

In launching our communist programme, which contained the outlines of a response to many vital problems concerning the revolutionary movement of the proletariat, we expected to see a broad discussion develop on all its aspects. Instead there has been and still is only furious discussion over the incompatibility of electoral participation, which is soberly affirmed in the programme. Indeed, although the electionist maximalists proclaim that for them electoral action is quite secondary, they are in fact so mesmerized by it as to launch an avalanche of articles against the few anti-electionist lines contained in our programme. On our side, apart from the ample treatment given in these columns to the reasons underlying our abstentionism, we have only now begun to use *Avanti!* as a platform to reply to this deluge of electoralist objections.

Hence we are delighted to note that the Turin newspaper *L'Ordine Nuovo* is demanding clarification of the paragraph in the communist programme which states: "Elections to local workers' councils will be held *flog in accordance with the trades go which they belong, but on an urban and provincial constituency basis*:" The writer, Comrade Andrea Viglono, asks whether this was a way of denying that the power of the Soviets should derive from the masses consulted and voting at *the very place where they work*: in the factories, workshops, mines and villages.

What the drafters of the programme had in mind was as follows. The Soviet system is a system of *political* representation of the working class; its fundamental characteristic is denial of the right to vote to anyone who is not a member of the proletariat. It has been thought that Soviets and economic unions were the same thing. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. It may well be that in various countries, in early stages of the revolution, Soviet-type bodies were set up with representation from the craft unions - but this was no more than a makeshift arrangement.

While the trade union has as its object the defence of the sectional interests of the worker in so far as he belongs to a given trade or industry, the proletarian figures w. the Soviet as a member of a social class that has conquered political power and is running society, in so far as his interests have something in common with all workers of any trade whatsoever. What we have in the central Soviet is a political representation of the working class, with deputies representing local constituencies. National representatives of the various trades have no place in this schema at all; this should suffice to give the lie simultaneously to trade-unionist interpretations and to the reformist parody of

hypothetical constituent assemblies of trades masquerading as Soviet-type institutions.

But the question remains, how should the network of representation be fashioned in the case of local urban or rural village Soviets? If we refer to the Russian system, as expounded in Articles XI, XII, XIII and XIV of the Constitution of the Soviet Republic, we may conclude that the essential feature is that in the cities there is one delegate for every 1,000 inhabitants, and in the countryside one for every 100 inhabitants, elections being held (Art. 66) in accordance with rules established by the local Soviets. So it is not the case that the number of delegates to be elected depends on how many factories or workplaces there are; and we are not told whether the election involves assembling all the electors with the right to a representative, or what the norms should be. But if we refer to the programmes of communists in other countries, it would seem safe to conclude that the nature of the electoral units is not the basic problem of the Soviet order, even though it gives rise to some important considerations.

The network of Soviets undoubtedly has a dual nature: political and revolutionary on the one hand; economic and constructive on the other. The first aspect is dominant in the early stages, but as the expropriation of the bourgeoisie proceeds, it gradually cedes in importance to the second. Necessity will gradually refine the bodies which are technically competent to fulfil this second function: forms of representation of trade categories and production units will emerge and connect with one another, especially as regards technique and work discipline. But the fundamental political role of the network of workers' councils is based on the historical concept of dictatorship: proletarian interests must be allowed free play in so far as they concern *the whole class over and above sectional interests, and the whole of the historical development of the movement for its emancipation*. The conditions needed to accomplish *all* these are basically: 1. the exclusion of the bourgeois from any participation in political activity; 2. the convenient distribution of electors into local constituencies which send delegates to the Congress of Soviets. This body then appoints the Central Executive Committee, and has the task of promulgating the decisions regarding the gradual socialization of the various sectors of the economy.

Seen in relation to this historical definition of the communist representative system, it seems to us that *L'Ordine Nuovo* slightly exaggerates the *formal* definition of the way the representative bodies intermesh. Which

groupings do the voting and where is not a substantive problem: various solutions at a national and regional level can be accommodated.

Only up to a certain point can the factory internal commissions be seen as the precursors of Soviets. We prefer to think of them as precursors of the factory councils, which will have technical and disciplinary duties both during and after the socialization of the factory itself. We should be clear that the civilian political Soviet will be elected wherever convenient, and most probably on the basis of constituencies that are not very different from present electoral seats.

The electoral rolls themselves will have to be different. Viglongo poses the question whether all the workers in the factory should have the right to vote, or just the trade-union members. We would ask him to consider whether some workers, even members of a trade union, should be struck off the electoral roll of the civilian political Soviet where it is found that, in addition to working in a factory, they live on the proceeds from a small capital sum or annuity. This is a not uncommon occurrence amongst us. Again the Russian Constitution clearly takes this into account in the first sentence of Art. 65. Finally the legitimately unemployed and incapacitated must also have a vote.

What characterizes the communist system then is the definition of the right to be an elector, a right which depends not on one's membership of a particular trade, but on the extent to which the individual, in the totality of his social relations, can be seen as a proletarian with an interest in the rapid achievement of communism, or a non-proletarian tied in some way or other to the preservation of the economic relations of private property. This extremely simple condition guarantees the political workability of the Soviet system of representation. In parallel to this system, new and technically competent techno-economic bodies will emerge. They must, however, remain subordinate to whatever the Soviets lay down in terms of broad policy guidelines; for until classes are totally abolished, only the political system of representation will embody the collective interests of the proletariat, acting as the prime accelerator of the revolutionary process. On another occasion we shall discuss the problem whether it is possible or desirable to set up political Soviets even before the revolutionary battle for the conquest of power takes place.|