

Lenin and workers' control

Didier-L. LIMON

Published: Paris, December 1967, *Autogestion: études, débats, documents*, cahier no. 4, pp. 65-111.

Translated and Edited: Keith Rosenthal, December 2010

***Editor's Note:** This phenomenal, historical and analytical study has, until now, not been translated into English. This is a shame on many levels for it stands nearly peerless in its meticulous treatment of the specific subject it takes up. That is, the debates and discussions surrounding the implementation of workers' control of production within the first months after the October revolution of 1917 in Russia.*

Didier Limon's study goes in-depth to flesh out the various political tendencies, forces, and organizations at play during this pivotal moment in the revolution's history. There's little doubt as to where Limon's political inclinations lay in all of this, namely, with the Bolsheviks, and more specifically, with Lenin's approach to the question. Nonetheless, one cannot claim that he has failed to present the first-hand views of the various actors in this drama, and thus provides the reader with a clear, multi-dimensional picture of this centrally-important question to any socialist revolution, as it played out in the days when Russia was controlled by its working class.

One final note on this translation; I do not pretend in any way to be an expert in French-English translations. Indeed, I hope that such an expert will one day be inspired to give this article a much more professional touch. To this end, I am supplying the original French version of this article, which can be accessed at the following link, <http://www.mediafire.com/file/6wrx8djl3k5t6h/limon%20lenine%20controle%20ouvrier.pdf>. The only reason I tried my hand at this task was because, first of all, I was so delighted upon recently discovering this article that I wanted to share it with a broader audience, and second, given that the article was not available in English, I thought it better for there to be at least a less-than-perfect translated version of this article rather than no translated version at all.

In any event, while I cannot guarantee the reader that the following is a flawless translation, I can most definitely guarantee that in all its essentials, the following is an accurate representation of the arguments, facts, and details as penned by Limon some forty years ago.

All citations and footnotes are those of the original author, unless otherwise noted (found at end of document).

The essential problem, the condition *sine qua non*, of the victory of the proletariat was in two words: combating sabotage. Was it not symptomatic that the word “sabotage” became on the first day of the revolution the gravest insult the Russian proletariat used against all of its enemies, without distinction?¹

Combating sabotage to ensure the livelihood of the revolutionary masses, this is what summarizes, for the time being, the economic program of the Bolsheviks, and which is a task that, first and foremost, the factory committees² alone were best able to carry out.

Combating sabotage was now to be, in the weeks that followed the 26th of October, the concrete translation into practice of the slogan of workers’ control of production and distribution.

Lenin did not abandon the project of national economic regulation “which would modify in total the relations of property.” But it proved practically impossible to realize “in the first weeks.” For an indefinite period, exceptional measures were becoming the rule, whether one wanted to rather be at a different place or not. They were in the very logic of every revolutionary action being met by an immediate counter-revolutionary reaction of sabotage. All the considerations on the difference that it would be appropriate to establish between nationalization, confiscation and socialization, between control and management, seemed to suddenly lose meaning in the face of the ruthless struggle waged by the capitalists against the workers.

The development of the Russian proletarian revolution also taught Lenin, much like the international workers’ movement, that between the moment of the takeover of power and when one could actually carry out a plan for the realization of a “revolutionary-democratic state capitalism,” there intervened inevitably a certain transitional phase characterized by civil war. But in any event, this period should, according to him, necessarily espouse the traits which would later receive the name, for better or worse, but now gone down in history as, “war communism.”³

Whatever happened, this situation called, at least to Lenin, for having more confidence than ever in the initiative of the masses, but without losing for an instant a view of reality, without deviating from a revolutionary path; to strike the enemies resolutely without searching to reconcile the irreconcilable or trying to resolve problems where a solution was not yet ripe. Give only essential directions and rely on the masses to adapt to the particular, concrete, conditions of their struggle.

Addressing the Russian population, Lenin declared ten days after the insurrection:

“Comrades, working people! Remember that now *you yourselves* are at the helm of state. No one will help you if you yourselves do not unite and take into your hands *all affairs of the state*. Your Soviets are from now on the organs of state authority, legislative bodies with full powers.

“Rally around your Soviets. Strengthen them. Get on with the job yourselves; begin right at the bottom, do not wait for anyone. Establish the strictest revolutionary law and order,

mercilessly suppress any attempts to create anarchy by drunkards, hooligans, counter-revolutionary officer cadets, Kornilovites and their like.

“Ensure the strictest control over production and accounting of products. Arrest and hand over to the revolutionary courts all who dare to injure the people’s cause, irrespective of whether the injury is manifested in sabotaging production (damage, delay and subversion), or in hoarding grain and products or holding up shipments of grain, disorganizing the railways and the postal, telegraph and telephone services, or any resistance whatever to the great cause of peace, the cause of transferring the land to the peasants, of ensuring workers’ control over the production and distribution of products.”⁴

The day before, at the All-Russian Soviet Executive, rising against the rhetoric of the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries⁵ who reproached the government for overriding formalities, Lenin stressed that the situation was far too grave to be concerned with exterior forms, outer appearances. It was necessary to urgently go after the essentials. Any delay, any temporary equivocation would mean failure.

“The creative, living, activity of the masses, is the principal factor of the new society. The workers must begin to organize workers’ control of their factories, revitalize the farms with industrial products and exchange them for wheat. Every object, every pound of bread should be counted, for socialism is above all else census-keeping. Socialism is not created by orders from on high. It is a stranger to mindless, official bureaucracy. Living, breathing socialism is the creation of the popular masses themselves.”⁶

It is in this spirit and fully aware of the subjective conditions of the entire Russian workers’ movement along with the objective possibilities in the economic realm, that Lenin wrote his draft decree on workers’ control. He submitted it to the commission of the Labor Commissariat on November 1st, even before it had been fully completed.

Lenin’s text, which was published in Pravda on November 3rd, includes the following eight points:

- 1. Workers’ control over the production, storage, purchase and sale of all products and raw materials shall be introduced in all industrial, commercial, banking, agricultural and other enterprises employing not less than five workers and office employees (together), or with an annual turnover of not less than 10,000 rubles.*
- 2. Workers’ control shall be exercised by all the workers and office employees of an enterprise, either directly, if the enterprise is small enough to permit it, or through their elected representatives, who shall be elected immediately at general meetings, at which minutes of the elections shall be taken and the names of those elected communicated to the government and to the local Soviets of Workers’, Soldiers’ and Peasants’ Deputies.*
- 3. Unless permission is given by the elected representatives of the workers and office employees, the suspension of work of an enterprise or an industrial establishment of state importance (see Clause 7), or any change in its operation is strictly prohibited.*
- 4. The elected representatives shall be given access to all books and documents and to all warehouses and stocks of materials, instruments and products, without exception.*

5. *The decisions of the elected representatives of the workers and office employees are binding upon the owners of enterprises and may be annulled only by trade unions and their congresses.*

6. *In all enterprises of state importance all owners and all representatives of the workers and office employees elected for the purpose of exercising workers' control shall be answerable to the state for the maintenance of the strictest order and discipline and for the protection of property. Persons guilty of dereliction of duty, concealment of stocks, accounts, etc., shall be punished by the confiscation of the whole of their property and by imprisonment for a term of up to five years.*

7. *By enterprises of state importance are meant all enterprises working for defense, or in any way connected with the manufacture of articles necessary for the existence of the masses of the population.*

8. *More detailed rules on workers' control shall be drawn up by the local Soviets of Workers' Deputies and by conferences of factory committees, and also by committees of office employees at general meetings of their representatives.*⁷

With this formulation, the factory committees were satisfied on the essentials, especially since the eighth point, which allowed full initiative, indicated that Lenin had no intention, in contrast to the wishes of Riazonov, to impose control through the government. But, at the same time, the fifth point, by giving the unions the possibility of arbitration, offered them a precious right to review the general activity of the committees.

In short, without wavering on revolutionary principles, Lenin, in this project, was making a political compromise between the factory committees and the unions, which would liberate the initiative of the masses of the workers on the ground who the victory of the revolution rested upon, by way of the fight against sabotage. He did not doubt for a moment that his plan would be approved, minor editorial changes aside, by the *Vtsik* and the *Sovnarkom*.⁸ In fact, the Labor commission accepted it and we don't hear any more mention of it for several days. In the spirit of Lenin, its publication in *Pravda* was tantamount to ratification; it was mostly bereft of official formalities.

On November 4th, speaking to the Soviet of Workers and Soldiers of Petrograd during a reception of delegates of the armies of the front, and apologizing for giving first a quick briefing on the situation of the new government and its tasks, Lenin alludes to the draft decree on workers' control by referring to it like an effective law that the workers should begin carrying out in practice.

"Our fault is that the Soviet organization has not yet learned to govern, and that there are far too many meetings. Let the Soviets form teams and get down to the business of government. Our task is to advance to socialism."

And then in a sort of example of a measure already taken by the government in this sense, Lenin indicates:

"A few days ago the workers received the law on the control of production which makes the factory committee a state institution. The workers must implement this law

immediately. They will supply the peasants with cloth and iron, and the peasants will give them grain. I just saw a comrade from Ivanovo-Voznesensk, and he told me this was the main thing. Socialism means keeping account of everything. You will have socialism if you take stock of every piece of iron and cloth.”

But Lenin had hastily offered this evidence: his text was only considered a draft, and was likely to be amply amended before it became law. The compromise that he proposed between the factory committees and the unions was far from being fully approved, especially by the latter.

Lozovsky, in particular, recalled a little later that he thought a “government project” such as this one “did not go beyond the limits of the activities of the factory committees.”

“It seemed to us,” he said, “that the primary cell of control must act strictly within the limits set by the higher organs of control, while the comrades that were for decentralization of the independent organization of workers’ control and autonomy for the lower organs of control, felt the mass could themselves create the principles of control.”⁹

At the request of the representatives of the unions to the commission of the Labor Commissariat charged with elaborating the decree on workers’ control, Lenin’s draft was ultimately adopted solely as a base for the work of the commission.

It will take nearly two weeks of discussions to achieve a final draft, the representatives of the unions and the factory committees only ceding their respective positions as a result of the arbitration of the delegates of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik party.

