

# The System of Communist Representation

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Translators unknown

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In launching our communist programme, which contained in synthesis the answer to many vital problems affecting the revolutionary movement of the proletariat, we expected to see a wide-ranging discussion on all its points.

Instead, only the incompatibility of electoral participation in the soberly stated programme was and is fiercely debated: the electoralist maximalists, while claiming that electoral action is secondary for them, are so concerned about it that they have spilled avalanches of articles against the few anti-electionist lines in our programme. As for us, apart from the extensive treatment given in these columns to the reasons for abstentionism, we have only now begun to respond in the *Avanti!* to defend ourselves from the deluge of electoralist objections.

We are therefore pleased to note that *L'Ordine Nuovo* of Turin asks for explanations of that point in the communist programme which says:

*'elections will be called for local workers' councils regardless of the professional categories to which they belong, and divided by city and provincial districts'.*

The columnist, who is comrade Andrea Viglono, wonders if this was a way of denying that the power of the Soviets must come from the masses consulted and voting in the very place where they work: in factories, workshops, mines, villages<sup>1</sup>.

The thinking of the programme's drafters was this. The Soviet system is a political representation of the working class, the fundamental characteristic of which is the exclusion from the right to vote of all those who do not belong to the proletariat.

It was believed that the Soviet was the same thing as the economic trade union: nothing could be more inaccurate. It may be that, in the first revolutionary moments, Soviet bodies were set up in various countries with representatives of the trade organisations, but this was only a temporary stopgap.

Whereas the economic trade union has as its objective the defence of the class interests of the worker insofar as he belongs to a given trade or industry, in the Soviet the proletarian is represented as a member of a social class that conquers and exercises political power and the direction of society insofar as its interests are common to all workers of all trades. In the Central Soviet we have a political representation of the working class with deputies from local constituencies.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Viglono, *Towards New Institutions*, in No. 16 of 30 August 1919 of the *Ordine Nuovo*.

There are no national representatives of the various occupational categories in it at all; this is as much to refute the syndicalist interpretations as it is to refute the reformist parody of hypothetical occupational constituencies touted as institutions with anything Soviet-like about them.

But, in local city or rural village soviets, how should the machinery of representation be constituted?

If we refer to the Russian system, set out in Chapters XI, XII, XIII and XIV of the Constitution of the Republic of Soviets, we can conclude that the essential thing is that in the cities there is one delegate for every 1,000 inhabitants, in the countryside for every 100; and elections take place (Art. 66) according to the customs established by the local Soviets.

So we do not have that the number of delegates to be elected depends on the number of factories or work units, and we do not know whether the election is done by grouping the electors to whom a representative is to be elected, and by what criterion.

But if we refer to the programmes of communists in other countries, we can conclude that the nature of the electoral unity, while lending itself to very important considerations, is not the substantive problem of the Sovietist order.

The gearing of the Soviets undoubtedly has a dual nature: political, revolutionary on the one hand; and economic, constructive on the other.

In the first moments the first function is predominant, which with the unfolding of the bourgeois expropriation gradually gives way to the second.

For this second function, the technically suitable organisms will later be refined in the school of necessity, and in this field the forms of delegation of the unionised categories and of the production units will arise and intertwine, especially with regard to the technique and discipline of labour.

But the fundamental political function of the network of workers' councils is based on the historical concept of dictatorship: proletarian interests must have free play insofar as they invest the entire class above the categories and the entire historical development of its emancipation movement.

The conditions for this are basically the exclusion of the bourgeoisie from all participation in political activity, and the appropriate distribution of the electorate in the local constituencies from which the delegations to the Congress of Soviets, which appoints the Central Executive Committee, and which has the task of promulgating the decisions for the subsequent socialisation of the various branches of the economy.

It seems to us that, in the face of this historical definition of the communist representative system, *L'Ordine Nuovo* slightly exaggerates the formal definition of the machinery of these representations.

Where and with what gearing the voting takes place is not a substantive problem: it can involve disparate national and regional solutions.

Only up to a certain point can we see the germ of the soviets in the internal factory commissions: or rather we think that these are destined to germinate the factory councils in charge of technical and disciplinary attributions during and after the socialisation of the factory itself; it being clear that the city political soviet can be elected where it will be most convenient and probably in meetings not very different from the present electoral lists.

The electoral lists themselves will have to be different. Viglongo raises the question as to whether all the workers in the factory will vote or only the organised ones: we make him think that some workers, even organised ones, may be excluded from the electoral lists of the city political soviet if it turns out that, in addition to working in the factory, they live off the proceeds of a small amount of pecuniary or land capital. This case is not uncommon among us: the Russian Constitution itself clearly provides for it in the first paragraph of Article 65. Legitimate unemployed and unfit for work must also vote.

What characterises the communist system is thus the definition of the right to be a voter, which does not depend on belonging to a professional category, but on whether or not the individual, in the integral complex of his social relations, is a proletarian interested in the rapid realisation of communism, or a non-proletarian nevertheless bound to the preservation of the economic relations of private property.

This very simple condition guarantees the political functionality of the sovietist representation: new and agile technical-economic organs will multiply alongside it, subordinated, however, always to what the former will establish regarding the broad outlines of the measures that will be implemented, because only pure political representation will summarise the collective interests of the proletariat, until the abolition of the classes has been totally realised; acting as the maximum accelerator of the revolutionary process.

At a later date, we will address the question of whether it is possible and expedient to constitute the political soviets even before the revolutionary battle for the conquest of power.