working class power and party power. For example, Lenin argued in 1921 that "[t]o go so far in this matter as to draw a contrast in general between the dictatorship of the masses and the dictatorship of the leaders, is ridiculously absurd and stupid." He stressed that "[t]he very presentation of the question — 'dictatorship of the Party or dictatorship of the class, dictatorship (Party) of the leaders or dictatorship (Party) of the masses?' — is evidence of the most incredible and hopeless confusion of mind ... [because] classes are usually ... led by political parties..." [**Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder**, p. 27 and pp. 25–6] If the Bolshevik party is in power then the working class rules and so the "dictatorship of the proletariat" and the "dictatorship of the party" are effectively the same thing. Needless to say, they are not. If the party holds power then the working class does not. If the party dictates then it dictates to the working class.

This confusion of party power with working class power explains Zinoviev's claim that the Bolsheviks had transferred the means of production to the "WHOLE WORKING CLASS." If we take the term "WHOLE WORKING CLASS" as a euphemism for the state, then his words are correct. The Bolsheviks had expropriated the capitalist class by means of nationalisation. This simply replaced the capitalist class with the state, leaving the working class in exactly the same position as before. Instead of being wage slaves to a capitalist, they had become wage slaves to the state.

We understand, and share with you, your disgust for the principles and tactics of the "yellow" Socialist politicians, who, all over the world, have discredited the very name of Socialism. Our aim is the same as yours — A COMMONWEALTH WITHOUT STATE, WITHOUT GOVERNMENT, WITHOUT CLASSES, IN WHICH THE WORKERS SHALL ADMINISTER THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION FOR THE COMMON BENEFIT OF ALL.

And yet these aims are to be pursued using means that are directly opposite to them. The state, government and classes are to be used to abolish state, government and classes. Workers shall administer production and distribution, but first they are to be dispossessed of such activity and placed under one-man management. Classes will be abolished, but first the proletariat must remain the proletariat and have no control over their work or workplaces. The state will be

abolished, but first it is necessary to strengthen it, create an army, police and secret police (the Cheka) separate from the mass of people (and in direct opposition to Lenin's claims in **State and Revolution**). Government must end, but first it must be turned into the dictatorship of a party and become the most centralised the world has ever seen.

Indeed, Trotsky (in 1920) brought this nonsense to its height in his infamous work **Terrorism and Communism**:

“Both economic and political compulsion are only forms of the expression of the dictatorship of the working class in two closely connected regions ... under Socialism there will not exist the apparatus of compulsion itself, namely, the State: for it will have melted away entirely into a producing and consuming commune. None the less, the road to Socialism lies through a period of the highest possible intensification of the principle of the State ... Just as a lamp, before going out, shoots up in a brilliant flame, so the State, before disappearing, assumes the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e., the most ruthless form of State, which embraces the life of the citizens authoritatively in every direction... No organisation except the army has ever controlled man with such severe compulsion as does the State organisation of the working class in the most difficult period of transition. It is just for this reason that we speak of the militarisation of labour.”

So, in order to ensure free labour under communism, the working class must be subjected to the militarisation of labour. To ensure that the state disappears, we must increase its power, scope and size. Yet we are to believe that this militarisation of life and labour will have no effect on those subject to it nor those who impose it. And supporters of Bolshevism call anarchists utopians and idealists!

Ends are not independent of means, just as the end of a journey is dependent on the path taken. You cannot end up in Paris if you follow the signs leading to Rome. This means that how a socialist society would look like and work is not independent of the means used to create it. In other words, a socialist society will reflect the social struggle which preceded it and the ideas which existed within that struggle as modified by the practical needs of any given situation. If the means are authoritarian, the ends will also be so. If the means deny freedom and working class autonomy, then so will the ends.

Thus, if the end is a society of free and equal individuals co-operating to manage their affairs then the means cannot be in contradiction to them. If they are, if the means are based on inequality, authoritarianism and hierarchy then the ends will also be marked by inequality, authoritarianism and hierarchy.

This means that if the ends are specified as **“A COMMONWEALTH WITHOUT STATE, WITHOUT GOVERNMENT, WITHOUT CLASSES, IN WHICH THE WORKERS SHALL ADMINISTER THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION FOR THE COMMON BENEFIT OF ALL”** then the means must reflect these goals. Thus the revolution must be marked by organisations organised in a libertarian way which will allow working people to manage their affairs directly, without need for government or appointed managers. Instead of centralising power at the top of the social pyramid, as the Bolsheviks did, power must be decentralised back the hands of the working class and their organisations. This means that workers' self-management of production must be encouraged, working class autonomy, freedom and

democracy protected and encouraged and working class administration of society formalised. This is what the Bolsheviks failed to do. As Samuel Farber notes, “*there is no evidence indicating that Lenin or any of the mainstream Bolshevik leaders lamented the loss of workers’ control or of democracy in the soviets, or at least referred to these losses as a retreat, as Lenin declared with the replacement of War Communism by NEP in 1921.*” [Before Stalinism, p. 44]

This argument does not mean that anarchists think that we can jump straight from capitalism to a fully developed socialist society. Of course the capitalist class will resist and so a revolution will have to defend itself. As Bakunin argued:

*“the federative alliance of all working men’s associations ... constitute the Commune ... all provinces, communes and associations ... by first **reorganising** on revolutionary lines ... [will] constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... [and] organise a revolutionary force capable defeating reaction ... [and for] self-defence ... [The] revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation...”* [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 170–2]

However, if you seek a society without government, classes and state then it can only be achieved by self-management and organisation from below upwards. The experience of Bolshevism shows the clear linkage between means and ends.

We address this letter to you, fellow-workers of the I.W.W., in recognition of your long and heroic services in the class war, of which you may have borne the brunt in your own country, so that you may clearly understand our Communist principles and program.

We appeal to you, as revolutionaries, to rally to the Communist International, born in the dawn of the World Social Revolution.

However, without presenting an accurate picture of the realities of the Russian Revolution, of how Bolshevik “*principles and program*” had been applied in practice, any such understanding will hardly be clear. Essentially Zinoviev is asking us to judge Bolshevism by what it says about itself, not what it actually does. In this, they differ sharply from Marx who had argued that we must judge people by what they do, not by what they say.

If we do judge the Bolsheviks by what they did, not by what they said, then it quickly becomes clear that real revolutionaries cannot help but reject the “principles and program” of Communism.

We call you to take the place to which your courage and revolutionary experience entitles you, in the front ranks of the proletarian Red Army fighting under the banner of Communism.

Ironically, the example of the so-called proletarian Red Army presents us with a clear example of what is meant by the “*banner of Communism.*” Let us quote the founder of this “proletarian” Red Army, Trotsky, on its nature. Writing in 1922, he argued that:

“There was and could be no question of controlling troops by means of elected committees and commanders who were subordinate to these committees and might be replaced at any moment ... [The old army] had carried out a social revolution within itself, casting aside the commanders from the landlord and bourgeois classes and establishing organs of revolutionary self-government, in the shape of the Soviets of Soldiers’ Deputies. These organisational and political measures were correct and necessary from the standpoint of breaking up the old army. But a new army capable of fighting could certainly not grow directly out of them ... The attempt made to apply our old organisational methods to the building of a Red Army threatened to undermine it from the very outset ... the system of election could in no way secure competent, suitable and authoritative commanders for the revolutionary army. The Red Army was built from above, in accordance with the principles of the dictatorship of the working class. Commanders were selected and tested by the organs of the Soviet power and the Communist Party. Election of commanders by the units themselves — which were politically ill-educated, being composed of recently mobilised young peasants — would inevitably have been transformed into a game of chance, and would often, in fact, have created favourable circumstances for the machinations of various intriguers and adventurers. Similarly, the revolutionary army, as an army for action and not as an arena of propaganda, was incompatible with a regime of elected committees, which in fact could not but destroy all centralised control.” [The Path of the Red Army]

Trotsky admits that the *“Red Army was built from above, in accordance with the principles of the dictatorship of the working class.”* Which means, to state the obvious, appointment from above, the dismantling of self-government, and so on are *“in accordance with the principles”* of Bolshevism. These comments were not made in the heat of the civil war, but afterward during peacetime. Notice Trotsky admits that a *“social revolution”* had swept through the Tsarist army. His actions, he also admits, reversed that revolution and replaced its organs of *“self-government”* with ones identical to the old regime. When that happens it is usually called by its true name, namely **counter**-revolution.