How were the observations presented by Lozovsky, acting in the name of the unions, taken into account during the preparation of the final draft?

In a declaration filed in the *Vtsik*, Lozovsky recalled, inter alia:

“The practice of the factory committees taught us that the workers and bosses sometimes arrive at compromises that are detrimental to the overall interests of the proletariat. The interests of one factory or mill can sometimes forget the general interests. This is why the lower organ of control must subordinate their work within the limits fixed by the instructions of the All-Russian Council of Workers’ Control.¹⁰ It is important to say this with absolute clarity so that the workers of each company don’t have the impression that the company belongs to them.”

In one word, what the unions want is for the factory committees to be considered the primary organs of the corresponding union to which, consequently, they would be subordinate. Such a conception would have resulted, if there had been a desire to immediately realize it, by the path of authority, that is to say, from above, in the secession of the most active elements in the workers’ movement. A compromise was necessary in the eyes of the unions themselves, and that of Lenin’s was seen as attractive enough to the factory committees. And it was finally accepted by the commission.

Adopted on November 14th by the *Vtsik*, ratified the following day by *Sovnarkum*, the decree on workers' control appeared at last on the 16th. Lenin's eight initial points had doubled in number and their basic content remained basically the same, but more "complete and precise", as can be seen from the following:

Decree on workers' control¹¹

- 1. In the interest of a plan for the regulation of the national economy, workers' control of production, purchase and sale of products and raw materials, storage, and over business finances, is to be implemented in all the sectors of industry, commerce, banking, agriculture, transport, cooperatives, and all others who employ workers making a salary or doing domestic work.*
- 2. Workers' control is exercised by all workers in a company with the aid of their elected organs: factory committees, council of elders, etc., which also includes equally the representatives of the professional and technical staff.*
- 3. In every major city, in every province or industrial region, there will be created a regional council of workers' control, composed of representatives of the unions, the factory committees and other workers' committees and workers' cooperatives, which will operate like an organ of the soviet of workers, soldiers, and peasants.*
- 4. Pending the convening of a Congress of the Councils of Workers' Control, there will be created in Petrograd an All-Russian Council of Workers' Control, with the participation of the representatives of the following organizations: 5 for the Vtsik, 5 for the All-Russian Council of Unions, 2 for the central workers cooperatives, 5 for the All-Russian Council of Factory Committees, 5 for the associations of the engineers and technicians, 2 for the association of the agronomists, 1 representative of each of the federation of Russian unions for each 100,000 members. 2 representatives of the union council of Petrograd.*
- 5. Within the higher organs of workers' control there will be a commission of inspection using professionals (engineers, accountants, etc) which, on the initiative of these organs or at the demand of the lower organs of workers' control, will verify the financial and technical activity of the enterprise.*
- 6. The organs of workers' control have the right to supervise production, set a production minimum, and take all reasonable steps to determine the cost of producing the products.*
- 7. The organs of workers' control have the right to control the entire commercial communication of the enterprise. In cases of hidden correspondences, owners will be brought before a tribunal. Trade secrets are abolished. The owners are obligated to present to the organs of workers' control all of the books and accounting from the current year and previous years.*
- 8. The decisions of the organs of workers' control are binding on the owners and cannot be revoked but by a decision of a higher body of control.*
- 9. The owner or administrator of the company has the right, within three days, to present to a higher body grievances against any decision taken by a lower organ of workers' control.*
- 10. In all companies, the owners and the representatives of the workers and employees elected to exercise workers' control are accountable to the State for observing the*

strictest order, discipline, and the protection of physical property. Whoever conceals hardware, products, and tools, falsifies accounts or engages in any violation of the law will be punished.

11. The regional councils of workers' control will settle any dispute or controversy between the lower organs of control upon receiving complaints of owners. To this end, they can give instructions on the basis of the particularities of the production in question and the local conditions, taking into account the decisions of the All-Russian Council of Workers' Control. They are entitled to supervise the activity of lower organs of workers' control.

12. The All-Russian Council of Workers' Control develops general plans of workers' control, gives instructions, makes binding decisions, regulates the relations between the regional councils of workers' control and is the highest authority on all matters of workers' control.

13. The All-Russian Council of Workers' Control coordinates the activity of the organs of workers' control with that of the other institutions responsible for organization of the national economy. A special order will be published on the relations between the All-Russian Council of Workers' Control and the other organs that organize and regulate the national economy.

14. All laws and circulars hindering the activity of the factory committees and other committees of workers and employees are repealed.

It appears in this document that the factory committees were set to become, at a later stage, themselves integrated into the trade union organization, constituting a lower echelon of the organizational pyramid of workers' control. Regionally, the delegates of these committees would share their authorities with the representatives of the unions. As in the higher authority, it provided not less than 21 representatives, without counting the delegates of the various union federations, as well as 5 delegates of the "All-Russian Council of Workers' Control."

It might have therefore appeared, with the spokesmen of the factory committees adopting the text of the decree, that the problem had been resolved. It was far from so.

In the same motion as the decree legalizing the existence of an All-Russian Council of Factory Committees, which permitted the organizational pyramid of workers' control, another, necessarily competing, pyramid was also established, based on the cells of the factory committees. Far from simplifying the problem as did the design of the initial draft of Lenin's, the decree engendered a virtual state of dual power between the pyramid of the factory committees and that of official workers' control. We stress *virtual*, for, in effect, if the power of the committees existed in fact, the plan for the decree remained for a longtime a desire.

In truth, the decree of November 14 had been accepted by the delegates of the factory committees as a lip service, and they would soon come to prove it, while those of the unions never concealed their discontent.

“Finally,” confesses Lozovsky, “the decree took shape most appropriately in the interest of the State, but just the same it wasn’t satisfactory to us.”¹²

Just constituted, the All-Russian Council of Workers’ Control was the scene of lively discussion that called into question the pure-and-simple nature of the decree.

“It should be known,” declared the spokesperson of the factory committees, “on what workers’ control will be based and in what manner the lower organs of workers’ control will be instituted. The factory committees believe that control should be the affair of the committee of each enterprise. These committees will then meet in each city, in order to form a central committee for each branch of industry, and then to organize together the coordination in the regional bodies.”

To that the representative of the Bolshevik fraction of the unions, Larin, retorted:

“Workers’ control is not the exclusive affair of the workers in each company, but of the workers of all branches of the industry... The unions represent the interests of the whole class, while the factory committees represent the special interests of their particular enterprise; and they therefore must be subordinate to the unions”

Both sides remained in their positions and the factory committees, masters of the place, naturally rallied to the cause of their leader Jivotov, when he announced, at the same meeting of the All-Russian Council of Workers’ Control, twelve days after the publication of the decree:

“Our homes, the factory committees, are elaborating instructions coming from the bottom to embrace all branches of industry; these are the instructions of the workshop, of life; consequently, they are the sole instructions that can have value. They show of what the factory committees are capable and, for that very reason, they should dominate everything with respect to workers’ control.”¹³

One can see Lenin was far from successful in making his conception of workers’ control dominant. In this regard, he must, with the aid of a handful of companions that he won to his views, tread carefully everywhere, right and left.

Among the opponents of Lenin’s conception of workers’ control, we have three currents represented respectively by the non-Bolshevik leaders of the factory committees, by a certain number of Bolshevik leaders of the unions, and finally, in the very interior of the central committee of the Bolsheviks, by the important faction of the “left communists.”

The problem of the management of the enterprises

Paying little mind to the decree of November 14, the non-Bolshevik members of the All-Russian Council of Factory Committees drafted a *Practical manual for the execution of workers’ control*, which was spread profusely around Petrograd.

In addition to its historical interest, the Manual deserves more examination for, in the extent to which the instructions were implemented, it would provide the Russian workers a painful but precious experience of which all the lessons have not yet been drawn.

The main feature of the *Manual for control* was its work in the capitalist enterprises, in that it deals, in fact, essentially with the workers' management of these enterprises and leads to the identification of control with management.

Now, one need only to study carefully Lenin's project for workers' control to see that there is not the slightest possibility of confusion there between control and management.

It is well specified that the role of the factory committee is to control in totality the activity of the owner, who remains the undisputed proprietor of the company. Is this to say that the owner retains the full exercise of the integral and total rights that compose the general notion of private property? No. Lenin's conception cannot be fully understood if the various measures indicated in his draft are compared to the specific elements corresponding to the general rights of property to which they directly apply.

This draft sets out, firstly, that the workers are empowered with control over the management in the broadest sense of the word, which is to say, both the financial and technical conduct of the enterprise, on the one hand, and on the other, the quantity and quality of production and the 'profits' realized by the entrepreneur. In other words, workers' control is exercised on the rights of *ususfructus*¹⁴ of property. Control of the *usus* [use] in order to prevent sabotage and at the same time have the power to catalogue the quantities of products in anticipation of being able to develop alternative plans and for a plan of production and distribution. Control of *fructus* [benefit] in the way of a possible reduction in the price to limit the profits, or the establishment of a financial tax, following the decision of the central power.

It is only regarding the third element of the right of private property that Lenin envisioned a true "suppression." Article 3 of the draft stipulates, in effect, that it is strictly forbidden for the owner, without authorization of the authorities, to stop or modify the activities of the enterprise. It is a fundamental violation of the right of private ownership to interfere in the ability to "dispose as one may," conferred upon an owner under the general rights of private property.

But it would be a grave error if one thought that these simple restrictions encompassed all of Lenin's views on private property in the means of production. If it is not stated in this very draft, it is precisely because he considered all other limitations other than those indicated to be the result of workers' control exercised in that enterprise.

Here, again, it is important to differentiate carefully the complex notions that management comprises. The exercise of the right of usage/ownership comports, in effect, on the one hand, the fixing of the quality and quantity of production, and on the other hand, the technical and financial direction of manufacturing. By convention and for

simplification, we say the first determination of the right of use/ownership constitutes the *substance*, and the second represents the *form*.

The capitalist system precisely characterized herein as the substance of the right of private use/ownership is, in fact, determined by market forces that, in the last instance, impose on the owner the quality and quantity of its particular production. The necessary relation between the needs of society and capitalist production are driven by the pursuit of profit, thus “anarchically,” by the periodic and sudden momentary fluctuations that form cyclical crises.

