

# Workers' Control and Revolution

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In the perpetual striving of the left to integrate long-range vision and immediate practice, the idea of workers' control [1] occupies a special place. On the one hand, its generalized application would satisfy one of the main requirements for a stateless society; on the other, the basic units and the specific measures, which it involves, are such that it can sometimes be put into practice within particular enterprises in an otherwise capitalist framework. In the first of these perspectives, workers' control has always been one of the most radical possible demands, indistinguishable in effect from the communist ideal, while from the second vantage-point it has appeared to be limited, innocuous, and easily cooptable.

How can a single demand appear at the same time so easy and so difficult, so harmless and so explosive? The contradiction lies of course in the system, which has given rise to the demand. Prior to capitalism, the idea of "workers' control of the production process" could not have been a demand; it was a simple fact of life (within the limits allowed by nature). Hence the apparent accessibility of workers' control, which at bottom reflects no more than the capacity of all humans to think as well as to do. In these terms, it should not be surprising that workers occasionally take over and run productive enterprises without necessarily having an explicit socialist consciousness or political strategy. The faculties they draw upon for such initiatives are not so much new as they are long suppressed--for the majority of the population.

It is the overcoming of this suppression, as old as capitalism, which constitutes the explosive side of workers' control. What workers' control points to is more than just a new way of organizing production; it is also the release of human creative energy on a vast scale. As such, it is inherently revolutionary. But at the same time, because of the very weight of what it must overcome, it appears correspondingly remote from day-to-day struggles. As a political rallying point, it has two specific drawbacks. First, its urgency in many situations is not likely to be as great as that of survival-demands; and second, its full application will remain limited as long as there are economic forces beyond the reach of the workers--whether within a given country or outside it.[2]

Concern with these dimensions is often seen as precluding an emphasis on workers' control, and as a result, the self-management impulse, despite its original naturalness, is consigned to utopia. Such a dismissal is altogether unjustified. The current growing interest in workers' control cannot be explained merely by its timeless qualities. Like Marx's critique of capitalism, it reflects a definite historical juncture. The countries with extreme physical privation are no longer the only ones in which the system's breakdown is manifest. The advanced capitalist regimes are likewise in question, even if not for the first time. A new feature of the current crisis is precisely a redefinition of the concept of basic needs. The "environment," after all, exists inside as well as outside the workplace, and the old distinction between survival needs (identified with wages) and other demands (self-determination, participation, and control) is increasingly losing its meaning. Linked to this is the fact that the fragmentation of the capitalist work process has reached a limit in the leading industrial

sectors and is fast approaching it in clerical and sales operations.[3] As the reaction develops, there is no reason why it should stop half way. Finally, with the rightward evolution of the Chinese leadership (the last great foreign model), there has opened an increasing space on the left to reexamine long-held assumptions about revolutionary organization--assumptions which after all had gained their principal confirmation in countries with vastly different economic starting points from our own.[4]

But despite all such arguments for placing workers' control on the agenda, one may well remain skeptical as to the real possibilities it encompasses. The isolated self-managed enterprises are interesting, but by their very nature they require either a small scale of initial operations, or else a negotiated transfer, which would be beyond the reach of the workers in any major industry. A second possibility to consider would be some of the West European reform models. These seem to have stopped short of all but the most token worker input except in the Swedish case. In Sweden, the results are more impressive, extending to major changes in the work process, flexibility in scheduling, and even the beginnings of an input into production decisions.[5] However, this is still not control.

The changes in Sweden are important for showing the workers' capabilities and also for developing them further, but they do not amount to a decisive shift of power. Thus they still leave unanswered the question of what the actual autonomy of the workers would mean. As a third alternative, we might consider the practice of some of the existing post-capitalist societies, which have instituted one form, or another of elective principle at the factory level. The two main cases in point, where such measures have been directly introduced by the political leadership, are Yugoslavia and China. But in both cases the measures were subject to important checks all along,[6] and more recently have been counterbalanced by decisive reversions to earlier practices: market-oriented in the case of Yugoslavia; bureaucratic in the case of China. As a further counter-consideration, so far as workers' control is concerned, we should note that attention to such cases, particularly that of China, frequently encourages an attitude of postponing any consideration of workplace-reorganization until after the question of state power has been "settled." Like other aspects of a full socialist transformation, however, workers' control has a way of losing its priority if it is not built into the process from the beginning.