This just one example of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” destroying democracy exercised by the working masses and replacing their democratic organisations with appointees from above.

The rationale behind this attack on working class democracy is significant and worth discussing. It was used again and again by the Bolsheviks to eliminate the gains of the revolution (for example, workers’ self-management of production). Trotsky provided this rationale on March 28th, 1918, when he gave a report to the Moscow City Conference of the Communist Party. In this report he stated that *“the principle of election is politically purposeless and technically inexpedient, and it has been, in practice, abolished by decree”* and that the Bolsheviks *“fac[ed] the task of creating a regular Army.”* Why the change? Simply because *“political power is in the hands of the same working class from whose ranks the Army is recruited.”* Of course, power was actually held by the Bolshevik party, not the working class, but never fear:

“Once we have established the Soviet regime, that is a system under which the government is headed by persons who have been directly elected by the Soviets of Workers’, Peasants’ and Soldiers’ Deputies, there can be no antagonism between the government and the mass of the workers, just as there is no antagonism between the administration

of the union and the general assembly of its members, and, therefore, there cannot be any grounds for fearing the appointment of members of the commanding staff by the organs of the Soviet Power.” [Work, Discipline, Order]

Of course, most workers’ are well aware that the administration of a trade union usually works against them during periods of struggle. Indeed, so are most Trotskyists as they often denounce the betrayals by that administration. Thus Trotsky’s own analogy indicates the fallacy of his argument. Elected officials do not necessarily reflect the interests of those who elected them. That is why anarchists have always supported delegation rather than representation combined with decentralisation, strict accountability and the power of instant recall. In a highly centralised system (as created by the Bolsheviks and as exists in most social democratic trade unions) the ability to recall an administration is difficult as it requires the agreement of all the people. Thus there are quite a few grounds for fearing the appointment of commanders by the government — no matter which party makes it up.

Trotsky repeated this rationale when he argued in favour of militarisation of labour and one-man management. As he put it, *“[i]t would be the most crying error to confuse the question as to the supremacy of the proletariat with the question of boards of workers at the head of factories. The dictatorship of the proletariat is expressed in the abolition of private property in the means of production, in the supremacy over the whole soviet mechanism of the collective will of the workers and not at all in the form in which individual enterprises are administered.” [Terrorism and Communism]* However, without economic power at the point of production, without workers’ self-management, working class political power would be weak. If capitalist economic relations existed in production, then how could socialist political forms exist? They cannot not and they did not. Trotsky’s *“collective will of the workers”* is simply a euphemism for the Party. In the same work he argued that *“it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party”* and that there is *“no substitution at all”* when the *“power of the party”* replaces the *“power of the working class.”* The party, he stressed, *“has afforded to the Soviets the possibility of becoming transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour.”* How labour could express this *“supremacy”* when it could not even vote for its delegates (never mind manage society) is never explained.

It could be argued that this *“substitution”* only came about due to the terrible circumstances of the Civil War. This is not the case. Trotsky’s counter-revolution in the Red Army occurred **before** its start, as did the Bolshevik attacks on soviet democracy. Nor did Trotsky argue that this *“substitution”* was the result of objective conditions, rather he considered it as natural. He repeated this argument in 1937:

“The revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party is for me not a thing that one can freely accept or reject: It is an objective necessity imposed upon us by the social realities — the class struggle, the heterogeneity of the revolutionary class, the necessity for a selected vanguard in order to assure the victory. The dictatorship of a party belongs to the barbarian prehistory as does the state itself, but we can not jump over this chapter, which can open (not at one stroke) genuine human history... The revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution ... Abstractly speaking, it would be very well if the party dictatorship could be replaced by the ‘dictatorship’ of the whole toiling people without any party, but this presupposes such a high level of political development among the masses that it can never

*be achieved under capitalist conditions. The reason for the revolution comes from the circumstance that capitalism does not permit the material and the moral development of the masses.” [Trotsky, **Writings 1936–37**, pp. 513–4]*

Capitalism is making desperate efforts to reconstruct its shattered world. The workers must seize by force the power of the State, and reconstruct society in its own interests.

By making this comment, Zinoviev confuses two things. Firstly, there is the “*power of the State*” and, secondly, there is working class power to reconstruct society. These two things are not the same. As Italian anarchist Luigi Fabbri argued:

“It is fairly certain that between the capitalist regime and the socialist there will be an intervening period of struggle, during which preoletarian revolutionary workers will have to work to uproot the remnants of bourgeois society ... relying on the strength of their organisation ... the proletariat ... will need organisation to meet not just the demands of the struggle but also the demands of production and social life ...

“The mistake of authoritarian communists in this connection is the belief that fighting and organising are impossible without submission to a government; and thus they regard anarchists ... as the foes of all organisation and all co-ordinated struggle. We, on the other hand, maintain that not only are revolutionary struggle and revolutionary organisation possible outside and in spite of government interference but that, indeed, that is the only effective way to struggle and organise, for it has the active participation of all members of the collective unit, instead of their passively entrusting themselves to the authority of the supreme leaders.

*“Any governing body is an impediment to the real organisation of the broad masses, the majority. Where a government exists, then the only really organised people are the minority who make up the government; and ... if the masses do organise, they do so against it, outside it, or at the very least, independently of it. In ossifying into a government, the revolution as such would fall apart, on account of its awarding that government the monopoly of organisation and of the means of struggle.” [“Anarchy and ‘Scientific’ Communism”, in **The Poverty of Statism**, pp. 13–49, Albert Meltzer (ed.), pp. 26–7]*

The state is a specific form of social organisation. It is based on the delegation and centralisation of power. As Malatesta put it, anarchist “*have used the word State ... to mean the sum total of the political, legislative, judiciary, military and financial institutions through which the management of their own affairs, the control over their personal behaviour, the responsibility for their personal safety, are taken away from the people and entrusted to others who, by usurpation or delegation, are vested with the power to make laws for everything and everybody, and to oblige the people to observe them, if need be, by the use of collective force.*” [**Anarchy**, p. 13]

In this, the Bolshevik state was exactly the same as any other state. It was based on the few (the Bolshevik leaders) governing the many (the working class). That the few claimed to be doing it for the many does not change the social relationships the state created. Nor does the claims of those in power have any bearing to what they do. Stalin, for example, argued that his rule expressed the interests of the working class. If we look at what the Bolsheviks did, it is clear they acted first and foremost to defend their own power, not that of the working class.

The state is centralised to facilitate minority rule by excluding the mass of people from taking part in the decision making processes within society. This is to be expected as social structures do not evolve by chance — rather they develop to meet specific needs and requirements. The specific need of the ruling class is to rule and that means marginalising the bulk of the population. Its requirement is for minority power and this is transformed into the structure of the state (and the capitalist company).

Ironically, the Bolsheviks faced the same problems as the bourgeois during its revolution. The process of revolution in France and America saw popular organisations being created by the working population (town meetings in the USA, sections and communes in France). This caused the bourgeois a problem. As Kropotkin put it, “[t]o attack the central power, to strip it of its prerogatives, to decentralise, to dissolve authority, would have been to abandon to the people the control of its affairs, to run the risk of a truly popular revolution. That is why the bourgeoisie sought to reinforce the central government even more...” [Kropotkin, **Words of a Rebel**, p. 143]

The same problem faced the Bolsheviks. By centralising power under their control, they effectively disempowered the working class. Thus the seizure of “the power of the State” and workers “reconstruct[ing] society in its own interests” are two logically opposite things. If the state power is seized then the workers are not in power, the state is. If working people are in a position to reconstruct society then they have the power and so government does not exist. Bolshevism solves this problem by simply playing with words — it confuses party power with workers power.

Or the Social Revolution

Will the capitalists be able to do this?

They will, unless the workers declare war on the whole capitalist system, overthrow the capitalist governments, and set up a Government of the working class, which shall destroy the institution of capitalist private property and make all wealth the property of the workers in common.