In contrast, the objective of the socialist system is to establish a relation between production and the needs of society so that their balance can be maintained at any time without provoking crises of overproduction and unemployment. To achieve this, it is important to substitute the individual pursuit of profit and the blind laws of the market with a system of permanent regulation and *a priori* of production aimed at fulfilling the needs of society. In other words, society must be the direct master of the substance of the rights of use/ownership, which is to determine the quality and quantity of each particular production answering to a need, accounting for the totality of the disposable resources. In short, the rights of use/ownership, as to its substance, are to make private capital *social*. This means that, in each factory, this substance must be determined by the principle function being not the search for the most profit, but of a general plan of production corresponding to the needs of the whole of society.

It is understandable therefore that the mere substitution of the workers of an enterprise for the owner in regards to the exercise of the rights of management of a property *as to its substance*, would be absolutely incapable of carrying out the requirements of a socialized economy. The character of this essential element of ownership is by no means changed if, instead of being an attribute of a single person, it falls to a fraction of society: the factory committee or union, which would decide matters on its own authority.

The problem isn't one of which *people* here enjoy the title of the property, but rather of *use of the property*, otherwise known as production. In this regard, there is only one alternative: ultimately, the necessary relation between production and consumption either in the established, basic function of the search for the greatest profit by the owners of the means of production, or in a result based on the implementation of an established plan.

From the moment that one orients generally on the second term of this alternative and in particular on the establishment of a national plan of production, it follows that the right of usage in its substance must necessarily and exclusively lie with society as a whole.

This is not simply because it was equally urgent to Lenin that he work simultaneously at both projects of workers' control and economic regulation. Regarding the central problem of the abolition of private property in the means of production, one sees how both of these two projects were organically linked to one another by their very functional dependence. The draft of the *Supreme National Economic Council* that corresponds well with Lenin's approach, in effect, addresses this requirement of a plan that should result in

“nationalization” and “socialization” of the substance of the rights of usage/ownership scattered between the multitudes of owners of private property in the means of production in Russia. It makes sure that, solely, the *Supreme National Economic Council* is empowered to determine, to force upon each owner the quality and quantity of production in regard to both the resources of their “private” enterprise and as regards the needs of the rest of society. As for the workers, they would specifically ensure that their owners implemented the directives and the instructions of the S.N.E.C.

Lenin considered, in effect, that, for at least some time, the *formal* exercise of management would be left to the owners and “their” technicians, while the workers were invited to institute the strictest control: nothing more, nothing less.

If, in regard to *substance*, management is less a problem of the actual people who organize production, than it is inversely what defines *formal* management. That is, at the level of large mechanical and scientific production, there is a need for highly-skilled technicians educated by long experience, and a single plan, no matter how amazing, how comprehensive, could not supplant it. These specialists cannot be improvised overnight by a workers’ committee, however revolutionary, however great the desire to be successful and however free the initiative. It is also not excluded, *a priori*, that such technicians can be rallied, before or during the socialist revolution, to the proletarian cause and given full membership in labor organizations.

Unfortunately, as regards the Russia of 1917, we have seen that this was not the case, as much as was needed. Almost all of the leading personnel of the factories and mills – whether the title-holders assuming effective control of their enterprises or the technical directors and the principal engineers – deliberately sat on the other side of the barricade, in the camp of the counter-revolution. On the other hand, the Russian industrial proletariat was still too young and too small to count in its ranks sufficient workers able to take the place of the technicians who provided the direction of their businesses.*

Here we address a fundamental aspect of the Russian revolution, which was the subject of the most serious disagreements between the Bolshevik leaders immediately after taking power, and which, in truth, far from being specifically Russian, will invariably, in different degrees, be of concern to the entire international workers’ movement from the moment the practical organization of a socialist economy is considered.

Formal management is essentially technical: can this be contested? But the historical circumstances within which the workers themselves address this problem appear to be eminently political and social. In other words, the human essence of the socialist revolution consists in this, that the workers see in the owners of the means of production and the technicians that serve them, not humans that also have the capacity required to run businesses, but only masters of the exploitation of man by man.

If the capitalist world is full of fetishism where the relations of man disappear behind that of things, it is precisely in that moment where the laboring masses revolt against this

world, pierce the sacred screen of things in order to attack directly the humans that they had previously known behind the sacrosanct fetish of private property.

From that moment, the capitalist, director, whatever his personal relationship, technically-speaking, with the operation of the enterprise, is nothing more to the workers than the exploiter, the enemy, one they no longer want to do anything but disappear forever from their lives. Ask the workers then to nuance their behavior, to no longer see the old boss in the new technical director, an indispensable specialist (which he would be indeed, all measures being taken to this effect), at a time where the workers have suddenly become aware of their historic role and their social power, to assert their autonomy, in a time where they finally have confidence in themselves, in their own forces – to require the workers to admit their incompetence, their weaknesses, their inadequacy in a domain that is the most sensitive for them since it embraces all of their life since childhood, which is that of production.

That was indeed the tragic and inevitable antinomy engendered in the Leninist conception of workers' control.

Where, in the months that preceded the insurrection, Lenin developed his theories on workers' control by specifying that it was to force the owners and technical staff to participate in production under the control of the workers, some might believe that this program was valid for the period before the taking of power, that it was only dictated by the relative strength of the proletariat and the large industrial bourgeoisie. In short, that this particular conception of workers' control was inspired by considerations exclusively *political* and was only a "tactical formulation."

Similarly, when he insisted, before October, that the watchword of workers' control was always "accompanied or preceded by the dictatorship of the proletariat," some thought and probably still think that for Lenin this was above all for purposes of propaganda and that the "formula" of workers' control only served to make more appealing the dictatorship of the proletariat.

This would be an overall misapprehension, and, what's more, a lack of understanding of Lenin's whole persona. The greatness of this "professional revolutionary" and what confers upon his writing a valuable universal education for the entire workers' movement is that Lenin has nothing of the Machiavellian in him. Socialist and Marxist, having dedicated his whole being to the cause of the freedom of the proletariat, Lenin intended primarily to raise the political consciousness of the workers, giving them the confidence in their selves, to teach with Marx, that "the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself." And all of his written and oral work is inspired from end-to-end with this conviction. His whole watchword is expressed in his wanting to explain concretely, openly, before the workers, in their present consciousness, the revolutionary perspective, lest they be destined to eternally fall. This watchword, Lenin's addressing of the working class and nothing but it, for the sake of its own actions; never attacking his adversary through deceit, through simple cunning; never by having only the

“insiders” knowing what is happening and the masses, outside of the well-informed circles of the party, being left to fend for their selves.

For Lenin, as for Marx, the class struggle is essentially a struggle to be *led by the masses* and not a battle in which some holders-of-the-historical-truth *lead* the masses. The war of revolutionary liberation is distinguished precisely from the wars between the armies of the capitalist oppressors in that the “army” must at all times be fully conscious of the scope and meaning of the battle in which they are engaged. Thus, when Lenin says that workers’ control of the capitalist enterprises, in order to aid the regulation of the national economy by the new proletarian State, will be the principal and most difficult of tasks, it is not a matter of “tactics,” a war ruse intended to make the capitalists believe that the Bolsheviks had no intention, once taking power, of driving them from their businesses; that they may intend to even give the capitalists a wider enjoyment of their property. This is not it at all. This slogan was solely aimed at the workers so that they understood or tried to understand that, in the general conditions of Russia in 1917, due to the relatively low level of technical achievement of the industrial population of Russia, it would be irrational to completely dismiss the assistance of technicians of capitalist production, whether they be owners or not. In this sense, it is possible that, once the proletariat masters political power, the individual capitalists – insofar as they conduct or are capable of effectively conducting, in practice, the production – and the bourgeois technicians could be considered as an integral part of the “economic instrument” which, as against the “instrument of oppression,” neither can nor should be broken.

What Lenin said in regard to the administration of the State, namely that “the first cook or the first worker that comes along” is not necessarily able to immediately undertake every one of its aspects, is no less valid as far as the “administration” of production, of the formal management of an enterprise is concerned. In both of these areas, what is important is that the proletariat begins without delay to receive hands-on training and apprenticeship. The essence, Lenin never tired of repeating, “is to give the oppressed and the workers confidence in their own power.”

That should be the goal of workers’ control in each enterprise: to learn the art of management from the bourgeois technicians to the fullest extent possible, while at the same time conducting the most informative surveillance.

But the Russian owners and technicians, in the first months of the October revolution, preferred, for the most part, to go into hiding rather than be controlled, however they may accept that it was the workers who, owing to their revolutionary zeal, had repugnantly taken control.

Thus the tidy rational “realism” of Lenin was to stumble on the reactionary ideology of some and the revolutionary ideal of others: two very concrete realities that didn’t lack, each in their own way, certain rationality.

But we know that, far from renouncing his conception of workers’ control, Lenin pushed more intensely than ever, firm in his unshakeable confidence in the creative power of the

masses in “acting” towards their own emancipation. He would fight mercilessly for this with the labor leaders and even within the Bolshevik party, which crystallized in theories expressing all of the elements in the inevitable overflowing of the sea of the Russian revolution.

The non-Bolshevik manual of workers' control

In the first place, it was important to fight against the “workerist” conception of the famous *Practical manual for the execution of workers' control* established by the non-Bolshevik leaders of the All-Russian Council of Factory Committees.

This manual includes a short introduction – a sort of explanatory memorandum—and a series of concrete measures forming an action program for the factory committees. We will examine these measures first and foremost.

Each factory committee would create 4 “control committees” in which each of the committee members were “authorized to invite those technicians chosen from the staff, with a consultative voice.”

Two of these oversight committees would be in charge of, first, organizing production, and second, transforming war production into peacetime production. The two other committees had the task of organizing the supervision, one of the raw materials, the other of the fuels.

This general scheme being established, the *Manual* prescribes to each of these committees a series of practical instructions which defined in details their specific functions.

Both committees related to supervision were to “fight against sabotage”, and in this respect, the tasks assigned to them in the *Manual* are essentially functions of control and census-taking, much like Lenin envisioned.