In sum, if we survey the available current examples of workers' participation in management, what we find falls very far short of control except in the most isolated cases, even where considerable social upheaval has intervened. It would seem, then, that while workers' control may perhaps not be impossible, it at least requires almost laboratory-controlled surroundings for its success.[7] There is one type of experience, however, which explodes such a view completely, and that is the experience of the revolutionary periods themselves. On the one hand, workers' control has gone further and deeper in such periods than at any other times, whether pre- or post-revolutionary. And on the other hand, far from being peculiar to this or that crisis, workers' control initiatives have arisen along with every revolutionary crisis that has yet occurred in industrialized or even partly industrialized countries.

Clearly, we are dealing with a phenomenon of universal force and appeal. And yet, without more than this initial recognition of it, we are tempted to ask whether the crises themselves don't constitute an environment just as artificial as the isolated small enterprise or the self-sufficient community. Such a view is contradicted, however, by two immediate considerations. First is simply the range of different settings and circumstances in which the initiatives arose. Without setting any across-the-board criteria as to the depth or thrust of the crises, a listing would have to include: Russia 1917-18, Germany 1918-19, Hungary 1919, Italy 1920, Spain 1936-39, Czechoslovakia 1945-47, Hungary and Poland

1956, Algeria 1962-65, China 1966-69, France and Czechoslovakia 1968, Chile 1970-73, and Portugal 1974-75. Second and more decisive is the fact that in no case did the radical initiative die a natural death. Although there may have been natural disadvantages (inexperience, excesses, or abuses), what killed the initiative in every case was not any loss of enthusiasm, but rather the threat or use of armed force. It is true that in many of the cases there were also divisions among the workers, but it was the military factor which invariably sealed the argument.

If we grant, then, that workers' control has shown itself to have a core of viability, it remains for us to ask what can be learned from all these experiences which might point toward its implementation under stable conditions. Focusing first on the Russian case and then on three cases directly pertinent to today's advanced capitalist democracies, we shall have to look for both positive and negative lessons in such matters as the capacities of the workers, the ripeness of the surrounding conditions, and the role of political leadership.

### **Proletariat and Dictatorship in Revolutionary Russia**

The history of revolutionary workers' movements presents an inspiring but at the same time a sobering succession of rises and falls. Tremendous but short-lived outpourings of human potential are followed by longer periods of often-bitter repression. Indeed, the rule so far seems to be: the higher the hopes, the bloodier the repression.

The Russian case inescapably sets the terms for any comparative discussion. In its combination of hopes and disappointments, it was certainly a prototype, although it differs from its successors on our list in being the only case of a movement initiated under capitalism in which the capitalist state was decisively overthrown. In that sense, it represents the closest approach of any of them to a clear-cut workers' victory. Related to this point is the uniqueness of the Russian Revolution in being, despite the immensity of the country's peasant population, the only revolution yet to have triumphed on the basis of an industrial working class. This fact, combined with the forcefulness of Lenin's writings, has given the Bolshevik approach a historic influence on discussions of workers' control which is out of all proportion to the revolution's long-run attainments in that area.

In point of fact, the Bolshevik leadership, from the moment that it took power in October 1917, entered upon an irrevocable collision course with workers' self-management initiatives. For Lenin himself, there may have been some misgivings; at least there is no question about his enthusiasm for workers' initiatives during the whole pre-October period.[8] But his position after October is unambiguous: "large-scale machine industry--which is precisely the material source, the productive source, the foundation of socialism--calls for absolute and strict unity of will.... But how can strict unity of will be ensured? By thousands subordinating their will to the will of one." [9]

Despite the unprecedented surge of factory takeovers which occurred throughout 1917, the Bolshevik leadership looked upon such actions as at most an expression of revolt against the bourgeoisie. It did not treat them as being something which they could directly build upon in the course of a transition to socialism. Instead, going along with the emphasis on obedience, Lenin repeatedly urged a prominent managerial role for former capitalists. When the Bolsheviks adopted the slogan of workers' control, therefore, they made clear that they understood "control" in the limited European sense of "checking." [10] While the performance of the ex-capitalists was thus indeed to be "controlled," Lenin never spelled out what aspects of the production process the workers would be empowered to judge. What this meant in practice, however, is clearly suggested in his remarks about Taylorism, namely, that if a given method can quadruple productivity for the benefit of the capitalists, it can just as well do so for the benefit of the working class. [11]