This is what the Russian workers have done, and this is the **ONLY WAY** for the workers of other countries to free themselves from industrial slavery, and to make over the world so that the worker shall get **ALL HE PRODUCES**, and **nobody shall be able to make money out of the labor of other men.**

It cannot be denied that the capitalist government had been overthrown in Russia. Nor can it be denied that a government claiming to be “of the working class” had been created. Nor can it be denied that the institution of capitalist private property had been destroyed. However, “all wealth” was not in the hands of the workers, nor had industrial slavery been abolished, nor did the worker get all that he or she produced.

As far as the means of production went, the worker did not manage them. Rather, they were in the hands of state appointees. The role of workers were, as Lenin had argued, simply to obey — just as they do in any capitalist firm. Indeed, Trotsky wanted to militarise labour and his ideas were introduced in many industries, most notably by himself on the railways. In 1920, he “*started by placing the railwaymen and the personnel of the repair workshops under martial law. When the railwaymen’s trade union objected, he summarily ousted its leaders and, **with the full support and endorsement of the Party leadership**, ‘appointed others willing to do his bidding. He repeated the procedure in other unions of transport workers.’*” [Maurice Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers’**

Control, p. 67] He, like Mussolini, got the trains working again but it had as little to do with socialism as Italian Fascism.

Trotsky's perspective on this issue was simply following previous Bolshevik arguments and practice to their logical conclusion. Rather than being firm supporters of workers self-management of production, the Bolshevik leadership opposed it from the start. Needless to say, such a huge subject cannot be covered in this article. All we can do is present a few important points and refer readers to Maurice Brinton's *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control: 1917 to 1921* for details.

The Bolshevik leaders quickly started to undermine any form of workers' self-management of production. Lenin argued in **Six Theses on the Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government** for "*obedience, and unquestioning obedience at that, during work to the one-man decisions of Soviet directors, of dictators elected or appointed by Soviet institutions, vested with dictatorial powers.*" These theses were written between April 29th and May 3rd, 1918. In other words, before the start of the civil war at the end of May, 1918. Unquestioning obedience of appointed dictators is the hall-mark of capitalist production ("*industrial slavery*") and not of socialism. The practice of Bolshevism followed the theory.

As anarchist Peter Arshinov argued in 1923, a "*fundamental fact*" of the Bolshevik revolution was "*that the workers and the peasant labourers remained within the earlier situation of 'working classes' — producers managed by authority from above.*" He stressed that Bolshevik political and economic ideas may have "*remov[ed] the workers from the hands of individual capitalists*" but they "*delivered them to the yet more rapacious hands of a single ever-present capitalist boss, the State. The relations between the workers and this new boss are the same as earlier relations between labour and capital ... Wage labour has remained what it was before, except that it has taken on the character of an obligation to the State... It is clear that in all this we are dealing with a simple substitution of State capitalism for private capitalism.*" [**The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 35 and p. 71]

Clearly, Zinoviev is not presenting an honest account of the situation of workers in the so-called "dictatorship of the proletariat" nor presenting an honest account of Bolshevik practice up to January 1920. Trotsky's dictatorship over the railway workers later that year was just continuing the policies started by Lenin in 1918.

But unless the workers of other countries rise against their own capitalists, the Russian Revolution cannot last. The capitalists of the entire world, realizing the example of the danger of Soviet Russia, have united to crush it. The Allies have quickly forgotten their hatred for Germany, and have invited the German capitalists to join them in the common cause.

Notice that Zinoviev mentions the foreign intervention in Russia and yet does not indicate that this has had any significant impact on the development of the Revolution. That Revolution "*cannot last*" indefinitely, but, apparently, the gains of that revolution Zinoviev lists in his letter still exist. This was a common feature of Bolshevism at the time. It was only with the rise of Stalinism did Leninists start to use the problems created during the Civil War as an excuse for the anti-socialist and anti-democratic activities of Lenin and the other Bolshevik leaders. As Victor Serge noted in his memoirs, during this period (later called "*War Communism*") "*any one who, like myself, went so far as to consider it purely temporary was looked upon with disdain.*" [**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**, p. 115]

Also, we must point out a certain ingenuity in later Trotskyist arguments that Stalinism can be explained purely by the terrible civil war Russia experienced. After all, Lenin himself stated that every “*revolution ..., in its development, would give rise to exceptionally complicated circumstances*” and “*[r]evolution is the sharpest, most furious, desperate class war and civil war. Not a single great revolution in history has escaped civil war. No one who does not live in a shell could imagine that civil war is conceivable without exceptionally complicated circumstances.*” [**Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?**, p. 80 and p. 81] If the Bolshevik political and organisational form cannot survive during the inevitable period of civil war, disruption and complicated circumstances associated with a revolution then it is clearly a theory to be avoided at all costs.

Moreover, the attacks on working class autonomy (i.e. the disbandment of soviets, the appointment of officers in the army and the appointment of managers with “dictatorial” powers, repression against left-wing and anarchist opponents) all started *before* the start of the Civil War and so can hardly be blamed on it.

<snip>

In order to destroy Capitalism, the workers must first wrest State power out of the hands of the capitalist class. They must not only SEIZE this power, but ABOLISH THE OLD CAPITALIST APPARATUS ENTIRELY.

For the experience of Revolutions has shown that the workers cannot take hold of the State machine and use it for their own purposes — such as the Yellow Socialist politicians propose to do. The capitalist State is built to serve capitalism, and that is all it can do, no matter who is running it.

And in place of the capitalist State the workers must build their own WORKERS’ STATE, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

In and of itself, the notion that the capitalist state being built to serve capitalism is one anarchists had been arguing long before Lenin wrote “***State and Revolution***” in 1917. As Kropotkin put it, Anarchists “*maintain that the State organisation, having been the force to which minorities resorted for establishing and organising their power over the masses, cannot be the force which will serve to destroy these privileges.*” [**Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 170]

The question now arises of whether workers need to build their own state or not. Anarchists answer no, of course. We argue that it is impossible for the working class, as a class, to take power by means of a state. They can only do so in self-managed organisations which eliminate hierarchy. In Bakunin’s words, the “*future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal.*” [**Op. Cit.**, p. 206]

By ending the division of society into governed and governors by universal self-management in working class organisations, the working class can destroy capitalism and resist attempts by minorities (ex-capitalists, would be “revolutionary leaders”) to dominate them. Only by forming new organisations structured in a self-managed way can a new society be created. Giving power to a few leaders cannot do this. Real socialism cannot be worked out by a handful of people sitting at the centre, it has to be worked from below, by the people of every city, town and village.

The Dictatorship of the Proletariat

Many members of the I.W.W. do not agree with this. They are against “the State in general.” They propose to overthrow the capitalist State, and to establish in its place immediately the Industrial Commonwealth.

The Communists are also opposed to the “State.” They also wish to abolish it — to substitute for the government of men, the administration of things.

But unfortunately this cannot be done immediately. The destruction of the capitalist State does not mean that capitalism automatically and immediately disappears. The capitalists still have arms, which must be taken away from them; they are still supported by hordes of loyal bureaucrats, managers, superintendents, foremen, and trained men of all sorts, who will sabotage industry — and these must be persuaded or compelled to serve the working class; they still have army officers who can betray the Revolution, preachers who can raise superstitious fears against it, teachers and orators who can misrepresent it to the ignorant, thugs who can be hired to discredit it by evil behavior, newspaper editors who can deceive the people with floods of lies, and “yellow” Socialists and Labor fakers who prefer capitalist “democracy” to Revolution. All these people must be sternly suppressed.