Regarding the raw materials, the workers' committee shall develop an inventory of all the stocks at the disposal of the enterprise, monitor all inflows and outflows for each workshop, check each order, delegate one of its members to the arrival station of the raw materials, provide advice on the necessity of reducing the consumption of a material or of replacing another, setting the essential quota for the continued operation of the enterprise, etc.

Similar functions, and others detailed, are assigned to the committee of fuels.

But workers' control should not be limited to the verification of raw materials and fuels: it applies no less rigorously to their employment in the process of production, in other words, to the entire manufacturing process, from their delivery to the finished product.

In this sense, the committee charged with controlling the production itself is by far the most important, but it also raises more controversial problems within the labor organizations. Here the lack of a clear conception of the needs of a socialized economy almost inevitably leads to a confusion of grave consequence between workers' *control* and workers' *management*. It suffices to just examine the series of tasks assigned in the Manual to the committee for supervising the organization of production to see this.

This committee, according to our *Manual*, is mandated "to establish connection between the different departments of the factory"; to check "the technical state of the equipment"; to examine the "rate of exploitation"; to give advice on "management deficiencies"; to fix "the number of workshops, workers, machine and building utilization, the interest on capital, the salaries of the entire personnel from the directors to the workers and other employees." Additionally, this same committee must deal with the "financial aspect" of the enterprise.

Thus, under the guise of control, this committee is, in fact, charged with assuming the functions that, in all enterprises, encompasses that of general direction. In other words, the committee assumes the overall management, both in determining its substance and its formal exercise. And the capitalists are supposed to remain the owners of the means of production, leading consequently, in each enterprise, to a system of collegial and joint co-management.

That is indeed the intent of the *Manual*, which specifies in its introduction that "the workers' control over industry, as an indivisible part of control over the entire life of the economy of the country, should not be considered in the narrow sense of a reform, but in the grandest sense of *revolutionary intervention*." And the authors formulated it thus: *control presupposes management of production* (i.e., the prerequisite of control is management).

We note here the importance of spelling out exactly what is meant by *management*.

1) Is it the *substance*, that is to say, the determination of the type and quantity of production in each enterprise? Of this, "the management" that "presupposes" workers' control cannot be the transfer of the powers of capitalist property to the entire working class: this is in view of establishing a general plan of production responding to the needs of the entire society and whose implementation would be mandatory for each owner according to their own production capacity. In this case, the workers' committee, after having verified the accuracy of the information furnished by the owner or the administrators regarding the particular manufacturing potential, have the task of overseeing the execution of the relevant directives issued, for example, according to the plan of a *national or regional workers' committee*.

Considered in its essence, management is *taking care* of the entire working class in its totality and universal control by the workers of each private enterprise. But it should be more precise still. When the authors of the *Manual* believe they are preventing criticism of separatism and particularization (decentralized federation) in announcing that they

intend to group the factory committees in regional federations and in an All-Russian union, they come close to the question. It is not, as regards the substance of management, a matter of harmonizing the factory committees, but primarily to account for all the economic forces at the disposal of the country, that it is necessary to establish a plan for national production.

The accounting that consists of the sum of the information provided by the countless factory committees, which will be the prerequisite of a general plan of production, does not exhaust the requirements. The problem in the second place is the application of the known disposable resources so as to satisfy the collective needs as measured and classified in order of urgency. However, it is obvious that the factory committees, even gathered at the national level, are not in a position to know all the needs of society—which includes not only industrial workers—or to determine a scale of priorities. These are the tasks of special organizations which can collaborate with the delegates of the factory committees, but must also equally represent the input of the other categories of the population and their different professional organizations, social, familial, cultural, etc., including the factory committees which only constitute one of these.

The foregoing is true not only for the tasks conferred by the *Manual* to the committee for the organization of production, but equally if not more so for those assigned to the reconversion of the factories from war production to peacetime production.

2) Is it, on the contrary, the *formal* exercise of management, of the administrative direction of the production in each enterprise? In this case, we see that the postulate “control presupposes management” confuses the two functions of control and formal management. These two functions that are exercised at the same level, within the enterprise, the *Manual*, however, in the measure that it seeks differentiation, assigns the one and the other to the same workers’ committee. Thus, this committee is invited to supervise itself, which is strictly speaking absurd.

But perhaps our authors, though they do not specify it, consider the control itself as more a matter of the so-called supervisory committees, while the committees of organization and reconversion of production were to realize, themselves, the *revolutionary intervention* underscored in the introduction of the *Manual*?

Revolutionary intervention, we have seen, which is manifested in a form of collegial management, part-capitalist, part-worker.

Yet, such a sharing of the formal management of an enterprise, regardless of other considerations, raises two unanswered questions of differing nature, one political, and the other purely technical.

If we assume that the workers, through their factory committee, are effectively able to take care of the formal management, one cannot see how they would be content to share management with the old bosses or capitalist directors, if not for political reasons. But if this is so, than it means that the victorious revolution—since the *Manual* is released after

the October revolution—has not yet fully eliminated the capitalist power and so a certain compromise should be concluded with them in the form of the introduction of a sort of “constitutional monarchy” within each enterprise. The boss would remain the king of his factory, but would be subjected to the growing revolutionary intervention of the parliament and ministers represented by the workers themselves and their delegates.

Such a picture of the Russian revolution after October, of which the two dominant features are the technical maturity of the industrial proletariat and the ability of the Russian bourgeoisie to force the Bolsheviks into the compromise in question couldn’t be more false: it was precisely an inverse relationship of these two factors that characterized reality.

We know most certainly that if Lenin was not of the opinion, immediately after taking power, nor in the following months, that it was possible to definitively and totally abolish capitalist private property in the means of production, it is not at all for political reasons. It is not even remotely as a result of the need to conclude a political compromise with Russia’s big industrial bourgeoisie—which would, in fact, signify the irrevocable failure of the proletarian revolution—but only for reasons exclusively owing to the insufficient technical-industrial maturity of the Russian proletariat and the absence of economic experts recently won over to the revolutionary socialist cause. All that could be envisioned, as a first step, was to “nationalize” immediately the *substance* of capitalist management, regulate the private right of sale of property, and place under workers’ control the exercise of *formal* management temporarily left in the hands of the bourgeoisie.

Almost every place the workers’ committees, encouraged by the *Manual*, had actually implemented a revolutionary intervention into the formal management of the enterprise, we see that this produced catastrophic results, and our authors would ultimately end up acknowledging this. Without a doubt they had somewhat of a premonition of this in “authorizing” the factory committees to surround themselves with technical advisors “chosen from the staff.” But was this not therefore a concession that the Russian workers, for the most part, couldn’t of themselves assume this function and that their presence within a system of joint, worker-boss management, either would be rendered impracticable in the long-run or would end up being reduced to the simple right to inspect and control the activities of the chief managers, that is to say, a control of management precisely the same as that understood by Lenin?

The most qualified of the Russian workers would have enough to do in taking care of the vital enterprises deserted by their owners or where the management persisted in sabotaging the directives of the new proletarian power, and would therefore be needed most in attending to such properties thusly proclaimed nationalized. But, in addition, a problem would arise that the authors of the *Manual* thought they had resolved once and for all.

In these enterprises, without private owners, without “bosses,” was it certain that the most efficient formal management, the most sound in terms of the interests of the entire

working class, should be exercised by a *joint-collegial committee* in preference to a *singular-uniform committee*? This question had equally caused great controversy within the Russian workers' organizations, which lasted several years before it had entirely abandoned the principle of joint management.

3) Finally, the solution of the problem of formal management nevertheless leaves unresolved the question of workers' control, in the extent that there is agreement on the need to carefully distinguish, according to their respective natures, the different functions that govern the general course of the entire enterprise in a socialized economy or in the process of socialization. It thus appears that the concept of workers' control covers a broader content, of an historical nature, which continues to develop, of the different responses needed at each step in the workers' movement, in the phase of preparation for revolution, as in the aftermath of the takeover of power, as in the organization of the socialized economy; that is, to the specific requirements of each of these periods.

Many of the problems of the Russian revolution of which we can learn are most valuable to us because, before being convinced of the correctness of any particular solution, whether it had been advocated by Lenin or by someone else, the Russian workers experimented with them all, and each has been the subject of passionate, free discussions: experience and discussions without which the march to socialism, insofar as the emancipation of the workers must be done by themselves, would remain a phrase emptied of meaning and life.

The truth is that the leaders of the Central Council of the Factory Committees were not the only ones to take it upon themselves to give directions for the implementation of workers' control. Almost all of the other workers' organizations, immediately after the publication of the decree of November 14th, made it their duty to establish their own "manuals" of practical guidelines.

In Moscow, in Samara, the Urals and elsewhere, the textile workers' unions, the steelworkers, the miners, the tailors, gave to themselves instructions for the implementation of workers' control in their particular professions, taking into account the local situation and especially the attitude of their respective employers. Hence, naturally, the grandest diversity in the measures recommended, since the range of control was from more or less passive all the way to the most complete revolutionary intervention, but all reflecting a desire to completely eliminate the capitalists from production, gradually, according to some, more quickly, according to others, practically immediately, according to still others.

Such diversity was in many ways inevitable. On the one hand, no real experience of workers' control, either in Russia or elsewhere, could be invoked as a basis for comparison. Innovation was required all along the line. On the other hand, the slogan of workers' control, even in the aftermath of the uprising, had lost none of its fighting, revolutionary-agitational character. In the weeks that followed the publication of the decree of November 14th, one can identify a series of proclamations emanating from Russian employers' organizations, in industry and trade, which threatened to "close the

enterprises in which the workers demanded the introduction of workers' control," as was also declared, on November 22nd, in a resolution of the union of millers and manufacturers of Petrograd. Identical resolutions were drafted by the union of industrialists in the Don basin, by the congress of mine owners of the Urals, etc.¹⁵ . . . In brief, it was necessary to immediately proceed with a few nationalizations through outright seizure, just as Lenin had foreseen the necessity of doing, for purposes of sending a warning or carrying out political repression.

But, in some places, the workers did not wait for an official decree of confiscation to be enacted for them to pronounce the nationalization of their enterprises. However, this phenomenon of "nationalization from below" was still very rare during the first three months of the revolution. Sometimes, the workers' committees, after ousting the directors and taking possession of the general direction, asked them to return after several weeks of unfruitful experimentation with joint-collegial management. A number of factories, Lozovsky relates, had to close their doors, the deficit becoming too large as a result of the management by the committees.

