

# THE WORKERS' GOVERNMENT

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One of the most important questions the forthcoming Fourth Congress of the Communist International will have to examine and decide on is indisputably that of the Workers' Government. It has been thrown up by the demand for the proletarian United Front, the irrefutable necessity and paramount significance of which becomes increasingly clear in the face of the ever sharper and broader offensive of the world bourgeoisie. The slogan of the workers' government develops organically out of the struggle in which the masses of working women and men have to defend their bare existence, even their life itself against the insatiable hunger of the exploiting capitalists.

The black misery of this historic hour calls out shockingly and angrily for this struggle. If it is to be waged successfully, to push ever broader in its scope and ever higher in its goal, it needs the exploited masses to create their own organs of labour and struggle, which must overcome fragmentation and tearing themselves apart so as to come together as a united and decisive force. Factory councils, control committees, action committees etc will come into being. Only: the effect of such committees will keep within the most modest boundaries. Worse still, their effectiveness will be gradually crippled, the councils and committees themselves will be strangled if governmental power remains in the hands of the exploiting minority. Also the ecstatic fans of 'democracy' and of the 'working community' of 'moderate, reasonable' workers' leaders and 'understanding, well meaning' representatives of the bourgeoisie in the government will learn this lesson through bitter experience.

It is and remains true: either the bourgeoisie has control of the government and uses governmental power in its own class interests or, on the other hand, the workers govern and likewise use the government in their class interest i.e. against the profiteering bourgeoisie. A 'fair balance' does not exist. The rule of all such coalition governments between bourgeois and workers' parties has manifestly proved this. Whether it is a 'grand' or 'narrow' coalition, with more or less sharp lines drawn to its right or left can, of course, weaken or sharpen this fundamental fact. But it changes nothing in its essence, its basic nugget of truth, particularly in these times when the collapse of capitalism opens up ever more deeply the conflicts of classes and makes the struggle between them sharper and more bitter.

Workers' leaders occupying a few government posts in no way means the same as the conquest of political power by the proletariat. It can mean pocket money for individuals or hand outs for the class but always remains as the bourgeoisie's goal a means to corrupt and deceive the proletariat. Only a government that consists entirely of representatives of the workers' parties and organisations

(including workers by brain) deserves the name of workers' government. For such a government can only arise as the fruit of strong, class conscious movements and struggles in which the exploited majority confronts the exploiting minority and the existence of such a government expresses a growth in the power of the proletariat. This alone, held to and defended by all available means, is the sure basis for a workers' government that demonstrate its right to exist in that it thoroughly and energetically follows a policy the theme of which is the well being of the producers and not the profits of the rich who take for themselves what others produce.

For sure: the Workers' Government means a growth in the political power of the proletariat but it is still in no way to be put on the same level as the conquest of political and state power by the proletariat and the establishment of its dictatorship. For the proletariat to be able to claim political power and use it fully in the service of its liberation requires the smashing of the bourgeois state and its apparatus of power. The bourgeois state machinery corresponds by definition to the purposes of power for the exploiting and possessing classes. It is unfit for the proletariat's goals of liberation. Its character does not change because another class takes over the apparatus and leaves it functioning. The proletariat must create in the system of councils a state that expresses its class power and class rule through the necessary organs.

In contrast, the workers' government does not destroy the bourgeois state and it would be a dangerous self-deception if the workers convinced themselves or let themselves be convinced that the workers' government makes it possible to 'hollow out' the bourgeois state from within. Just as the power of the bourgeoisie in the economy cannot be hollowed out, so it cannot happen in the state. In both spheres their power must be overcome, smashed and that can only be achieved by the force of the proletariat and not by the cleverness of the cleverest government. The Workers' Government is the attempt to force the bourgeois state within its essential historic limitations to serve the historic interests of the proletariat.

The slogan of the Workers' Government thus connects to the illusions that the broadest masses of the proletariat and particularly the newly proletarianised layers have about the nature and value of the bourgeois democratic state. It is a political slogan of the transitional period from capitalism to socialism, communism and reflects two things: firstly, how unclear and unfinished is the knowledge of the majority of the proletariat about the nature of bourgeois society, its state and the conditions of its own liberation; and secondly, that a shift in the relation of forces between the bourgeoisie and proletariat to the latter's advantage has begun but not yet reached its end. The corresponding new relationship is unstable and changeable because the unripeness of proletarian consciousness hinders the complete and uninhibited unfolding of the power of the working class in revolutionary struggle.

It is clear that a situation that is characterised by these two factors is full of difficulties and dangers for the individual sections of the Communist International and thus for the world proletariat that it has been called upon to lead. Can, indeed must not the slogan of the workers' government cause confusion in the camp of the Communists, shake their certainty as to their goal and path, cause a wrong application of our forces and thus their squandering, lessening our ability to lead the masses of the dispossessed along the right path? Can, indeed must not the old bourgeois reformist illusions whose total destruction is the task of Communists win new support and emerge stronger through use of this slogan? Won't all this hold up the process of clarification and self-awareness of the proletariat, which is the precondition for it setting its entire strength to conquer political power and setting up its own dictatorship to destroy an exploiting and enslaving capitalism?