Zinoviev simply fails to understand that “stern suppression” cannot be the means to liberation. As Malatesta put it:

“If some people ... have assumed the right to violate everybody’s freedom on the pretext of preparing the triumph of freedom, they will always find that the people are not yet sufficiently mature, that the dangers of reaction are ever-present, that the education of the people has not yet been completed. And with these excuses they will seek to perpetuate their own power.” [Errico Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 52]

Moreover, the strength of a revolution depends on the working masses being its masters. As Alexander Berkman argued, *“the strength of the revolution ... First and foremost, [is] in the support of the people ... If they feel that they themselves are making the revolution, that they have become masters of their lives, that they have gained freedom and are building up their welfare, then in that very sentiment you have the greatest strength of the revolution... Let them believe in the revolution, and they will defend it to the death.”* Thus the *“armed workers and peasants are the only effective defence of the revolution.”* This strength can only exist in liberty, so no attempt can be made to “defend” the revolution against mere talk, against the mere expression of an opinion. To *“suppress speech and press is not only a theoretical offence against liberty; it is a direct blow at the very foundations of the revolution... It would generate fear and distrust, would hatch conspiracies, and culminate in a reign of terror which has always killed revolution in the pass.”* [ABC of Anarchism, pp. 80–81 and p. 83] Only a regime which no longer had the support of the working masses could “sternly suppress” opposition viewpoints. If the revolution sincerely reflected the interests, ideas and needs of the working people, then no amount of reactionary talk could get people to abandon their freedom. Zinoviev’s comments simply indicate how unpopular the Bolshevik dictatorship had become in the eyes of the Russian masses (in early 1921, Zinoviev declared that the government’s support among the working class had been reduced to 1 per cent).

Zinoviev is confusing two things. First, there is the issue of the defence of a revolution. Second, there is the question of the state. The two are not the same. The former can be achieved without a

government, by empowering, arming and organising the whole revolutionary people. The state, we must stress, is the empowering, arming and organising a minority of a revolutionary people and the disempowering, disarming and dis-organising of the rest. The difference is important. This can be seen from the Russian Revolution.

The Bolshevik state used its armed forces to suppress workers' protests and organisations all during the Russian Civil War. Zinoviev himself was the head of the Petrograd Soviet which, in 1919, sent troops to break strikes in the city. In 1921, in response to a wave of strikes and the rebellion of Kronstadt, he was the head of the "*Petrograd Defence Committee*" which was "*vested with absolute power throughout the entire province*" and "*took stern measures to prevent any further disturbances. The city became a vast garrison, with troops patrolling in every quarter. Notices posted on the walls reminded the citizenry that all gatherings would be dispersed and those who resisted shot on the spot. During the day the streets were nearly deserted, and, with the curfew now set at 9 p.m., night life ceased altogether.*" [Paul Avrich, **Kronstadt 1921**, p. 142]

Ultimately, centralised power is used to impose the will of the leaders, who use state power against the very class they claim to represent:

"Without revolutionary coercion directed against the avowed enemies of the workers and peasants, it is impossible to break down the resistance of these exploiters. On the other hand, revolutionary coercion is bound to be employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves." [Lenin, **Collected Works**, vol. 24, p. 170]

In other words, whoever protests against the dictatorship of the party.

Of course, it will be replied that the Bolshevik dictatorship used its power to crush the resistance of the bosses (and "*backward workers*"). Sadly, this is not the case. First, we must stress that anarchists are **not** against defending a revolution or expropriating the power and wealth of the ruling class, quite the reverse as this is about **how** a revolution does this. Lenin's argument is flawed as it confuses the defence of the revolution with the defence of the party in power. These are two totally different things.

The "*revolutionary coercion*" Lenin speaks of is, apparently, directed against one part of the working class. However, this will also intimidate the rest (just as bourgeois repression not only intimidates those who strike but those who may think of striking). As a policy, it can have but one effect — to eliminate **all** workers' power and freedom. It is the violence of an oppressive minority against the oppressed majority, not vice versa. Ending free speech harmed working class people. Militarisation of labour did not affect the bourgeoisie. Neither did eliminating soviet democracy or union independence. As the dissident (working class) Communist Gavrii Miasnikov argued in 1921 (in reply to Lenin):

"The trouble is that, while you raise your hand against the capitalist, you deal a blow to the worker. You know very well that for such words as I am now uttering hundreds, perhaps thousands, of workers are languishing in prison. That I myself remain at liberty is only because I am a veteran Communist, have suffered for my beliefs, and am known among the mass of workers. Were it not for this, were I just an ordinary mechanic from the same factory, where would I be now? In a Cheka prison or, more likely, made to 'escape,' just as I made Mikhail Romanov 'escape.' Once more I say: You raise your hand

against the bourgeoisie, but it is I who am spitting blood, and it is we, the workers, whose jaws are being cracked." [quoted by Paul Avrich, **G. T. Miasnikov and the Workers' Group**]

This can be seen from the make-up of Bolshevik prisoners. Of the 17 000 camp detainees on whom statistical information was available on 1 November 1920, peasants and workers constituted the largest groups, at 39% and 34% respectively. Similarly, of the 40 913 prisoners held in December 1921 (of whom 44% had been committed by the Cheka) nearly 84% were illiterate or minimally educated, clearly, therefore, either peasants or workers. [George Leggett, **The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police**, p. 178] Unsurprisingly, Miasnikov refused to denounce the Kronstadt insurgents nor would he have participated in their suppression had he been called upon to do so.

It is clear that the suppression that Zinoviev is advocating was not being directed just against the enemies of the revolution, but rather against all those who opposed the Bolshevik government, including workers. This can only occur when power is centralised into the hands of a few, when the revolution creates a new "state" rather than organising the defence of a free society.

Moreover, Zinoviev is also confusing the revolution with a fully developed socialist society. Anarchists and syndicalists are aware that it is not possible to "immediately" create "the Industrial Commonwealth," if by that it is meant a fully communist society. Anarchists are well aware that "*class difference do not vanish at the stroke of a pen whether that pen belongs to the theoreticians or to the pen-pushers who set out laws or decrees. Only action, that is to say direct action (not through government) expropriation by the proletarians, directed against the privileged class, can wipe out class difference.*" [Luigi Fabbri, "Anarchy and 'Scientific' Communism", in **The Poverty of Statism**, pp. 13–49, Albert Meltzer (ed.), p. 30] As such, immediately after all a revolution there will be need to defend it against attempts to overthrow it and re-introduce class society.

It is, however, essential that the "*Industrial Commonwealth*" be introduced as soon as possible if by that term we mean workers' direct management of society by their own organisations which, in turn, are run and controlled by them directly. As Murray Bookchin puts it:

"There can be no separation of the revolutionary process from the revolutionary goal. A society based on self-administration must be achieved by means of self-administration ... Assembly and community must arise from within the revolutionary process itself; indeed, the revolutionary process must be the formation of assembly and community, and with it, the destruction of power. Assembly and community must become 'fighting words,' not distinct panaceas. They must be created as modes of struggle against the existing society, not as theoretical or programmatic abstractions... The factory committees ... must be managed directly by workers' assemblies in the factories... neighbourhood committees, councils and boards must be rooted completely in the neighbourhood assembly. They must be answerable at every point to the assembly, they and their work must be under continual review by the assembly; and finally, their members must be subject to immediate recall by the assembly. The specific gravity of society, in short, must be shifted to its base — the armed people in permanent assembly." [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 167–9]

In this sense, it is essential that an "Industrial Commonwealth" is created immediately as "*[o]nly freedom or the struggle for freedom can be the school for freedom.*" [Malatesta, **Life and**

Ideas, p. 59] This, however, does not mean that defence of the revolution is not essential, it is. And it is a defence against attempts to introduce new tyrannies just as much as it is a defence against overthrown ones.

To break down the capitalist State, to crush capitalist resistance and disarm the capitalist class, to confiscate capitalist property and turn it over to the WHOLE WORKING CLASS IN COMMON, — for all these tasks a government is necessary — a State, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, in which the workers, through their Soviets, can uproot the capitalist system with an iron hand.

This is exactly what exists in Russia today.

Unfortunately what “*exists in Russia*” was somewhat different than this. The “soviet power” (i.e. the Bolshevik government) had, by the time Zinoviev wrote this letter, had become little more than the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party. As Zinoviev himself admitted later in 1920:

“soviet rule in Russia could not have been maintained for three years — not even three weeks — without the iron dictatorship of the Communist Party. Any class conscious worker must understand that the dictatorship of the working class can be achieved only by the dictatorship of its vanguard, i.e., by the Communist Party ... All questions of economic reconstruction, military organisation, education, food supply — all these questions, on which the fate of the proletarian revolution depends absolutely, are decided in Russia before all other matters and mostly in the framework of the party organisations ... Control by the party over soviet organs, over the trade unions, is the single durable guarantee that any measures taken will serve not special interests, but the interests of the entire proletariat.” [quoted by Oskar Anweiler, **The Soviets**, pp. 239–40]

Clearly, Zinoviev knew that the Russian workers had no real say through their soviets. The Communist Party made all the decisions and the workers, like workers in a capitalist society, had to carry them out (or be classed as an enemy of the revolution and either shot or imprisoned).