Elsewhere, the intervention of the committees of formal management resulted in the loss of the few technicians who hadn't participated in the sabotage or theft of the supplies lent by the private banks.

Cases are also mentioned where the factory committees did not hesitate to sell a part of the machinery in order to buy raw materials. As well, on their own authority, the committees requisitioned wagons and goods, or engaged in financial operations, on behalf of the factory where they had taken "control" . . .

One could multiply the examples of these failures and mistakes that constituted the price of apprenticeship paid by the Russian workers to whom, as such, the international socialist movement owes an invaluable debt.

Let us remember, however, for this pertains to the history and informs certain lessons of the grand debate of October, that during the months of November, December and a part of January, according to the testimony of Philips Price, a state very near that of anarchy reigned in the industries of northern Russia.

"The factory committees were acting on their own initiative and tried to solve only the problems of production and distribution that they considered the most urgent in the moment and in their immediate location . . . The enterprises were transformed so to speak into anarchist communities."¹⁶

The Bolsheviks of all tendencies did not fail to react to such interpretations of workers' control, which could only perpetuate, and accentuate, the chaos where it was to be found in production. With urgency, the new All-Russian Council of Workers' Control took the necessary steps and drafted a sort of counter-manual. The task was entrusted to a commission composed of representatives of *Vtsik*, the central council of unions and the

economic section of the Moscow Soviet, among which included the names of the Bolshevik leaders Milioutin, Larin, Antipov and Smidovitch.

The “Counter-Manual”

On December 13, *Izvestia* published ‘*General instructions on workers’ control established in accordance with the decree of November 14,*’ which was submitted to the next plenary session of the All-Russian Council of Workers’ Control.

This document, which contains no less than twenty-four articles, was of crucial importance. Not only did it contain the most elaborated of Lenin’s theses on workers’ control that we know of, but it also clarifies certain key aspects of Lenin’s conception on economic organization in the first stage of the transitional phase from capitalist economy to socialist economy.

The first four articles specify the forms of organization of workers’ control within each enterprise.

A special control commission is to be elected that can be composed in part by all of the members of the factory committee but which, in important enterprises, must include representatives of the employees and if possible the technicians. Equally, in the most important enterprises, a part of the control commission should be elected by the various trades that contribute to the given enterprise.

The control commission is responsible for the activity of both the general assembly of the staff of the enterprise and the higher body of workers’ control on which it depends.

In a second part, which includes five articles, the document sets out in detail the obligations and rights of the control commission with particular emphasis on the respective rights of the commission and the property owner.

The tasks of the commission are divided among the following twelve points contained in article 5.

Art. 5 – The commission of control in each enterprise is required to:

- 1) Determine the inventory of goods and fuels that are possessed by the enterprise and how much it needs, the tools used in production, the technical personnel and the special skills necessary;*
- 2) Determine how much of the company is equipped with everything it needs to ensure its normal operation;*
- 3) Predict whether the enterprise is threatened with a stoppage or decrease in production, and for what reasons;*
- 4) Determine the number of workers, by specialty, and the quantity of equipment that may be lacking, based on the stocks of fuels and raw materials in reserve and to be received;*

- 5) *Determine the measures to take in order to maintain workers' discipline over the workers and the employees;*
- 6) *Monitor the implementation of the decisions of the governmental bodies regulating the purchase and sale of goods;*
- 7) *Oppose the arbitrary removal of machinery, raw materials and fuels, etc., of the company without authorization by the higher organs of economic activity and ensure the conservation of inventories in their entirety;*
- 8) *Help to clarify the causes that reduce production and take remedial steps;*
- 9) *Participate in exploring the possibilities of full or partial use of the enterprise for miscellaneous production (particularly for moving from war production to peacetime production and in what measure), determine what changes to this end would need to be made by way of the equipment of the enterprise and the size of the staff, as well as the estimated time in which these modifications could be realized;*
- 10) *Participate in exploring the possibilities of developing the work for the needs of peacetime, by working in three shifts or by any other means, by arranging supplementary housing for the workers and their families;*
- 11) *Ensure that the enterprise's production remains in proportions which are fixed by the directing governmental bodies and until this proportion is fixed, within the limits of the normal capacity of the enterprise, propose a base level for thorough work;*
- 12) *Assist in the establishment of the total cost of the enterprise, at the invitation of the higher organ of workers' control or the institutions of the central government.*

It is clear that in these twelve points, in the whole as well as in the detail, the task of the control commission is essentially that of *control*. And the points 6, 7 and 11 specify that, insofar as the commission intervenes in the overall management of the enterprise, it is to monitor the execution of the central directions of the government organs specially charged with regulating the economic activity at the national level.

It is within the framework of these twelve points that the decisions of the control commission are binding on the entrepreneur-owner or those representatives assuming the effective direction of the enterprise, the formal management.

In regard to financial questions, the control commission is simply authorized to examine the business correspondence, the past and present balance-sheets and to attend, for information, the management meetings at which it is entitled to request all desirable details as well as to present its own observations.

In this regard, article 8 specifies that *the control commission is not to concern itself with the financial questions of the enterprise. If these issues arise, they are transmitted to the institutions of the central government.*

The instructions are clear: the control commission is in no way responsible for the formal management of the enterprise. Here is the text of the article concerning this essential point:

Art. 7 – The right to give orders in the management of the company, its market and its operation, is that of the owner. The control commission is not to be involved in the management of the enterprise and has no responsibility for its operation. This responsibility continues to lie with the owner.

So again, the control commission is definitely not authorized to seize for itself the role of chief manager of the enterprise. Article 9 of the instructions is less clear in this regard:

Art. 9 – The control commission of each enterprise may, through the intermediary of the higher organ of workers' control, raise before the central governmental institutions the question of seizing an enterprise or other coercive measures against the enterprise, but it has not right to take over its direction.

In a final section, devoted to the higher organs of workers' control, the instructions of December mark a new success for the argument of the unions against the partisans of the autonomy of the factory committees. One finds, in fact, in the instructions, the following fundamental article:

Art. 14 – The control commission of each enterprise constitutes the executive organ of the control commission of distribution of the trade union in the branch of industry to which it belongs and it is required to align its activity with the decisions of the latter.

Thus is initiated the redesign envisioned by the Bolshevik trade unionists and which consists in making the factory committee the primary building-block of the trade union organization. The latter, which is built vertically, provides for the grouping of the workers of all the trades contributing to the production of a finished product in a particular industry into a *unique professional union* representing the general interests of this industry beyond the particular interests of each of the trades it is comprised of. This does not mean that the interests of each trade will be ignored since they are all specifically represented on the control commission of each enterprise of any importance.

Article 14 of the instructions of December, making the control commission of each enterprise the executive organ of the commission of control and distribution of the trade union, is well designed as a step that will make these 'executive organs' the very foundations of the unions.

It is anticipated, on the other hand, in the instructions (art. 12) that at least half of the members of the commission of control and distribution of the trade union will be elected by the commissions of all of the enterprises in the corresponding branch of industry. The other half being the management or the delegates or the general assembly of the trade union, so that it could incorporate the engineers, statisticians or all other qualified people considered useful by the commission.

The part of the instructions relative to the functions of the commission of control and distribution instituted by each trade union is not in the least unimportant. One finds the

first indications on the role of the unions in the organization of the national economic life in the phase of the transition from capitalism to socialism.

In this regard, it is important to note that the publication of these instructions took place a week after the publication of the decree establishing the *Supreme National Economic Council*. And a study of these two texts shows that they involve the same general design and complement each other. We see that, if at a lower level in the stages of production, the control commission of the enterprise constitutes the executive organ of the commission of control of the corresponding trade union, this last commission in turn becomes the executive organ par excellence of the Supreme National Economic Council.

As for the All-Russian Council of Workers' Control, its composition remains the same as in the decree of November 14; the December instructions indicate however (art. 22) that it "can charge the all-Russian or regional trade union of any branch of industry to form an all-Russian or regional commission of control and distribution for that branch of industry."

The functions of these higher commissions are the following:

Art. 16 – The commission of control and distribution can help each enterprise within its jurisdiction to procure fuel, raw materials, and equipment according to its needs by drawing on the reserves of other enterprises of the same industry, whether they are active or idle. If there is no other way, the commission can petition the central governmental institutions to reduce the number of enterprises and support them, either by transferring the workers and employees of enterprises momentarily or permanently closed to active enterprises of the same type of production, or any other measures likely to prevent the closure or shutdown of enterprises and of assuring their regular function according to the plans and the decisions of the directing governmental organs.¹⁷

In a note annexed to this article, it is stated that the industrial commission can, according to its specialty, issue technical instructions for the commissions of an enterprise of their branch, provided they are not in contradiction to existing regulations.

It also specifies that the control commissions of industry can constitute around themselves councils of experts, of diverse specialists, and establish regulations of mandatory workers' discipline for the enterprises under their jurisdiction.

Finally, it is stressed that all the decisions of the industrial commission, approved in advance by the All-Russian Council of Workers' Control are binding for both the enterprise commissions as well as for all the workers and owners of that industry.

But, as we have seen, these instructions were not readily followed by the factory committees, despite the best efforts of the unions. No significant change could be realized in this area as long as the organization of the factory committees inclined towards replacing the union organization within the enterprises as well as at the regional and national level. This question, it is worth noting, will be the focus of debates at the first

All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions that would be held in January 1918, two months after the publication of the decree on workers' control.

The Left Bolsheviks¹⁸ and workers' control

Sticking to the classic scheme of the socialist doctrine, many Bolsheviks, including some of the best and closest collaborators of Lenin, saw in workers' control a revolutionary-agitation slogan, plainly justified under Kerensky, but "passé" since the October insurrection.

For them—who would soon be condemning Lenin as "rightist" and who would earn the appellation "left communists"—there could be no intermediary stage. The October revolution must, to be truly socialist and proletarian, realize immediately the complete abolition of private property in the means of production and therefore declare the total socialization of the latter via pure and simple confiscation. In so doing, workers' control *ipso facto* loses its whole *raison d'être*: thanks to the revolution, it becomes possible to pass directly from "workers' control" to "workers' management" through the intermediary of a central organ of regulation for the entire socialized national economy.