In line with this approach, the Soviet government reacted with consistent disfavor to workers' managerial initiatives, even where the alternative was a factory-shutdown.[12] Lenin defended this overall position by referring to the urgency of the country's economic tasks and to the inexperience of the workers.[13] He did not consider the possibility of using the old managers just as consultants, but instead accepted the idea that they should retain prime authority. In defense of this stance, one can point out that many workers escaping the old discipline used their freedom of action for purely private or sectoral advantages;[14] however, the widespread heroism displayed by workers in the civil war suggests that if given a meaningful opportunity, they might well have acted differently. While critics of self-management are right in stressing the need for coordination, there is no reason for them to assume--particularly in periods of revolutionary mobilization--that it is incompatible with increased reliance on rank-and-file initiative. In any case, what was perhaps even more significant than the government's position was the peremptory manner in which the leadership imposed it, not through discussion with the workers but rather by means of threats.[15]

What was at issue, in effect, was an entire approach to the transitional process. The acceptance of Taylorist methods was just one component--albeit a central one--of Lenin's larger view of the Russian economy as still requiring full development of the capitalist production process even if under (presumed) working class leadership. Lenin referred to this contradictory stage as "state capitalism," which he saw as a necessary prerequisite to socialism.[16] Its essence was a continuous increase of economic concentration. As such, its opponents could easily be classified as petty bourgeois, even though in fact workers might just as well resist the associated rationalization of industry.

In any case, it was in the context of his state-capitalism argument that Lenin presented his most general response to the self-management-oriented critics of his policy. The essay in question, "'Left Wing' Childishness and the Petty Bourgeois Mentality" (May 1918), makes important reading in relation to present-day discussion of workers' control and socialism. Lenin treats workers' self-management as being not only premature but even counterproductive to his overall strategy for reaching socialism by way of state capitalism. The either/or nature of his position is made explicit in the following exhortation: "our task is to study the state capitalism of the Germans, to spare no effort in copying it and not to shrink from adopting dictatorial methods to hasten the copying of it." [17] There can be little question as to which class would be the butt of such dictatorship at the factory level.

If the workers, however, are so ill equipped for self-management, how can their party be justified in taking state power? Lenin takes up this question of prematurity in general terms in the same essay, arguing convincingly against the kind of purism ("man in a muffler") which requires a perfect evenness in the development of all forces before any step forward can be taken.[18] It is strange that this properly dialectical response should accompany Lenin's totally undialectical exaltation of the priority of state capitalism. For while the latter approach could and did kill workers' self-management initiatives, the dialectical approach, with its recognition that people's faculties develop in conjunction with their responsibilities, prompts precisely the opposite suggestion: namely, if it was not too soon for the workers (through their parties) to seize state power, why was it too soon for them to start using it to transform production relations? Or, in other words, if Soviet industrialization was to differ from that of capitalist countries by being completed under a workers' government, why could it not also differ in the manner in which it was administered at the unit-level, i.e., within the factory?

What is at issue here is not in the nature of an "error" on Lenin's part. In terms of the immediate priority of defeating the counterrevolution, he was undeniably successful, although whether his

approach was the only one possible is something that we may never know. Two things are certain, however. One is that the supposedly temporary restraints upon workers' initiatives were never removed; [19] the other is that the economic assumptions, which seemed to justify them were not peculiar to Lenin but were widely shared in his time, even among Marxists. Briefly put, the assumptions are (1) that growth is good, (2) that results are more important than processes, and (3) that capitalists get results.[20] Linked to them in Lenin's thinking was the more specific belief in the relative neutrality of capitalist management techniques (Taylorism) and, with it, the implicit conclusion that communists can play the capitalist game without getting drawn into it.

The irony of all this is that while Lenin's approach may have been necessary to prevent the immediate counterrevolution, it undoubtedly worked to facilitate the more long-term restoration of traditional hierarchical management practices. The negative lesson of the Soviet experience is therefore clear: socialist revolution will not lead directly to the establishment of workers' control unless the appropriate measures are incorporated into the process through all its stages. What the Russian workers accomplished in 1917 was of unparalleled importance in raising this possibility. If their efforts failed, it was not because of any inherent flaw in what they were striving for, but rather because of historical circumstances specific to the Russian case.