BUT THIS DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT IS ONLY TEMPORARY.

We, Communists, also want to abolish the State. The State can only exist as long as there is class struggle. The function of the Proletarian Dictatorship is to abolish the capitalist class as a class; in fact, do away with all class divisions of every kind. And when this condition is reached then the PROLETARIAN DICTATORSHIP, THE STATE, AUTOMATICALLY DISAPPEARS — to make way for an industrial administrative body which will be something like the General Executive Board of the I.W.W.

Taking this literally, then Zinoviev is admitting that the working class in Russia are still proletarians, still dispossessed from the means of production and are not, in fact, running society in their own interests. The way to abolish the proletarian class, as a class, is for the working class to expropriate capital directly and place it under workers self-management. If this is not done, then that class remains proletarian and so remains subject to wage slavery, exploitation and oppression. In Russia, the economic position of the working class had not changed.

This was admitted by Lenin in **Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder**. He noted, in passing, that the trade unions “*are, and will long remain, a necessary ‘school of Communism’, a*

preparatory school for training the proletariat to exercise its dictatorship, an indispensable organisation of the workers for gradually transferring the management of the whole economy of the country to the hands of the working class (and not of separate trades) and later to the hands of all the toiling masses.” [p. 34] If the working class does not manage the economy, then who does? If the working class does not do so, then it clearly is still the proletariat and the revolution has not changed its economic position at all. As such, “revolutionary” Russia was still a class society in which the proletariat was still following orders in production. Needless to say, the new ruling class of party officials and bureaucrats did not want to loose their power to the old ruling class, but the position of the proletariat had not changed.

In a recent leaflet, Mary Marcy argues that, although the I.W.W. does not theoretically recognize the necessity for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, it will be forced to do so IN FACT at the time of the Revolution, in order to suppress the capitalist counter-revolution.

This is true, but unless the I.W.W. acknowledges beforehand the necessity of the Workers’ State, and prepares for it, there will be confusion and weakness at a time when firmness and swift action are imperative.

However, it is to confuse the defence of a revolution and the various working class organisations needed for the ex-proletariat to run society in its own interests with “the workers’ state” which is the source of weakness. To consider the creation of a new state as simply defending a revolution implies a lack of understanding of both. As Malatesta argued:

“But perhaps the truth is simply this: ... [some] take the expression ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ to mean simply the revolutionary action of the workers in taking possession of the land and the instruments of labour, and trying to build a society and organise a way of life in which there will be no place for a class that exploits and oppresses the producers.

“Thus constructed, the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ would be the effective power of all workers trying to bring down capitalist society and would thus turn into Anarchy as soon as resistance from reactionaries would have ceased and no one can any longer seek to compel the masses by violence to obey and work for him. In which case, the discrepancy between us would be nothing more than a question of semantics. Dictatorship of the proletariat would signify the dictatorship of everyone, which is to say, it would be a dictatorship no longer, just as government by everybody is no longer a government in the authoritarian, historical and practical sense of the word.

“But the real supporters of ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ do not take that line, as they are making quite plain in Russia. Of course, the proletariat has a hand in this, just as the people has a part to play in democratic regimes, that is to say, to conceal the reality of things. In reality, what we have is the dictatorship of one party, or rather, of one’ party’s leaders: a genuine dictatorship, with its decrees, its penal sanctions, its henchmen and above all its armed forces, which are at present [1919] also deployed in the defence of the revolution against its external enemies, but which will tomorrow be used to impose the dictator’s will upon the workers, to apply a break on revolution, to consolidate the

*new interests in the process of emerging and protect a new privileged class against the masses.” [Malatesta, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, pp. 38–9]*

The Workers’ State

What will be the form of the Workers’ State?

We have before us the example of the Russian Soviet Republic, whose structure, in view of the conflicting reports printed in other countries, it may be useful to briefly describe here.

The unit of government is the local Soviet, or Council, of Workers’, Red Army, and Peasants’ Deputies.

The city Workers’ Soviet is made up as follows: each factory elects one delegate for a certain number of workers, and each local Union also elects delegates. These delegates are elected according to political parties — or, if the workers wish it, as individual candidates.

The Red Army delegates are chosen by military units.

For the peasants, each village has its local Soviet, which sends delegates to the Township Soviet, which in turn elects to the County Soviet, and this to the Provincial Soviet.

Nobody who employs labor for profit can vote.

The question, of course, is whether working people have a meaningful vote. Stalin organised elections, it did not mean that the Russian workers and peasants had a say under Stalinism. The same can be said of Lenin’s regime as well.

Samuel Farber provides a good summary of Bolshevik actions which made the vote meaningless. In response to the “*great Bolshevik losses in the soviet elections*” during the spring and summer of 1918 “*Bolshevik armed force usually overthrew the results of these provincial elections ... [In] the city of Izhevsk [for example] ... in the May election [to the soviet] the Mensheviks and SRs won a majority ... In June, these two parties also won a majority of the executive committee of the soviet. At this point, the local Bolshevik leadership refused to give up power ... [and by use of the military] abrogated the results of the May and June elections and arrested the SR and Menshevik members of the soviet and its executive committee.*” In addition, “*the government continually postponed the new general elections to the Petrograd Soviet, the term of which had ended in March 1918. Apparently, the government feared that the opposition parties would show gains.*” [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, pp. 23–4 and p. 22]

Bolshevik opposition to the soviet democracy started a few months after the Bolsheviks seizure of power in the name of the soviets. A few more examples are worth accounting.

After a demonstration in Petrograd in favour of the Constituent Assembly was repressed by the Bolsheviks in mid-January 1918, calls for new elections to the soviet occurred in many factories. “*Despite the efforts of the Bolsheviks and the Factory Committees they controlled, the movement for new elections to the soviet spread to more than twenty factories by early February and resulted in the election of fifty delegates: thirty-six SRs, seven Mensheviks and seven nonparty.*” However, the Bolsheviks “*unwillingness to recognise the elections and to seat new delegates pushed a group of Socialists to ... lay plans for an alternative workers’ forum ... what was later to become the Assembly*

of Workers' Plenipotentiaries." [Scott Smith, *The Social-Revolutionaries and the Dilemma of Civil War*, **The Bolsheviks in Russian Society**, pp. 83–104, Vladimir N. Brovkin (Ed.), pp. 85–86]

In Tula, again in the spring of 1918, local Bolsheviks reported to the Bolshevik Central Committee that the "*Bolshevik deputies began to be recalled one after another ... our situation became shakier with passing day. We were forced to block new elections to the soviet and even not to recognise them where they had taken place not in our favour.*" [quoted by Smith, **Op. Cit.**, p. 87] In the end, the local party leader was forced to abolish the city soviet and to vest power in the Provincial Executive Committee. This refused to convene a plenum of the city soviet for more than two months, knowing that newly elected delegates were non-Bolshevik. [**Ibid.**]

In Yaroslavl', the newly elected soviet convened on April 9th, 1918, and when it elected a Menshevik chairman, "*the Bolshevik delegation walked out and declared the soviet dissolved. In response, workers in the city went out on strike, which the Bolsheviks answered by arresting the strike committee and threatening to dismiss the strikers and replace them with unemployed workers.*" This failed and the Bolsheviks were forced to hold new elections, which they lost. Then "*the Bolsheviks dissolved this soviet as well and places the city under martial law.*" A similar event occurred in Riazan' (again in April) and, again, the Bolsheviks "*promptly dissolved the soviet and declared a dictatorship under a Military-Revolutionary Committee.*" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 88–9]