The diversion from this path in favor of any half-measures, would lead to utter failure. And these "left communists" would precisely offer as evidence of this the "failure" of the decree on workers' control of the 14th of November 1917.

"The decree on workers' control," wrote L. Kritzmann, one of the best theoreticians and practitioners of "left communism," "proved to be a half-measure and hence unfeasible. As a slogan, workers' control signifies the growing power but also the lingering weaknesses of the proletariat; in other words, it is an expression of the weaknesses not yet surmounted by the workers' movement. The owner was not prepared to lead his enterprise for the sole purpose of having the workers learn how to manage it (for this was the secret object of workers' control after the October revolution). Conversely, the workers only felt hatred for the capitalists and they weren't much disposed to voluntarily remain the object of their exploitation. This is why matters were forced, despite any sufficient preparation, towards letting the workers take over management even where, at least in name, what existed was only workers' control."¹⁹

As regards the politico-psychological aspect of the problem, we have seen that the Leninist conception of workers' control does not allow itself to reconcile a certain antinomy. How to expect the capitalists to willingly teach their "gravediggers"? But wasn't one of the *raisons d'être* of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" to compel and coerce reluctant capitalists?

As for the anticapitalist "hate" of the workers manifested at the location of the management of the enterprises, the embodiment of the abhorred regime, it is part of the revolutionary sentiment without which all possible emancipation would be unthinkable. But is it not the role of the revolutionary workers' organizations to help transmute this

spontaneous and anarchical hatred into energy capable of channeling and moving itself towards a goal not only sentimental, but consciously and voluntarily deliberate?

The argument of Kritzmann, however, contains two other essential points.

He sees, *first*, in workers' control, a "half-measure" as opposed to a full measure that would be the socialization of the means of production and subsequent workers' management. And, *second*, he warns of the "insufficient preparation" of the Russian proletariat in the matter of management.

This dual observation offers a judgment in favor of only one alternative. Either the October revolution could not solve the problems of socialist economic organization, or one of the two assumed "observations", at least in part, must be incorrect.

1) In an instance, in effect, of the seeming insufficient technical preparedness of the Russian proletariat, how are we to conceive that the total eviction of the capitalist owners implied in the expropriation of the means of production, can suddenly, as if by a magic wand, provide the workers with the indispensable knowledge for the comprehensive management of a unit of production?

Is it not precisely because of this weakness that "workers' control" was indispensable, even inevitable after the conquest of power? But does it follow then that the revolution of October must have lost its double character as proletarian and socialist? Facing the proletariat, the uncontested master of the political power, the Russian capitalists had no other choice: to submit their enterprise to workers' control or resign. And, in the latter case, they were going to be met with the confiscation provided as the just *sanction* conferred by the decree of November now in full effect. Under these conditions, workers' control could only fail with the proletarian revolution itself: such a failure would mean that the political power of the proletariat proved unable to break the politico-economic resistance of the bourgeoisie.

In truth, the impasse that Kritzmann comes to is a product of his acceptance as a premise the idea that the revolution is only socialist if it abolished entirely and all at once private property in the means of production. We have seen how Lenin discussed this argument, and it is unnecessary to restate it here. It is necessary, in contrast, to highlight the confusion introduced by Kritzmann and his political friends, viz., workers' control, between the political problems and the economic questions: confusion that is found to originate from their view that post-revolutionary workers' control is deemed a "half-measure."

2) "According to the slogan," say Kritzmann, "workers' control signifies the increasing power, but also the insufficiencies of the proletariat, in other words, it is an expression of a weakness not yet overcome by the workers' movement."

By giving the slogan of workers' control an exclusively political value, Kritzmann deliberately ignores the content that it was given by Lenin. It would matter little, if they

agreed on the objective of this slogan, that Kritzmann did not share the definition given by Lenin. But it was not, in this case, a debate over semantics: the divergence is well on target. In regard to the same slogan, Kritzmann and Lenin suggest, in truth, two different phenomena. The mistake, for the uninformed observer, is all the easier to make because the phenomenon considered by Kritzmann, when he spoke of workers' control, effectively exists in the picture painted by Lenin: it is however important to note that, in the latter, the phenomenon in question covers only a fragment of the canvas.

Thus, when the "left communists" argue that workers' control is only a "half-measure", this judgment, far from concerning the results expected by Lenin, is more inspired by the definition they themselves offer.

If workers' control could not and should not be expressed, as Kritzmann held, it would certainly be a "half-measure", one of those half-measures that Lenin was the first to denounce in April 1917. All the difference resides, in fact, in their fundamental disagreement about the immediately realizable possibilities of the October revolution.

The "left communists" have only wanted to see in the slogan of workers' control its initial political aspect of which it essentially was between the two revolutions of February and October 1917. During this period, it is true that workers' control, or more accurately the extent to which the Russian workers managed to impose it on the owners, had offered one of the best indicators of the balance of power between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie *on the political plane*. From that time, Lenin never tired of pointing out that as long as all the political power did not belong to the workers, it would be futile to expect workers' control to achieve decisive and lasting realization *on the economic plane*.

Prior to October, in the words of Kritzmann, workers' control "expressed" with certainty the growing *political* power of the Russian proletariat, which was real, but still insufficient. But at the same time, and this is what Kritzmann overlooks, workers' control illuminates the *economic* power of the Russian proletariat, just as its *potential* continues to grow. And it is precisely due to this potential, of workers' control becoming a reality on the economic plane, that the proletariat should therefore necessarily assume its political supremacy by conquering power.

While the struggle for workers' control, before October, had been used to *indicate* the maturity of the workers' movement on the political plane, it would be absurd to conclude that the slogan of workers' control had no specific objective, even if this objective could only be achieved after the seizure of power.

This is also why the definition of workers' control given by Kritzmann – which would have had a semblance of merit before October – was now completely wrong on the day after the Russian proletariat takes power. How can it be claimed, in effect, at that time, that workers' control "expressed the weakness not yet overcome by the workers' movement"?

Workers' control no more *expressed* directly, before October, the political power of the proletariat only as an *indicator*, any more than it *expressed*, after the revolution, the reversal of the balance of forces between the proletariat and the capitalist class. This reversal is characterized by the seizure of power by the Bolshevik party and this is not identified in any way with workers' control as conceived by Lenin in the first phase of the post-revolutionary period.

What the slogan of workers' control highlighted in Russia, in November 1917, is validly a "weakness not yet overcome," not of the political wherewithal of the Russian working class in power, but essentially of the degree of industrial and technical development of the Russian proletariat.

And it is because of this specific weakness that "matters were forced," not, as asserted by Kritzmann, by "letting the workers take over management even where, at least in name, what existed was only workers' control," but by sticking precisely to the slogan of workers' control, thus making it much easier to immediately declare the abolition of private property in the means of production, if only in the most vital industries. It was, ultimately, much easier to seize power in an empire in decline, than to establish a new social and economic system without precedent in the world.

One finds in another prominent "left communist", N. Ossinsky – who held at this time, we shall see, one of the most important positions in the soviet economic organization – a definition of workers' control which, unlike that of Kritzmann, puts much emphasis on its technical-economic character, but in order to better demonstrate how it was impracticable.

"Originally, workers' control," writes Ossinsky²⁰, "aimed at the custody of the owners of the means of production by the proletariat.

"This custody is distinguished from ordinary custody in that, in the 'minority' period, they [the owners] are not the 'pupils,' but the 'tutors' who have learned to administer. Such custody was introduced by the decree of November 14 under the slogan of 'workers' control'."

However, with the development of the revolution, this control, instead of sticking to the guidelines contained in the decree and in the instructions, was increasingly applied to the proletariat's own activity: control transformed into management.

"The destiny of the slogan of workers' control is therefore of great interest. Born of the desire to unmask the adversary, it suffered a fiasco when it tried to transform itself into a system. To the extent that, despite everything, it was realized, its content became quite different from what was originally intended: it took, in fact, the form of a decentralized dictatorship, of the custody of capitalists taken in isolation by diverse workers' organizations acting independently of each other. And it is precisely at this moment, when workers' control appeared openly in these traits, that some attempted to define and justify it as a system of control."

“Thus developed in the Russian working class not only the tendencies of ‘separatism’ and ‘syndicalism,’ but even ‘petty-bourgeois conceptions of the property of the enterprises’.”

Most of these observations are indisputable and do not belong exclusively to the “left communists.” But they wanted to see it as the inevitable consequence of the Leninist conception of workers’ control – the irrevocable proof of its impossible viability.

The common life of the “pupils” and the “tutors,” Ossinsky stressed, is becoming increasingly unbearable: the diarchy of the owner and the workers leads to the failure of the enterprise and quickly transforms into a singular power of the workers without having received any authorization to this effect from the government . . . Here we find the general reasoning of the “left communists,” as already noted in Kritzmann.

One could, certainly, hold forth endlessly in debate in order to try to find out if it would not have been preferable to have a highly random form of workers’ control, liquidating all the capitalist owners, left to poorly manage an economy only socialized on paper, but that would have satisfied the pride of the workers and the doctrinal requirements of the “left communists”? Unless one concludes with Rosa Luxembourg that “the problem could only be posed: it could not be solved in Russia”?

Nevertheless, “left communists” and partisans of Lenin were at least in agreement on this point: the problem *should* be resolved in one manner or another; they should at all costs, like the communards of ‘71, “storm the heavens.” But precisely, could the experience of the Paris Commune not, equally on the economic plane, shed some light on Russia?

Even then, Marx saw that the *political domination of the producer cannot co-exist with the extension of his social slavery*. And this is why, *the Commune was therefore used as a lever for uprooting the economic foundations upon which rested the existence of classes and hence their domination*.

One of the great merits of the Commune, Marx tells us, is that it “proposed to abolish that class property . . . by transforming the means of production, the earth and the capital, which now are mostly used to enslave and exploit the worker, into the mere instruments of free labor and association.” The author in *Capital* went on to state that it would *regulate national production according to a common plan under the control of the associated workers*.