The circumstances in question all relate to Russia's position as pacesetter. First, as already suggested, the period itself was one in which the impressiveness of capitalism's productive attainments was still largely unquestioned. Secondly, the very economic backwardness, which made Russian society so explosive, also required that any revolutionary government place a premium upon growth. And third, the workers themselves operated under a series of specific disadvantages, the most decisive of which was the lack of sufficient tradition and organization to enable them to coordinate their self-management initiatives.

### **The Politics of Revolutionary Workers' Control: Three Cases**

The Russian experience, while only the first of its kind, was also the one in which the anti-capitalist struggle came closest to success. We have already seen, though, how distant it still was from a genuine victory. The capitalists were politically and militarily defeated, but their conception of the workplace hierarchy survived--with decisive consequences for the overall development of Soviet society.

Looking at the subsequent experiences of Italy, Spain, and Chile, we can make almost exactly the opposite comment. The capitalist class in all three cases recovered its position in the most thoroughgoing and brutal form possible, via fascism. But the workers in each case made unprecedented advances which, taken together, go far toward mapping the place of workers' control in the transformations which still await the industrialized countries.

#### **Italy, 1920.**

The Italian factory occupations of September 1920 were in some ways more limited than their crisis-counterparts elsewhere. They lasted less than a month, during which time a liberal bourgeois government remained in place; and the immediate withdrawal of the workers was based on a compromise. There was no doubt on either side, however, that class and state power were at issue throughout.[21] This was the first instance of factory-seizures in a capitalist democracy, and it also gave rise for the first time to the idea that the workers could make the revolution not by bringing production to a halt (the general strike) but rather by taking charge of it themselves.

If the short-run scope of the episode remained limited, it was partly because the workers lacked a strategy for going beyond the factory-seizures and partly because of the reluctant patience of the capitalist class in waiting them out. The seizures themselves reflected an ad hoc decision. Although they climaxed more than a year of dramatic advances by the workers--including an election in which the Socialists emerged as the top vote-getting party--, the immediate occasion for them was a lockout.[22] The unity of the workers' direct response was not matched by any thoroughness or consensus in their prior planning. As for the capitalists, their patience at that moment was prompted not only by their unwillingness to destroy the factories but also by two contingent factors: on the one hand a cyclical downturn in the demand for their products,[23] and on the other, in the person of Giolitti, a shrewd political leadership at the national level.

These factors, however, served only to delay the more fundamental capitalist response. The full reaction began with the fascist takeover of 1922. The connection between Italy's "first" in the sphere of fascism and its "first" in the sphere of factory-seizures is by no means accidental. The actual experience of the factory-seizures constituted a trauma for the bourgeoisie.[24] Giolitti's temporizing strategy had proved to be a sufficient palliative in only one sense: it gave short-run results simply because the workers had no way of extending their leverage beyond the factories themselves. But Giolitti had had higher hopes than just winning the immediate battle; as he admitted in his memoirs, he had assumed--in a manner doubtless common to the class he represented--that if he simply let the occupation run its course, the workers would soon realize that they were incapable of managing production.[25] This comfortable assumption was shattered once and for all. The working class threat was clearly more profound than Giolitti had thought, and for the bourgeoisie this justified new methods of repression.[26]

Despite their brevity, the Italian factory occupations signaled a major step forward for the workers compared to the Russian experience. In Russia, for reasons already noted, the workers had displayed considerable disorganization and indiscipline, sometimes degenerating into outright corruption, all of which had provided the element of justification for Lenin's repressive approach. In the Italian factories, by contrast, "absenteeism among workers was negligible, discipline effective, combativity widely diffused." [27] Moreover, unlike the Russian situation, where worker-run factories had related to the market on a one-by-one basis, in Italy the workers set in motion the rudiments of a coordinated sales policy.[28] In general, then, the Italian workers gave important practical evidence to show that one-man rule in the factory is not necessarily the only alternative to chaos.