Anti-Bolshevik historian Vladimir Brovkin indicates that there "*are three factors*" which emerge from the soviet election results in the spring of 1918. These are, firstly, "*the impressive success of the Menshevik-SR opposition*" in those elections in all regions in European Russia. The second "*is the Bolshevik practice of outright disbandment of the Menshevik-SR-controlled soviets. The third is the subsequent wave of anti-Bolshevik uprisings.*" In fact, "*in all provincial capitals of European Russia where elections were held on which there are data, the Mensheviks and the SRs won majorities on the city soviets in the spring of 1918.*" Brovkin stresses that the "*process of the Menshevik-SR electoral victories threatened Bolshevik power. That is why in the course of the spring and summer of 1918, the soviet assemblies were disbanded in most cities and villages. To stay in power, the Bolsheviks had to destroy the soviets... These steps generated a far-reaching transformation in the soviet system, which remained 'soviet' in name only.*" [*"The Mensheviks' Political Comeback: The Elections to the Provincial City Soviets in Spring 1918"*, **The Russian Review**, vol. 42, pp. 1–50, p. 46, p. 47 and p. 48]

Brovkin presents accounts from numerous towns and cities. As an example, he discusses Tver' where the "*escalation of political tensions followed the already familiar pattern*" as the "*victory of the opposition at the polls*" in April 1918 "*brought about an intensification of the Bolshevik repression. Strikes, protests, and marches in Tver' lead to the imposition of martial law.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 11]

These are just a few examples of what was happening in Russia in early 1918. We must stress that the Russian Civil War started in late May, 1918 and the net effect of which was, of course, to make many dissident workers support the Bolsheviks during the war. This, however, did not stop mass resistance and strikes breaking out periodically during the war when workers and peasants could no longer put up with Bolshevik policies or the effects of the war.

Simple disbandment was just one of the many tactics used. Parties and meetings were banded, activists arrested and opposition press censored (if not suppressed). During the Civil War, the Bolsheviks repressed all political parties, including the Mensheviks even though they "*consistently pursued a policy of peaceable opposition to the Bolshevik regime, a policy conducted by strictly legitimate means*" and "*[i]ndividual Mensheviks who joined organisations aiming at the overthrow*

of the Soviet Government were expelled from the Menshevik Party." [George Leggett, **The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police**, pp. 318–9 and p. 332]

The Bolsheviks also created institutional barriers to democracy. Zinoviev's comment that each local Union also elects delegates is an example. It means, of course, that the workers have two delegates, one for their place of work, another for their trade union. Why does the local Union also get a delegate? Simple, because it allowed the Bolsheviks to pack the soviet with "delegates" representing the trade union officialdom, in other words, the Bolshevik party. As historian Alexander Rabinowitch noted, the elections to the Petrograd Soviet in the second half of 1918 saw continued Bolshevik control because of "*the numerically quite significant representation now given to trade unions, [and] district soviets ... in which the Bolsheviks had overwhelming strength.*" [quoted by Samuel Farber, *Op. Cit.*, p. 33]

Every six months the City and Provincial Soviets elect delegates to the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, which is the supreme governing body of the country. The Congress decides upon the policies which are to govern the country for six months, and then elects a Central Executive Committee of two hundred, which is to carry out these policies. The Congress also elects the Cabinet — The Council of People's Commissars, who are the heads of Government Departments — or People's Commissariats.

The People's Commissars can be recalled at any time by the Central Executive Committee. The members of all Soviets can be recalled very easily, and at any time, by their constituents.

These Soviets are not only LEGISLATIVE bodies, but also EXECUTIVE organs. Unlike your Congress, they do not make the laws and leave them to the President to carry out, but the members carry out the laws themselves; and there is no Supreme Court to say whether or not these laws are "constitutional."

Between the All-Russian Congresses of Soviets the Central Executive Committee is the SUPREME POWER in Russia. It meets at least every two months, and in the meanwhile, the Council of People's Commissars directs the country, while the members of the Central Executive Committee go to work in the various government departments.

Needless to say, Zinoviev fails to mention a few facts. The All-Russian Congress originally was meant to meet four times a year, but met only once in 1919 and once in 1920. Obviously "*the supreme governing body of the country*" was not considered that important for the actual governing of the country. Between late 1918 and throughout 1919, the Central Executive Committee of the All-Russian congress of soviets did not once meet in full session. In the first year of the revolution, only 68 of 480 decrees by the Council of People's Commissars (the Communist government) were actually submitted to the Soviet Central Executive Committee (and even fewer were drafted by it). Clearly, the "*SUPREME POWER*" in Russia was, again, considered irrelevant for those who did hold the real power.

Zinoviev clearly admits that, in practice, the soviets have delegated their power to the "Council of People's Commissars" which is the *real* power in "the Workers' State." As he says, it "*directs the country,*" not the working class. The working class "ruled" Russia in the same sense they "rule" in

any bourgeois democracy (i.e. they did not). When the Kronstadt sailors rose in rebellion for free elections to the soviets in February 1921, the response of the Bolsheviks was simply to repress them.

Nor does he mention that the right of recall was undermined by the Bolsheviks at an early stage. We have already discussed the disbandment of soviets before the start of the Civil War in late May 1918. Oligarchic tendencies in the soviets increased post-October, with “[e]ffective power in the local soviets relentlessly gravitat[ing] to the executive committees.” Local soviets had “little input into the formation of national policy.” They quickly had become rubber-stamps of the Communist government and “the party often disbanded congresses that opposed major aspects of current policy.” [C. Sirianni, **Workers’ Control and Socialist Democracy**, p. 204 and p. 203] Indeed, the Soviet Constitution of 1918 codified this centralisation of power, with local soviets ordered to “carry out all orders of the respective higher organs of the soviet power” (i.e. to carry out the commands of the central government).

The Organization of Production and Distribution

In Russia the workers are organized in Industrial Unions, all the workers in each industry belonging to one union. For example, in a factory making metal products, even the carpenters and painters are members of the Metal Workers’ Union. Each factory is a local Union, and the Shop Committee elected by the workers is its Executive Committee.

The All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the federated Unions is elected by the annual Trade Union Convention. A Scale Committee elected by the Convention fixes the wages of all categories of workers.

With very few exceptions, all important factories in Russia have been nationalized, and are now the property of all the workers in common. The business of the Unions is therefore no longer to fight the capitalists, but to RUN INDUSTRY.

This is an obvious lie. It can best be exposed by looking at the events of the Tenth Party Congress one year after Zinoviev wrote his letter. The attempts by the Workers’ Opposition to introduce union running of industry in 1921 was combated by Lenin and other leading Bolsheviks. If the unions *did* run industry in 1920, then this debate would never have occurred.

As part of the campaign against the Workers’ Opposition and Bukharin, Lenin argued that “[i]f we say that it is not the Party but the trade unions that put up candidates and adminstrate, it may sound very democratic ... [but it] will be fatal for the dictatorship of the proletariat.” He also noted when using “the syndicalist phrase ‘mandatory nominations (by trade unions to management bodies)’” and you “neglect to add, there and then, that they are **not** mandatory for the Party, you have a syndicalist deviation, and that is **in**compatible with communism and the Party Programme... you are giving the non-Party workers a false sense of having some increase in their rights, whereas in fact there will be no change at all.” [Marx, Engels, Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 322, p. 324]

Similarly, in 1920 Lenin was boasting that in 1918 he had “pointed out the necessity of recognising the dictatorial authority of single individuals for the pursue of carrying out the Soviet idea” and even claimed that at that stage “there were no disputes in connection with the question” of one-man management. [quoted by Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 65] While the first claim is true (Lenin argued

for one-man management appointed from above **before** the start of the Civil War in May 1918) the latter one is **not** true (excluding anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists, there were also the dissent Left-Communists in the Bolshevik party itself). In 1921, Lenin was again arguing that it *“is absolutely essential that all authority in the factories should be concentrated in the hands of management ... under these circumstances any direct intervention by the trade unions in the management of enterprises must be regarded as positively harmful and impermissible.”* [**The Role of the Trade Unions under the N.E.P.**]

These facts, combined with the struggle of the Bolsheviks against workers’ self-management after the October Revolution shows that Zinoviev is simply lying, telling the I.W.W. what it wants to hear.

Hand in hand with the Unions works the Department of Labor of the Soviet Government, whose chief is the People’s Commissar of Labor, elected by the Soviet Congress with the approval of the unions.