Deciding these questions has huge consequences, heavy with responsibility. The nub of the question is not the support of a Communist Party for a Workers' Government, but rather the entry of Communists into the government itself and thus the taking of responsibility for its policies. According to the circumstances, answering all these questions positively – and thus rejecting the workers' government – can split the Communists from the masses of workers, can shake and temporarily stifle their growing trust that we always and everywhere stand with them and storm

forwards with them when it is right to struggle against a grasping capitalism and its power. If we throw out the workers' government, bourgeois and reformist quacks will tell the workers that we are not serious with all the demands we raise in order to alleviate the most burning daily needs of the exploited and oppressed and that we refuse to create the force that would be in a position to carry them through. If the Communist International answers doubting questions unequivocally in the negative and propagates the slogan of the Workers' Government, it is not excluded that some section falls prey to the danger of paying for the creation of a workers' government with the surrender of important party principles and the essential conditions for a strong, class conscious, proletarian policy; and covers up with its name and reputation a policy of cowardice and treachery aimed at 'saving' a workers' government. Such a policy would not just compromise the party but communism itself.

So it is understandable that our International did not reach unanimous agreement when the Executive rounded off the slogan 'For the proletarian united front!' with 'For a Workers' Government!' This conclusion drawn from the defensive struggle against the grand offensive of the capitalists was strongly disputed by many. Naturally enough, in particular by those comrades who also reject the proletarian United Front or give lip service to it as a bitter necessity but in their hearts hope its practice will go to the Devil and seek to avoid and limit it as much as possible, tortured by fears of being "derailed into an opportunist swamp". The reasons opponents of the workers' government call on are largely the same ones that they drew out of these fears and used to fight against the proletarian United Front, referring to the 'special situation' in their Communist Party, in their country. They have been expressed in the last issues of this journal and need not be repeated.

Heavier artillery than these typical reasons can be brought to bear against the workers' government. It is the very bad experience that the proletariat of different countries has gone through with so-called workers' governments. In Australia a workers' government came into being on the basis of the shifting sands of a Parliamentary combination which was right. Then instead of raising and solidifying the class power of the workers, it constrained and weakened it, not just by legal chains but also through confusing and dulling proletarian class consciousness. It honoured the proletariat with courts of arbitration and conciliation boards, which made wage struggles and strikes virtually impossible – or at least significantly harder – and thus handed the workers over to exploitation bound hand and foot. Generally the policy of the workers' government meant soup kitchens for the workers and nutritious meals for the bourgeoisie. It paid for being tolerated with its total subordination to the bourgeoisie.

In truth, the deeds of the workers' governments in Brunswick, Thuringen and Saxony where majority Social Democrats and Independents had and have the rudder of state in their hands, are no more worthy of praise – on the contrary! The policies of these workers' governments was and is a shocking example of what a workers' government should not be. They are only workers' governments by name, having only the superficial characteristic of being made up of representatives of the two German reformist parties. Their politics defines them as bourgeois to the core. From refusing far-reaching measures to fight the mass misery at the cost of big business, merchants, profiteers and usurers, to blocking the Saxon parliament against workers' demonstrations, violent repression of strikers in Brunswick, the use of the 'Technische Nothilfe' (an organisation of scabs backed by the Reich) against striking agricultural workers in Thuringen and the refusal of the right to strike to civil servants – based on Groener and Wirth. And all that in a situation that is objectively revolutionary and screams for the most forceful standing up for the interests of the proletariat in every respect.

The traces terrify us! [What we have seen terrifies us but it is not the full picture.] A Communist Party would commit suicide if it strolled along the comfortable and well-worn paths of the revolution-shy reformist workers' parties and their statesman-like squirts and into workers' governments and 'pure' social democratic governments. Yet looking more closely, the weaknesses, stupidities and crimes of such workers' governments as known up till now in no way necessarily

speaks against a workers' government in the Communist conception which can be born out of a forward movement and the struggle of large masses of the proletariat and must live and act in a close alliance with the forward movement and struggle of these masses. They only confirm that the reformist workers' parties have until now shown themselves totally incapable of pursuing a working class policy in the grand style. In the present historical hour, a real working class politics must be revolutionary politics, the sharpest policy of struggle against the bourgeoisie aimed at strengthening the power of the proletariat. The second rank Scheidemanns and Dittmanns [leaders of the majority and Independent Social Democracy] have shown that – as the Italian proverb puts it – “the habit does not make a monk”. Yet the workers' government is not a fixed, fossilised concept that dominates political life. It can rather be a component of the most lively political life if it is and remains the unfalsified expression of historic proletarian class life, the expression of a self-moving and developing awareness and will to power of the proletariat. To fight for a workers' government and, if the conditions are right, entering it, participation in it can be a duty, a necessity for Communist Parties.