It may seem paradoxical that the workers' revolutionary self-discipline should have advanced more in a situation where they were remote from power than in one where they could think of themselves as a ruling class. Even at an immediate level, however, this is not necessarily implausible, for the Italian workers were encouraged in their self-discipline by two practical requirements: on the one hand, that of guarding against provocation in a setting where the factories were surrounded by hostile armed forces, and on the other, that of building up support in new sectors of the population.

But one must still look deeper in order to see what enabled the Italian workers to respond to these requirements in the appropriate way. Italy's political development is characterized by some unique combinations of features not found together elsewhere. At the broadest level, it combines the late-industrialization traits of Germany and Russia with some of the constitutionalist traits of Northern and Western Europe. While late industrialization gave a revolutionary thrust to the working class, the possibility of incorporating democratic demands into labor struggles made the unions less "economistic" than they were--for varying reasons--in the other industrializing countries.[29] As a

result, there was less of a basis in Italy than elsewhere for the radical dichotomy between trade-union consciousness and class consciousness which at so many points shaped Lenin's thinking.

As a more direct expression of Italy's uniqueness in these respects, one can point at a tradition dating back to the 1860s which linked socialism very closely with anarchism.[30] Less than a year before the factory occupations, Antonio Gramsci gave a clear example of such a link when he wrote: "The proletarian dictatorship can only be embodied in a type of organization that is specific to the activity of producers, not wage-earners, the slaves of capital. The factory council is the nucleus of this organization.... The factory council is the model of the proletarian State." [31]

### **Spain, 1936-1939**

The Spanish Civil War provided the occasion, in certain regions of the country, for the closest approach yet made to a society fully based on workers' control. Largely hidden from world opinion at the time, the innovations in question have nonetheless been well recorded, often by eye-witnesses, and they constitute a vital reference-point for any revolutionary strategy which looks beyond the mere seizure of state power.

The most notable aspects of the Spanish experience may be summarized as follows.[32] First, workers' control was practiced in every sector of the economy. While it went furthest in agriculture, in at least one city (Barcelona) it was also introduced in all industries and services. Second, the structural changes were very radical, often entailing the elimination of certain managerial positions, the equalization of wages, and, in some peasant collectives, the abolition of money. Particularly impressive is the fact that, where land-expropriations took place, the peasants almost invariably preferred communal ownership to parcellization. Third, even the most radical of the changes were introduced directly and immediately, placing maximum reliance on the participation of the masses to the highest level of their abilities. Fourth, contrary to many stereotypes, the changes in question were not necessarily made at the expense of efficiency, but instead often involved advances in technology or coordination, as in the consolidation of the Barcelona bakeries and the vertical integration of the Catalan lumber industry. And finally, it was in some places close to three years before the self-managed operations were suppressed by force of arms. There was thus ample time for them to prove themselves as practical arrangements.

The full scope of the mass initiative in Spain was so great that one hesitates to offer any schematic explanation, but we may at least sketch in some of the contours.[33] In Spain as in Italy, we find an anarchist component to working class culture, and we also find a constitutional political framework. But Spain was economically more backward; its constitution was newer and its anarchism stronger. Anarchist and socialist movements had already developed two rival union-federations by the time the Republic was established (1931). In the sphere of government the anarchists were naturally unrepresented, but the left parties doubtless benefited from their votes. By the time of the February 1936 elections, the general polarization of Spanish society exceeded that of postwar Italy, and the Popular Front coalition won a majority in parliament. The workers and peasants could thus make their first moves under a government which, though not revolutionary, they had at least some reason to consider their own.

The reactionary forces, however, provided the real catalyst. This reflected another unique aspect of the Spanish case. In Italy, as also in Germany, fascism had intervened only after the high tide of the workers' movement had already passed--outlasted in the former case by a relatively unified bourgeoisie; crushed in the latter by an unholy alliance of social-democrats and generals. In

Spain of the 1930s, the bourgeoisie was still something of a rising class. An important sector of it was represented in the leadership of the Popular Front: again an unusual circumstance, in that all previous late-developing bourgeoisies had carefully avoided any political alliance with the working class. But the liberalism of the Republican bourgeoisie could not be viewed even as a temporary expedient by the rest of the Spanish ruling class. Hence the rapidly improvised military response of Franco in July 1936--the least prepared of all fascist risings in terms of any prior pacification of the masses.