In charge of the economic life of the country is the elected Supreme Council of People’s Economy, divided into departments, such as, Metal Department, Chemical Department, etc., each one headed by experts and workers, appointed, with the approval of the Union by the Supreme Council of People’s Economy.

The Supreme Council of People’s Economy was *“dominated by representatives of the upper echelons of the trade unions, party nominees, and technical and administrative experts, with a slight representation from (and no accountability to) the factory committees ... Policy was to be set by a seventy-to-eighty member Plenum, and daily business conducted by a Bureau of fifteen.”* [C. Sirianni, **Workers’ Control and Socialist Democracy**, p. 119]

In other words, the economic life of Russia was, in theory, conducted by the orders of fifteen people just as its political life was conducted by the orders of the handful of People’s Commissars. Hardly an example of economic democracy!

In each factory production is carried on by a committee consisting of three members: a representative of the Shop Committee of the Unions, a representative of the Central Executive of the Unions, and a representative of the Supreme Council of People’s Economy.

In other words, workers do not run industry and neither do the unions, if we mean by unions their members rather than their bureaucracy. Clearly, only one member of this committee is directly accountable to the workers in the workplace and so they cannot be said to be controlling production. Even this form of very limited workers’ control was eliminated by the Bolsheviks. In 1919, 10.8% of enterprises were under one-man management, by December 1920, 2,183 out of 2,483 factories were no longer under collective management.

Also, although Lenin described the NEP (New Economic Policy) of 1921 as a ‘defeat’, at no stage did he describe the suppression of soviet democracy and workers’ control in such language. In other words, Bolshevik politics did play a role, a key role, in the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and to deny it is to deny reality. In the words of Maurice Brinton:

“[I]n relation to industrial policy there is a clear-cut and incontrovertible link between what happened under Lenin and Trotsky and the later practice of Stalinism. We know

*that many on the revolutionary left will find this statement hard to swallow. We are convinced however that any honest reading of the facts cannot but lead to this conclusion. The more one unearths about this period [1917–21], the more difficult it becomes to define — or even see — the ‘gulf’ allegedly separating what happened in Lenin’s time from what happened later. Real knowledge of the facts also makes it impossible to accept ... that the whole course of events was ‘historically inevitable’ and ‘objectively determined.’ Bolshevik ideology and practice were **themselves** important and sometimes decisive factors in the equation, at every critical stage of this critical period.” [Op. Cit., p. 84]*

Democratic Centralization

The Unions are thus a branch of the government — and this government is the MOST HIGHLY CENTRALIZED GOVERNMENT THAT EXISTS.

It is also the most democratic government in history. For all the organs of government are in constant touch with the working masses, and constantly sensitive to their will. Moreover, the local Soviets all over Russia have complete autonomy to manage their own local affairs, provided they carry out the national policies laid down by the Soviet Congress. Also, the Soviet Government represents ONLY THE WORKERS, and cannot help but act in the workers’ interests.

Again, this is another blatant lie from Zinoviev. While there is no denying that the Bolshevik government was the “most highly centralised government that exists,” it can easily be shown that it was *not* the “most democratic government in history.” Indeed, we have indicated as much above, when we indicated Bolshevik disbandment of soviets and repression of all forms of opposition. This is not surprising, given that centralisation was designed to ensure minority rule.

Let us re-quote Zinoviev again:

*“soviet rule in Russia could not have been maintained for three years — not even three weeks — without the iron dictatorship of the Communist Party. Any class conscious worker must understand that the dictatorship of the working class can be achieved only by the dictatorship of its vanguard, i.e., by the Communist Party ... All questions of economic reconstruction, military organisation, education, food supply — all these questions, on which the fate of the proletarian revolution depends absolutely, are decided in Russia before all other matters and mostly in the framework of the party organisations ... Control by the party over soviet organs, over the trade unions, is the single durable guarantee that any measures taken will serve not special interests, but the interests of the entire proletariat.” [quoted by Oskar Anweiler, **The Soviets**, pp. 239–40]*

In other words, the party governs society, controls the soviets and unions and exercises its dictatorship over the workers. Indeed, the party does not have any special interests!

As for being sensitive to the working masses wills, Lenin and Trotsky argued repeatedly that party dictatorship was essential to stop this happening! Trotsky, for example, argued this against the **Workers’ Opposition** at the Tenth Party Congress in early 1921: “*They have made a fetish of democratic principles! They have placed the workers’ right to elect representatives above the Party. As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship clashed with the*

passing moods of the workers' democracy!" He stressed that the "Party is obliged to maintain its dictatorship ... regardless of temporary vacillations even in the working class ... The dictatorship does not base itself at every moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy." [quoted by M. Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 78]

Moreover, he argued against soviets being "sensitive" to the wishes of their electors in 1938 in a polemic against the Kronstadt rebellion. Trotsky stated that the "*Kronstadt slogan*" was "*soviets without Communists.*" [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 90] This, of course, is factually incorrect. The Kronstadt slogan was "*all power to the soviets but not to the parties*" (or "*free soviets*"). From this incorrect assertion, Trotsky argued as follows:

"to free the soviets from the leadership [!] of the Bolsheviks would have meant within a short time to demolish the soviets themselves. The experience of the Russian soviets during the period of Menshevik and SR domination and, even more clearly, the experience of the German and Austrian soviets under the domination of the Social Democrats, proved this. Social Revolutionary-anarchist soviets could only serve as a bridge from the proletarian dictatorship. They could play no other role, regardless of the 'ideas' of their participants. The Kronstadt uprising thus had a counterrevolutionary character." [Op. Cit., p. 90]

Interesting logic. Let us assume that the result of free elections would have been the end of Bolshevik "*leadership*" (i.e. dictatorship), as seems likely. What Trotsky is arguing is that to allow workers to vote for their representatives would "*only serve as a bridge from the proletarian dictatorship*"! This argument was made (in 1938) as a **general point** and is **not** phrased in terms of the problems facing the Russian Revolution in 1921. In other words Trotsky is clearly arguing for the dictatorship of the party and contrasting it to soviet democracy. So much for "*All Power to the Soviets*" or "*workers' power*"!

Perhaps we can better understand the Bolshevik vision by quoting Victor Serge. Serge, an anarchist turned Bolshevik, argued in 1919 that the party "*is in a sense the nervous system of the [working] class*" and its "*consciousness.*" And the working class? It is "*carrying out all the menial tasks required by the revolution*" while "*sympathising instinctively with the party.*" [**Revolution in Danger**, p.67 and p. 6] The party thinks, the workers obey. As in any class system.

Clearly, Zinoviev is reporting neither the facts of Bolshevik Russia nor the opinion of the Bolshevik leaders.

Many members of the I.W.W. are opposed to centralization, because they do not think it can be democratic. But where there are great masses of people, it is impossible to register the will of individuals; only the will of majorities can be registered, and in Soviet Russia the government is administered only for the common good of the working class.

In other words, the government expresses the "will of the majority" but it is, in fact, impossible for the "great masses of people" to actually govern themselves directly. The logic of Zinoviev's argument is flawed:

"if you consider these worthy electors as unable to look after their own interests themselves, how is it that they will know how to choose for themselves the shepherds who

must guide them? And how will they be able to solve this problem of social alchemy, of producing a genius from the votes of a mass of fools? And what will happen to the minorities which are still the most intelligent, most active and radical part of a society?"
[Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 53]

Yet, the **practice** of Bolshevism shows that Zinoviev is simply wrong. Soviet Russia was administered by a hand-full of People's Commissars. The soviets became marginalised (a fact which did not bother Lenin, Trotsky or Zinoviev). Clearly, centralisation cannot be democratic, as the experience of Bolshevism shows.

The private property of the capitalist class, in order to become the SOCIAL property of the workers, cannot be turned over to individuals or groups of individuals. It must become the property of all in common, and a centralized authority is necessary to accomplish this change.

Zinoviev is clearly playing with words here. A centralised authority **is** made up of "*individuals or groups of individuals*." Turning social property over to a few individuals at the top of a highly centralised organisation does not ensure that it is held in common, rather it ensures that the vast majority are dispossessed of real control over that property. The bureaucrats would be in control of it, not the whole of society.