If we are confined to the above references of Marx’s on the Commune, the impression would be that the “left communists” had at least the teachings of the master on their side. But soon after we find in Marx these lines that one need only meditate on:

The working class did not expect miracles from the Commune. They have no ready-made utopias to introduce by decree to the people. They know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending by its own economical agencies, they will have to pass through long

*struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men. They have no ideals to realize, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant.*²¹

If we compare these texts to the attitude of Lenin in the first months of the October revolution – and we know how much he was inspired by the experience of the Commune and Marx’s unequalled analysis that brought it to life – the only conclusion is that the author of *State and Revolution* is to be found entirely in the revolutionary Marxist tradition, while our “left communists,” desiring to echo the workers’ *aspirations*, inclined to the side of those still waiting for ‘miracles’ and aimed to realize an “ideal” via “decree to the people.”

Breaking the oppressive apparatus of the capitalist state and identifying the elements of the new society that the old bourgeois society carries within it; of these two Marxist teachings drawn from the experience of the Paris Commune, do we not find in Lenin application of this experience to the October revolution? But could anyone argue that Lenin envisioned so little as to have the dictatorship of the proletariat coexist with the prolongation of economic exploitation by the capitalist owner?

Workers’ control, defined by the decree of November 14th and clarified by the instructions of December – which, again, constituted neither a final goal nor the only measure intended to destroy in the shortest time possible the economic supremacy of the Russian big bourgeoisie – precisely rendered impossible any further exploitation of workers by their bosses. Overnight, the workers, via the factory committees, the unions, the soviets and the workers’ government had full discretion to set their wages and to limit the income of the capitalists to that of a technician, to determine the work rules within each workshop and to create a new industrial and social legislation in the exclusive interest of the proletariat. By deliberately ignoring this²², the ‘left communists’ were showing the signs of the worst workerist illusions, which they were also unwittingly reinforcing. As such and insofar as they exercised a considerable influence on the Russian workers’ organizations, are not the “left communists” partly responsible when the workers, under the guise of control, take over the management for which they were not prepared, in order to proceed shortly thereafter in a manner no less anarchical than the famous “nationalizations from below”?

“There is not a person to affirm,” wrote Kritzmann, “that the Russian revolution was artificial. It was more of an elemental process. This elemental overthrowing of the power of the bourgeoisie by the will of the proletariat, which no force could restrain, is expressed in the chaotic liquidation of the owners and the possessions of the plants. The consequence was obviously the destruction of old economic relations and, not infrequently, the shuttering of the enterprise. Workers’ management, especially one that is instituted at the base, locally, often proved incapable of running the enterprise, as this ability can only be acquired with practice.”²³

Is it not to voluntarily delude oneself to believe that the mere publication of a decree on the general confiscation of the means of production would have sufficed to remedy the

anarchy that reigned in the takeover of factories by the workers' committees? Such a decree would have only served to precipitate the "elemental process", without correcting the "errors" that were inevitable given the insufficient maturity. It is definitely not by decrees that one could hope to raise the technical-economic level of the masses, any more than they can be invited to realize overnight the maximum program that constitutes the organization of a socialist economy.

"When we were accused," recalled Lenin, "of breaking up production into separate departments by introducing workers' control, we brushed aside this nonsense. In introducing workers' control, we knew that it would take much time before it spread to the whole of Russia, but we wanted to show that we recognize only one road — changes from below; we wanted the workers themselves, from below, to draw up the new, basic economic principles. Much time will be required for this."²⁴

The least that can be said about the "left communists" is that they misunderstood the *time* factor in their conception of the socialist revolution; they seem to have forgotten that the materialist dialectic remains an abstraction if one excludes any notion of evolution.

This is in some ways the inverse phenomenon of that which we will see in regards to the discussion on workers' control among certain Bolshevik syndicalists.

The conception of the Bolshevik syndicalists

The Bolsheviks situated at the head of the unions and who, therefore, were in close contact with the Russian working class on the field of production, had a more concrete, more objective view of the organizational possibilities of the economic life of the workers and, ultimately, themselves. So they were far from sharing the views of a certain number of their comrades in the party's central committee, inclined to observe the reality of what was made out to be their alleged doctrinal intransigence.

Lozovsky, secretary general of the All-Russian Council of Unions, could hardly have any illusions about the practical results of a general socialization-by-decrees. On this crucial point, he was in complete agreement with Lenin. "Socialism," wrote Lozovsky, "can't be built in a few weeks or in a few months; it will require many years, if not decades. It is not possible with a stroke of the pen to abolish private property in the means of production, but to significantly limit the rights of private property in the means of production and exchange. Workers' control represents the indispensable transitional stage on the path to the socialization of production."²⁵

The Bolsheviks of the unions were also the first to confound their party comrades who they called "left communists." However, besides the reasons cited, such as the lack of general economic development in Russia, to demonstrate that any attempt at immediate socialization would lead to disaster, the Bolshevik syndicalists advanced a series of arguments that did nothing but call into question the very essence of the October revolution and hence the nature of the transitional system that it had inaugurated.

Lozovsky, noting the impossibility of realizing socialism at the outset, deduced that the October revolution retained the “bourgeois-democratic” character that had marked the February revolution.

“The left Bolsheviks,” Lozovsky indignantly stated, “contend that the October revolution is a proletarian and socialist revolution, and that it is important to immediately proceed to the realization of the maximum program. This is a profound error: Russia is not yet ripe for the socialization of production, and it must still pass through a long period, both bourgeois and democratic.”²⁶

Lenin, in contrast, had tried to show that the forward march to socialism, that is to say the accomplishment of the first lower phase of the communist society, could only be done by passing through a series of transitional stages. But if socialism, or more exactly the socialization of the essential means of production, could not be decreed at the beginning of the first of these steps, the fact remains nonetheless that this first step itself would necessarily mark a total and definitive break with the capitalist system on the political plane. Any revolution that carried out this fundamental rupture and gave itself the historical mission of opening the road to socialism, thereby fulfilled the conditions of being defined as a socialist and proletarian revolution.

This central thesis of Lenin’s was opposed by the majority of his companions, in the unions as in the party, by the Bolsheviks of the “right” and of the “left.” Considered leftist by the right opposition and rightist by the left opposition, Lenin tried to compare back to back the two oppositional theses. For the one, the immediate socialization of the economy was impossible, the revolution could not be socialist, for the other, the revolution was socialist, the immediate socialization of the economy was necessary. Finally, the right and the left had to agree, faced with Lenin’s thesis, to consider that it did not fit with the classical Marxist conception of the socialist revolution or more exactly with the idea that they had held.

It is remarkable that, a few years later, recalling the first experience of workers’ control shortly after October, Lozovsky had retrospectively provided the rationale for the leftist thesis.

“This prudent conception of workers’ control,” says Lozovsky about the decree of November, “resulted from the objective analysis of the economic possibilities and from the profound conviction that socialism could be built not in a few weeks or months, but over years and decades. A wedge had been driven into the capitalist system of production and its ‘secrets.’ But it turned out that in the era of social revolution, a constitutional monarchy within each factory is impossible and that the owner, however complex may be the mechanism of a modern enterprise, does not represent more than an unnecessary cog.”²⁷

The fact remains that in November 1917, Lozovsky and the so-called right opposition within the Bolshevik central committee, far from trusting the creative initiative of the masses, searched for a solution “from above.” The Bolshevik syndicalists demanded the

termination, by authority, of the pernicious activity of the factory committees. We have seen how Riazanov proposed the substitution of workers' control exercised by the factory committees for "control of the State over the workers." The formula of Lozovsky, made out to be less brutal, led to the same result, except that instead of "the State," it would read "the union." The key, for them [Bolshevik syndicalists], was to strongly regulate the Russian working class, to prescribe for the workers what they were to do and to prevent them from surrendering to improvisation, to spontaneous acts, which would bring only disaster the instant that they engaged in combat with the capitalists without the proper weaponry in hand.

And, as a corollary to this theory of supervision-from-above, a prelude to the bureaucratization to come, the Bolshevik syndicalists saw yet another point of agreement with the "Bolsheviks of the right," that of seeking a political alliance with the other parties who had cooperated in the revolution of February 1917, but had opposed the subsequent seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

"One must be blind," exclaimed Lozovsky, "not to see that the dictatorship of one party, based on a fraction of the proletariat and soldiers, cannot solve the problems that are posed to the revolution. Either the social base of the revolution must be broadened in cooperation with the other socialist parties, or it will collapse; there isn't, there can't be a middle ground."²⁸

Nothing is more illuminating than the reconciliation of this statement by Lozovsky with that of the "right Bolsheviks," by which they had accompanied, a few days earlier, their resignation from *Sovnarkom* and from the central committee of the Bolshevik party.

"We feel," said the representatives of the right opposition, "that only the formation of a socialist government composed of the representatives of all the parties collaborating with the Soviets will reap the fruits of the heroic struggle of the working class and the revolutionary army waged in the days of October. We think that outside of this solution there is only one possible path: the maintenance of a purely Bolshevik government by the means of political terror. The Council of People's Commissars has embarked on this path. Neither will we nor can we follow them there."²⁹

Presently, we are still in 1917 and we see that the syndicalists and the socialists of all tendencies, as well as the communists of the left and right, still had full liberty to explain, defend, and print their particular viewpoints. On the other hand, only the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries had been taken in to participate in the government: it is they who had declined the offer that had been made by the Bolsheviks, at Lenin's initiative, on October 26, and which offer was constantly renewed until it was finally accepted by them on December 10.

As for the Mensheviks³⁰ and the Right Socialist-Revolutionaries, supported by the railworkers', civil servants' and librarians' unions, they proved to be the most bitter opponents of the Bolsheviks, denouncing Lenin and Trotsky as the "executioners of the

Russian people,” to be removed from power at all costs; indeed, they made it the condition of their participation in a coalition government with the Bolsheviks.