The counterattack from below was instantaneous, massive, and revolutionary. The popular resistance far outstripped anything that could have been organized by the bourgeois Republic; but by the same token it involved the immediate implementation of measures which even the most progressive of the governing parties could envisage only for a distant future. The military insurgency had hobbled the Republican power structure, and in so doing had confronted workers and peasants not only with a mortal threat, but also with an undreamed-of opportunity. They rushed to fill the vacuum. In a two-week period they collectivized industries, services, and farm villages throughout the Eastern half of Spain.[34] With communities now authentically their own to defend, they gave themselves in full force to the military struggle against fascism.

The Republican government was in a contradictory position. On the one hand, it would have fallen instantly without the popular counterattack, but on the other, it could in no way identify with the social revolution, which this involved. So while it gathered some of its forces to resist Franco's Nationalist army, it mobilized others to suppress the very movement which had made such resistance possible. It was to gain a decisive counterrevolutionary success in the Barcelona May Days of 1937.[35]

The response from the side of the workers and peasants was ambiguous. Their dilemma was essentially the obverse of that of the government. While they were tenacious about preserving their social gains, they were reluctant to bring about any further deterioration in the unity of the anti-fascist forces. At any level above that of their immediate communities, they tended to accept defeat, although this often meant that they were disarmed for the common military effort. To some extent, however, this element of resignation had shown itself even while the revolution was still at the crest of its initial upsurge. A key moment had occurred in Barcelona on July 21, 1936. The armed workers, having routed the bourgeoisie, were offered power by the Catalan president. They declined. As explained by one of their anarchist leaders: "We could have remained alone, imposed our absolute will, declared the Generalidad [Catalan state] null and void, and imposed the true power of the people in its place, but we did not believe in dictatorship when it was being exercised against us, and we did not want it when we could exercise it ourselves only at the expense of others." [36]

When one takes into account the final outcome of the conflict, it is hard not to consider such a statement either tragic or absurd. But the tragedy/absurdity is compounded by the position of those who did think in terms of state power. For while the anarchists backed the workers but refused to accept their mandate, the Communists welcomed a role in the government but used it--with even greater insistence than their bourgeois partners--to undo the revolutionary gains of the workers.[37]

Santiago Carrillo's "Eurocommunist" position is not new; already in January 1937 he was saying, as Secretary General of the Socialist-Communist Youth, "We are not Marxist youth. We fight for a democratic, parliamentary republic." [38] The practical meaning of such statements was shown after May 1937, when the Republican government (with Communist participation) began the systematic restoration of private ownership in agriculture and industry.[39] This was almost two years before the final victory of fascism.



The Spanish workers and peasants thus experienced, within the lifetime of the Republic, a compressed and intensified version of what the Russian workers went through after 1917. The rationales, however, were different. Lenin's reservations about self-management had rested above all on the question of expertise. In Spain, on the other hand, even for work requiring highly specialized skills, it was possible to find individuals who accepted the aims and ideals of the masses of workers, and did not demand special privileges. This is indeed a tribute to the cultural impact of Spanish anarchism, and it was an important factor in the improvement of public services under workers' control.

The argument for suppressing workers' control was found not in any failures of the workers themselves but rather in the international situation: an issue that became particularly important with the intervention of Nazi and Italian Fascist forces on Franco's side. The Soviet Union was the only outside power willing to aid the Republic, but Stalin did not wish to jeopardize his defensive alliance with the French government by supporting revolution in Spain. More generally, the Communist parties argued that the only hope of additional support against Franco would come from portraying the battle strictly as one of "democracy vs. fascism." For our present purposes, it is enough to make three points about this argument. First, its assumption that bourgeois governments might be swayed by such an ideological appeal proved to be totally unfounded. Second, it imposed a major limitation on the nature of foreign working-class support, for while thousands of highly politicized workers came to Spain as volunteers, the millions who stayed at home had no reason to see the issue as one of class interest and as a result had no significant impact on the struggle. Finally, within Spain, the consequences for the workers' and peasants' fighting ability were--as we have seen--disastrous.