So his argument is based on a fallacy, namely the assumption that the centre will not start to view the whole economy as its property (and being centralised, such a body would be difficult to effectively control). Indeed, Stalin's power was derived from the state bureaucracy which ran the economy in its own interests. Not that it suddenly arose with Stalin. It was a feature of the Soviet system from the start. Samuel Farber, for example, notes that, "*in practice, [the] hypercentralisation [pursued by the Bolsheviks from early 1918 onwards] turned into infighting and scrambles for control among competing bureaucracies*" and he points to the "*not untypical example of a small condensed milk plant with few than 15 workers that became the object of a drawn-out competition among six organisations including the Supreme Council of National Economy, the Council of People's Commissars of the Northern Region, the Vologda Council of People's Commissars, and the Petrograd Food Commissariat*." [Op. Cit., p. 73] In other words, centralised bodies are not immune to viewing resources as their own property (and compared to an individual workplace, the state's power to enforce its viewpoint against the rest of society is considerably stronger).

A centralised body effectively excludes the mass participation of the mass of workers — power rests in the hands of a few people which, by its nature, generates bureaucratic rule. This can be seen from the example of Lenin's Russia. The central bodies the Bolsheviks created had little knowledge of the local situation and often gave orders that contradicted each other or had little bearing to reality, so encouraging factories to ignore the centre. [Carmen Sirianni, **Workers' Control and Socialist Democracy**, pp. 72–3 and pp. 118–20]

The simple fact is, a socialist society **must** be created from below, by the working class itself. If the workers do not know how to create the necessary conditions for a socialist organisation of labour, no one else can do it for them or compel them to do it. If the state is used to combat "localism" and such things then it obviously cannot be in the hands of the workers' themselves. Socialism can only be created by workers' own actions and organisations otherwise it will not be set up at all — something else will be, namely state capitalism.

The industries, too, which supply the needs of all the people, are not the concern only of the workers in each industry, but of ALL IN COMMON, and must be administered for the benefit of all. Moreover, modern industry is so complicated and interdependent, that in order to operate most economically and with the greatest production, it must be subject to one general scheme, and one central management.

In other words, an exact reproduction of the capitalist workplace. And all workers know how alienating, wasteful and inefficient the typical capitalist workplace is. Why reproduce it on an even greater scale? Moreover, one central management and one general scheme cannot hope to understand, nevermind meet, the needs of a complicated and dynamic society. As Bakunin argued:

“What man, what group of individuals, no matter how great their genius, would dare to think themselves able to embrace and understand the plethora of interests, attitudes and activities so various in every country, every province, locality and profession.” [Michael Bakunin: **Selected Writings**, p. 240]

Yes, there is a need for co-operation and co-ordination, the question is how this is achieved. Is it from the bottom-up or from the top-down? Is it by federalism or by centralisation?

The Revolution must be defended against the formidable assaults of the combined forces of capitalism. Vast armies must be raised, drilled, equipped and directed. This means centralization. Soviet Russia has for two years almost alone fought off the massed attacks of the capitalist world. How could the Red Army, more than two million strong, have been formed without central directing authority?

We have indicated above the nature of the Red Army. The question of co-ordination of joint activity is an important one. Anarchists argue that to co-ordinate struggle you do not need a “central directing authority,” rather you need a federal body based on delegates with clear and accountable mandates. In the words of Bakunin:

*“the federative alliance of all working men’s associations ... constitute the Commune ... all provinces, communes and associations ... by first **reorganising** on revolutionary lines ... [will] constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... [and] organise a revolutionary force capable defeating reaction ... [and for] self-defence ... [The] revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation...”* [Michael Bakunin: **Selected Writings**, p. 170–2]

Such a federal body would be the means to discuss and implement common activities. Rather than centralising power at the top, the decisions would flow from the bottom-up. Co-ordination would be achieved without centralised power. The Red Army achieved “central directing authority” by eliminating workers’ democracy and freedom in favour of appointed officers and a typical military structure. It was effective in defeating the Whites but also for repressing working class revolts against the Bolsheviks and ensuring their dictatorship **over** the proletariat.

Moreover, it had an effect on the rise of Stalinism. Without democratic organisation, the Red Army could never be a means for creating a socialist society, only a means of reproducing autocratic organisation. The influence of the autocratic organisation created by Trotsky had a massive impact on the development of the Soviet State. According to Trotsky himself:

“The demobilisation of the Red Army of five million played no small role in the formation of the bureaucracy. The victorious commanders assumed leading posts in the local Soviets, in economy, in education, and they persistently introduced everywhere that regime which had ensured success in the civil war. Thus on all sides the masses were pushed away gradually from actual participation in the leadership of the country.” [**The Revolution Betrayed**]

Obviously Trotsky had forgotten who created the regime in the Red Army in the first place! He also seems to have forgotten that after militarising the Red Army, he turned his power to militarising workers (starting with the railway workers).

The capitalist class has a strongly centralized organization, which permits its full strength to be hurled against the scattered and divided sections of the working class. The class war is war. To overthrow capitalism, the workers must be a military force, with its General Staff — but this general Staff elected and controlled by the workers.

As noted above, the Bolshevik government was far from elected and controlled by the workers. And, of course, the capitalist class has a strongly centralised organisation. It needs it to enforce its rule. Minority classes need a “strongly centralised organisation” because it is the only way by which they can enforce their rule. Majority classes do not. They need effect organisation in which power is decentralised so they can actually manage their own affairs. These organisations do need to co-ordinate their activity, but this can be done by federalism from the bottom-up.

In summary, structure and function are not separable. The capitalist class has centralised organisation because it is a minority and needs it for its rule. The working class, being the majority, cannot use structures designed for minorities without giving a minority power over itself.

In time of strike every worker knows that there must be a Strike Committee — a centralized organ to conduct the strike, whose orders must be obeyed — although this Committee is elected and controlled by the rank and file. SOVIET RUSSIA IS ON STRIKE AGAINST THE WHOLE CAPITALIST WORLD. THE SOCIAL REVOLUTION IS A GENERAL STRIKE AGAINST THE WHOLE CAPITALIST SYSTEM. THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT IS THE STRIKE COMMITTEE OF THE SOCIAL REVOLUTION.

In strikes, the decisions which are to be obeyed are those of the strikers. They should make the decisions and the strike committees should carry them out. The actual decisions of the Strike Committee are accountable to the assembled strikers who have the real power. Thus power is decentralised in the hands of the strikers and not in the hands of the committee.

Zinoviev confuses a bureaucratic trade union with a self-managed revolutionary union or strike assembly. In the former, the role of the member is to vote for an official (bureaucrat) who then can issue commands to strike, to return to work and so on. They are elected, but they, not

the worker, has the power. In the later, the members/strikers have the power to decide what the organisation does. The committees exist to carry out these wishes. Clearly, the Bolshevik “dictatorship of the proletariat” is the same as a bureaucratic trade union, with the committees issuing orders and the members expected simply to obey. As such, it is to be avoided at all cost in favour of a revolution inspired by the self-management practiced by a **revolutionary** union like the I.W.W, run by and for its members.

Probably the coming proletarian revolutions in America and other countries will develop new forms of organization. The Bolsheviks do not pretend that they have said the final word in the Social Revolution. But the experience of two years of Workers government in Russia is naturally of the greatest importance, and should be closely studied by the workers of other countries.

No truer words were said in this letter! Only by so doing can Bolshevik rhetoric be compared to Bolshevik reality. As I have proven, Zinoviev’s account of the Bolshevik revolution has little bearing to reality.

The Communist International holds out to the I.W.W. the hand of brotherhood.

As can be seen, this hand of brotherhood was based on systematic lying. Given that the Bolshevik government had been repressing Russian anarchists and syndicalists (as well as other socialists like the Left-Mensheviks and Left-Social Revolutionaries) as well as strikers and working class protestors, it is clear that this brotherhood was of the Big Brother kind rather than a meeting of equals.

Zinoviev’s letter should be studied to see the divergence between Bolshevik myth and Bolshevik reality. Once this is done, it clearly shows that Bolshevism is a deeply flawed ideology which cannot lead to working class freedom.

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Lying for Leninism
An analysis of G. Zinoviev's letter to the I.W.W.

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