The preceding experiences shed some light on what is significant for the disputed question. There are different types of workers' government ranging from a coalition of true workers' parties with bourgeois reform parties through to a 'pure' social democratic coalition. But not any kind of workers' government can serve even as a propaganda and rallying slogan of the Communists, let alone as a goal of struggle. Decisive for the position of Communists towards a workers' government is not party political composition but its implemented policies. The policies of a workers' government will however ultimately be defined by the activity or passivity of the proletarian masses, through the ripeness of their awareness and will and correspondingly their use of power. The proletariat gets the type of workers' government it is prepared to tolerate.

So we see ahistorical, mechanical thinking that only bases its judgement on external forms and schematic formulas when, in the name of communist principles, the position on the workers' government is made to depend on whether it is the product of revolutionary mass struggle or is the fruit of a parliamentary combination. However strongly we hope for the first option, we should not overlook that a parliamentary line-up can also encourage advancing mass movement and mass activity. For sure: only an indirect and weaker impact, but still an impact on working class life. In England, for example, there is the imminent possibility of a workers' government one day coming to power by parliamentary means without great shocks or revolutionary struggles. Only a real transformation in the consciousness and position of power of the proletariat must have preceded the parliamentary consequence. This transformation presses towards consistent working class politics, which cannot be carried out without sharp confrontation with the bourgeoisie. So it appears that in England serious, revolutionary mass movements will not prepare the way for a workers' government but instead by its accompaniment and protector.

The slogan of our Executive “For the Workers' Government!” contains as its final, unavoidable consequence the entry of Communists into a workers' government, working together and sharing responsibility with non-Communist workers' parties and organisations. It cannot be denied that even taking an active position for bringing about a workers' government, but much more participation in it, can increase the danger for Communists of becoming prisoners of a banal opportunism and selling out the Communist fundamentals of our politics for short-lived, day-to-day successes. Only: the danger of walking into an opportunist swamp adheres not merely to entry into a workers' government but much more to any activity that goes outside a sect-like prayer circle, one that should remain small for the sake of purity.

The maternal concern to avoid dangers leads to a self-sufficient quietism, to an unsullied passivity through which a Communist Party isolates itself from the masses, loses its living historic content and falls prey to fossilisation. For the essence, the task of Communist Parties is themselves to develop the highest political, revolutionary activity and through this, through their own activity to bring about the development of the highest activity of the proletarian masses, like a steel drawing

the igniting sparks from a piece of flint. It is quite uncommunist to give up work and struggle because of unavoidable dangers. What it comes down to is dealing with the dangers. The inherent dangers of the situation – falling by means of the practice of a workers' government into a busy, unfruitful opportunism – are best worked against (alongside the strong ideological and organisational unity of the Communist Party and its strict discipline) by pursuing the strongest goal-oriented activity and most intimate organic link to the proletarian masses.

Just as ahistorical as the refusal of the workers' government out of fear of opportunism is the conception that the workers' government must under all circumstances be a transitional stage between the bourgeois state and the workers' state, an unavoidable and not unpleasant 'substitute' for the dictatorship of the proletariat. A workers' government certainly can but in no way must be a transitional stage to proletarian class power. The history of the Russian Revolution proves it. With the tremendous sharpening of class conflict in the developed capitalist world and the growing acuteness of class struggles, there can develop a relatively fast shift in the relation of forces between bourgeoisie and proletariat that can lead directly to the latter conquering power and instituting its dictatorship. Further, it is also excluded that the World Congress of the Communist International proclaims the workers' government as a fundamental goal and object of struggle that must be fought for in all circumstances. Workers' Government as "replacement for the dictatorship" is a laughable conception that out of smart-arsedness ignores that one cannot put new wine in old bottles. The historic content of the dictatorship of the proletariat must blow apart the bourgeois class state, even a bourgeois democratic one.

In easily the majority of countries under capitalist domination, the Workers' Government appears as the crowning summit of the tactic of the United Front, as the propaganda and rallying slogan of the hour. The concrete conditions of in each of these states will decide how and under what defining conditions then slogan can become a goal of struggle. One can conceive of situations, contexts, in which Communist Parties must fight for and enter a workers' government even under very difficult circumstances. The conditions for this will be diverse and different. They cannot all be specified in ground rules beforehand. Yet, as ever, certain factors must be decisive: the cleanliness of the face the Communists present; the independence of Communist policy; strong links with the masses; an orientation towards deepening and accelerating the process of becoming aware in the working class and thus the growth of its power. Of course, it is a pre-condition for the radical policy of a true workers' government that it supports itself on the organised power of the workers, armed for struggle, outside Parliament. Where the practice of the proletarian United Front pushes towards the Workers' Government, it can - if correctly conceived and implemented, be a step forwards towards the dictatorship of the proletariat. Whet that will be the case will be decided not just by the given conditions but also the understanding and will of the Communist Parties, which become an acting will and understanding of the masses. Let us put it to the test, let us act!