### **Chile, 1970-1973**

Allende's Chile was a direct successor to revolutionary Spain in more ways than one: electoral stimulus, workers' initiatives, conflicts within the left, decisive foreign support to the right, and crushing defeat. In some ways, of course, Chile never reached the levels attained in Spain. Thus, the Chilean workers and peasants remained for the most part unarmed, and there were no whole regions of the country that they controlled. Nevertheless, there is one important sense in which the Chilean case carries the accumulated experience of workers' control another step forward: namely, that the interaction between class-conscious workers and the elected government was a great deal more fluid. The Allende government, unlike the Popular Front government in Spain, was made up overwhelmingly of working-class parties and was at least programmatically committed to workers' control. The Chilean workers, for their part, had much less of a tradition of anarchism, and in fact were most often identified--if only through their unions--with the very parties that made up the government. Only among the peasants had any direct takeovers been carried out prior to 1970.

In effect, the autonomous workers' initiatives were, to a greater extent than in either Italy or Spain, an offshoot of the struggle that was being conducted at state level. While the Chilean workers never came as close to power as did their Spanish predecessors (especially in Catalonia), they certainly would not have declined the authority if it had been thrust upon them. Their problem was thus the opposite of the one facing the Spanish workers: after a whole generation of functioning under a stable constitutional regime, and after eighteen years of steady electoral growth for the left, the Chilean workers had become used to relying upon an eventual electoral success for the satisfaction of their demands.[40] It was only after Allende's narrow victory that they began to see the full extent of their own responsibility in the process.

The direct role of the workers was initially a defensive one. The first factories to be taken over were those whose owners had unilaterally cut back production.[41] The workers did not necessarily expect

to run such factories on their own; their more likely priority, at this stage, was to protect a government with which they identified. At first, it was only in the countryside (especially in the Mapuche Indian zone) that expropriations from below were undertaken on a systematic basis. But even in these cases, there was a sense of acting within legal terms consistent with those accepted by Allende, for already on the books was an agrarian reform passed in 1967 which had set an 80-hectare ceiling on individual holdings but which the previous administration had not seriously implemented.

In short, both workers and peasants acted in the expectation of official support for their steps. To a greater extent than in any previous case, such support did materialize. This was not because the government's security from the right was any stronger, for in this respect, unlike the situation in Republican Spain, the military still constituted a threat from within. Rather, it was because the government's dependence on the left was greater, both in terms of its original access to office and in terms of its need to confront unanimous bourgeois obstruction of economic activity. In any case, legal norms were established through the Ministry of Labor for regulating factory organization in the "social area" (nationalized sector) of the economy, and these provided for a majority of worker-elected representatives on the Administrative Council of each enterprise. Within this framework, the workers again showed that their economic performance increased with the level of their participation, while the latter in turn, far from reflecting narrow sectoral interests or competitive attitudes, was related to their identification with the total process of change.[42]

But the Allende government was never able to free itself of its institutional moorings. The bourgeoisie, by its very obstructionism, was forcing a speed-up of the transformation, but only the grassroots workers could mount an appropriate response. With the October 1972 bosses' stoppage, "business as usual" disappeared completely, and expropriation became necessary not just as a revolutionary goal but simply for the maintenance of essential services. At this point the contradiction between legally installed government and class-conscious workers became decisive. The workers overcame the stoppage and saved the government, but the government bargained away their victory by agreeing to return seized factories in exchange for military guarantees to protect scheduled congressional elections.[43]

The available alternatives will never be fully known. Significantly, however, even a strong defender of Allende's concessions admits that the military at that moment was not yet prepared to launch a successful coup.[44] From the workers' standpoint, therefore, the setback was unmitigated. It signaled the end of any official encouragement to workers' control, except in improvised response to the coup-attempt of June 1973, when once again many plants were seized. By that time, however, the military already had the initiative, and from then on until the final coup in September, workers in self-managed factories were subjected to systematic shakedowns and intimidation by the armed forces. The legal pretext for such shakedowns was never applied against rightists, even though it was they who had actually been committing acts of violence. The government said nothing, but it was powerless in any case. It had made its choice earlier. As in Spain, the workers' initiatives had been blocked "from their own side"--less wholeheartedly, but no less surely.

Still, Chile had shown that government support for workers' control was at least a possibility. Some sectors of the governing coalition (especially the left wing of the Socialist party) favored just such a strategy, though not to the exclusion of a coordinated approach to transition. Within the self-managed factories, the workers with the highest level of participation had no illusions about the sufficiency of their own sphere of activity; rather, they identified precisely with these sectors,[45] and thus with an approach which--even if belatedly--had come to see the workplace struggle and the state-level struggle as going hand in hand.