Ultimately, Lenin only had with him the majority of the Bolshevik central committee, with Trotsky, Stalin, Sverdlov, Joffe, Sokolnikov, etc., who generally supported him against the two tendencies of the left and right. The subsequent history of the Russian revolution revealed that in this majority very few of this number fully shared Lenin’s conception of the transition to socialism. For the majority of Bolsheviks, of the right, the center, or the left, when Lenin called for trust in the creative power of the masses, during and even more so after the revolution, they translated this to mean the power of the Bolshevik party and the power of the State with which they had come to identify themselves. For these Bolshevik leaders, who passed through a dozen years in illegal clandestinity, in exile or in banishment, without personally participating in a mass workers’ movement, the “mass” could only be designated as the “unorganized mass,” incapable by itself of making history and even less able to lay the groundwork for a socialist society. And the very course of the Russian revolution since February 1917 seemed to justify this in the measure that they identified the victory of the October insurrectionary army with the conquest by the Bolsheviks of the majority in the soviets in the large cities and in certain trade union federations. Great was their surprise, not to mention their shock, to hear Lenin, even after October, insisting on the need to “draw from the depths of the popular masses,” to lay claim to their “autonomy,” as he emphasized in the speech below.

On one occasion where differences had arisen in certain factories of Petrograd between the skilled and unskilled workers in regards to the fixing of wage rates, it had been decided to convene a general assembly of the workers’ organizations of the city, namely the workers’ section of the municipal soviet, the council of unions and that of the factory committees. It was proved, on the one hand, that the Mensheviks tried to use these differences to pit the workers against the soviet power. Invited to comment on the dispute, Lenin took the opportunity to take stock of the economic and social situation. We only possess this statement through the excerpts that were published at the time by *Pravda* and of which we here reproduce the essential points relating to the Leninist conception of workers’ control and of the role of the “masses” in the creation of socialism.³¹

“The revolution of October 25,” Lenin said, “had shown the exceptional political maturity of the proletariat and its ability to stand firm in opposition to the bourgeoisie. The complete victory of socialism, however, would require a tremendous organizational effort filled with the knowledge that the proletariat must become the ruling class.

“The proletariat was faced with the tasks of transforming the state system on socialist lines, for no matter how easy it would be to cite arguments in favor of a middle course such a course would be insignificant, the country’s economic situation having reached a state that would rule out any middle course. There was no place left for half-measures in the gigantic struggle against imperialism and capitalism.

“The point at issue was—win or lose.

“The workers should and did understand this; this was obvious because they had rejected half-way, compromise decisions. The more profound the revolution, the greater the number of active workers required to accomplish the replacement of capitalism by a socialist machinery. Even if there were no sabotage, the forces of the petty bourgeoisie would be inadequate. The task was one that could be accomplished only by drawing on the masses, only by the independent activity of the masses. The proletariat, therefore, should not think of improving its position at the moment, but should think of becoming the ruling class. It could not be expected that the rural proletariat would be clearly and firmly conscious of its own interests. Only the working class could be, and every proletarian, conscious of the great prospects, should feel himself to be a leader and carry the masses with him.

“The illusion that only the bourgeoisie could run the state must be fought against. The proletariat must take the rule of the state upon itself.

“The tasks of organizing production devolved entirely on the working class. They should do away, once and for all, with the illusion that state affairs or the management of banks and factories were beyond the power of the workers. All this could be solved only by tremendous day-to-day organizational work.

“Every factory committee should concern itself not only with the affairs of its own factory, but should also be an organization nucleus helping arrange the life of the state as a whole. It is easy to issue a decree on the abolition of private property, but it must and could be implemented only by the workers themselves. Let there be mistakes—they would be the mistakes of a new class creating a new way of life.

“There was not and could not be a definite plan for the organization of economic life. Nobody could provide one. But it could be done from below, by the masses, through their experience. Instructions would, of course, be given and ways would be indicated, but it was necessary to begin simultaneously from above and from below.

“The Soviets would have to become bodies regulating all production in Russia, but in order that they should not become staff headquarters without troops, their must be work amongst the masses . . . Not the organization of individuals, but the organization of all the working people, would be a guarantee of success . . .”³²

1 Lozovsky, *The unions in Soviet Russia*, p. 652 (in German).

2 **Editor’s Note:** Factory committees, which sprang up during the Russian Revolution of 1917, were varied in origin and purpose, at times acting in a supervisory role over management, in other instances engaging in matters of collective bargaining and worker representation, and in some instances acting as rudimentary organs of workers' control. While the majority of factory committees fulfilled union-type roles, historians estimate

that in 7–10% of cases, factory committees were the result of workers' take-over of the factory. Most factory committees of this type developed as a means by workers to counter lock-outs and/or sabotage by factory owners. (Wikipedia).

3 **Editor's Note:** War communism was the economic and political system that existed in Russia during the Civil War, from 1918 to 1921. This policy was adopted by the Bolsheviks with the aim of keeping towns and the Red Army supplied with weapons and food, in conditions in which all normal economic mechanisms and relations were being destroyed by the war. (Wikipedia).

4 Lenin, *Collected Works*, XXII (in German), p. 56.

5 **Editor's Note:** In 1917, the Socialist-Revolutionary Party (a non-Marxist party based upon peasant revolution and agrarian reform) split between those who supported the bourgeois, Provisional Government, established after the February Revolution, and those who supported the Bolsheviks who favored a communist insurrection. The majority stayed within the mainstream party but a minority who supported the Bolshevik path became known as Left Socialist-Revolutionaries. (Wikipedia).

6 Lenin, *Collected Works*, XXII, p. 46.

7 Lenin, *Collected Works*, XXII, pp 26-27

8 It is possible to believe, indeed, that the *Sovnarkom* had already entertained the project of its president. *Vtsik* = The Central Executive Committee of the All-Russian Soviets. *Sovnarkum* = The Council of People's Commissars.

9 Lozovsky, *Workers' Control*, Petrograd, 1918, p. 10.

10 The council, in the spirit of Lozovsky, would include delegates from the factory committees, representatives from the unions and other workers' organizations. See final draft below.

11 Documents annexed to volume XXII, p. 613.

12 Lozovsky, *Workers' Control*, p. 10.

13 Discussion at the All-Russian Council of Workers' Control, meeting of November 28, 1917.

14 **Editor's Note:** *Usufruct* is the legal right to use and derive profit or benefit from property that belongs to another person.

* **Editor's Note:** It is estimated that in Russia in 1917, only 20% of the population lived in an urban setting, with the remainder of the population being composed of rural and semi-rural peasants and their families. Within the cities, roughly a third of the workers were illiterate; in the countryside, roughly two-thirds of rural workers were illiterate. As a further illustration, in a 1918 study of 724 metalworkers at the Putilov factory in Petrograd (the most advanced factory in Russia), it was found that a mere 9.6 percent had finished the three-year rural or the four-year city schools; only two men in the sample had more than four years of education. (Rex Wade, "Red guards and workers' militias in the Russian Revolution," Stanford University Press, 1984, p.23)

15 R. Arsky, *Workers' Control*, pp. 21, 22.

16 Philips Price, *The Russian Revolution*, Hambourg 1921, pp. 261 and 266.

17 In early December 1917, the government, as a result of growing unemployment in the industries that had stopped receiving orders for war materials, had to resort to decreeing the closure of a number of enterprises for a month and a half, in order to organize their conversion to civilian needs. Cf. I. Larine und L. Kritzmann, *Wirtschaftsleben und Wirtschaftlicher Aufbau in Soviet Russland*, 1917-1920, Hambourg 1921, p. 13.

18 Editor's Note: Russian left communism began in 1918 as a faction within the Russian Communist Party named the Left Communists, which opposed the signing of the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty with Imperial Germany. The Left Communists wanted international proletarian revolution across the world. The leader of this faction, in the beginning, was Bukharin. They stood for a revolutionary war against the Central Powers; opposed the right of nations to self-determination; and they generally took a voluntarist stance regarding the possibilities for social revolution at that time. They argued against the over-bureaucratization of the state and further argued that full state ownership of the means of production should proceed at a quicker pace than Lenin desired. (Wikipedia).

19 I. Larine and L. Kritzmman, op cit, p. 163.

20 N. Ossinsky, *The Construction of Socialism*, Moscow 1918, p. 35 and after.

21 Marx, *The civil war in France* (Paris, 1936), pp 62 and 63.

22 It is symptomatic that still in 1923, a 'left communist' had continued to support the thesis of N. Ossinsky in debate with Lenin, where he raised this unexpected comment: "The slogan of workers' control, which had been the most popular among the working masses through October, completely changed content after the ascension to power of the Bolsheviks. In truth, nobody had an absolutely clear idea that this control could be realized, perhaps even Lenin (!). For a while, after the revolution, Lenin continued to defend his point of view." Cf. J.S. Rosenfeld, *Die organization der Industrie-verwaltung in Das heutige Russland*, 1917-1922 (Moscow, April 1923), p.3

23 L. Kritzmman, op cit, p. 158.

24 Lenin, report to the Third Congress of the All-Russian Soviets, Petrograd, January 11, 1918, cf. *Complete Works*, Vol. XXII, p. 220.

25 Lozovsky, *The unions in soviet Russia*, p. 654.

26 Lozovsky, *The professional monitor*, the organ of the central council of the unions, 24 November 1917.

27 Lozovsky, *The unions in soviet Russia* (Moscow, May 1920), op cit., p. 654.

28 Lozovsky, *The professional monitor*, 24 November 1917.

29 Document annexed to volume XXII of the *Complete Works* of Lenin, p. 615. This statement, signed by the resigned People's Commissars Nogin (Industry and Commerce), Rykov (Internal Affairs), Milioutine (Agriculture) and Theodorovitch (Supply), was approved notably by the Bolshevik syndicalists Riasanov and Shlyapnikov, as well as by Larine, Zinoviev and Kamenev.

30 Editor's Note: The Mensheviks were a faction of the Russian revolutionary movement that emerged in 1904 after a split occurred in the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, producing two distinct trends: the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. The split proved to be long-standing and had to do both with pragmatic issues based in history such as the failed revolution of 1905, and theoretical issues of class leadership, class alliances, and bourgeois democracy. While both factions believed that a "bourgeois democratic" revolution was necessary, the Mensheviks generally tended to be more moderate and were more positive towards the "mainstream" liberal opposition. (Wikipedia).

31 Editor's Note: This speech was delivered at a meeting of the Workers' Section of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, December 4, 1917.

32 Lenin, *Complete Works*, XXII, p. 125-127.