## Conclusion

It should hardly be necessary to say that the struggles for workers' control and for socialism are inseparable. And yet the problem that has arisen again and again in practice is that they have found themselves organizationally in conflict. "Socialism" has been the formal monopoly of a political party (or parties), while self-management has been the direct expression of the workers and peasants themselves. Whichever one has prevailed, the result has been a setback in the movement toward a classless society. "Socialism" without self-management has revived or perpetuated rigid social strata, while self-management without a strong political direction has simply been suppressed.

One can go even further and can say that the two sets of failures have reinforced each other. Thus, for every defeated workers' uprising, there are the party bureaucrats who will gain credibility by denouncing its spontaneous and undisciplined character. But at the same time, for every disappointment occasioned by a revolutionary government, there are the radical libertarians who will add a further blast to their condemnation of any strategy that doesn't emanate directly and immediately from the base. Vanguard and mass, party and class: instead of moving closer together, they move further apart.

On what basis might this separation be overcome? Among the experiences considered here, the closest approach to a synthesis was reached in Italy. But in that case, the revolutionary party was in its earliest formative period and was quite remote from power. In Chile, there was an improvised synthesis, but it came only after the working-class parties had already taken on governmental responsibility under highly restrictive conditions. The result was that as the workers' initiatives broadened, the parties' support for them became more and more limited. What remained of such support in Allende's third year came increasingly from outside the government. In any case, it was too little and too late. Russia and Spain, for all their differences, seem in the end to express a pattern of polarization, which was the trend everywhere.

An effective synthesis between the self-management impulse and a political strategy has yet to be worked out. If and when it comes, it will be recognizable only in the form of a sustained practical success. No theoretical formulation can constitute an answer in itself. Nonetheless, whatever practical success is attained will have some theoretical anticipation, and it is in this sense that our four cases, despite their relative failures, have something to tell us.

One of the biggest problems is that of technical expertise and coordination. We cannot say that the workers' ability to solve it has been demonstrated for any and every situation, but we can say the following. First, a genuine movement toward self-management, far from stressing a "my firm first" attitude, leads naturally--and as a practical matter--toward efforts at mutually beneficial planning between economic units. While these efforts may initially derive only from immediately obvious requirements, the practice they entail will create a natural receptivity to the case for more long-range or "macro" calculations. Second, workers are both able and willing to learn about technical matters. Third, where the urgency of expertise exceeds the time available to diffuse it, it is increasingly possible to find previously trained professionals (abroad if necessary) who will accept, perhaps even enthusiastically, new terms for their services. Finally, looking ahead, we should recognize that technology itself is not entirely an independent factor. On the contrary, for environmental as well as political reasons, it may have to undergo a considerable number of demystifying, simplifying, and decentralizing changes.[46]

A second major problem-area has to do with the conditions under which revolutionary workers' control can succeed. We have already noted the immediate political condition, namely, that the factory-level and state-level processes come to fruition simultaneously. This is partly a matter of conscious decisions, about which more will be said in a moment, but it is also a matter of the economic and cultural characteristics of the society in question. Regarding this background dimension, our survey has suggested that there are many possible situations--some of them even mutually exclusive--which may prove favorable to workers' control. While the self-management impulse has always been a component of urban revolutionary movements, it has sometimes--as in Spain--appeared in even stronger form in rural settings. Within the industrial sector, it has sometimes been associated with heavy industry (Italy) and sometimes with light (Spain). Although usually associated with non-dependent economies, workers' control has also become an issue in Third World countries (Chile and also Algeria). Within Europe, although the most radical thrusts have occurred in the relatively less prosperous countries (Spain, Portugal), the potential for workers' control continues to grow even in the foremost welfare state (Sweden). Related to this, if we consider the major political frameworks of military dictatorship, constitutional democracy, and People's Democracy, we find self-management initiatives arising in all three (1918 Germany, 1972 Chile, 1968 Czechoslovakia). Finally, there may be considerable variation in terms of such immediate circumstances as war and peace, economic crisis, and fascist threats.

All this does not add up to any theory as to where workers' control is most likely, but it does tell us that there is no single factor, which automatically excludes it. The role of conscious choice must therefore be a large one. Among the objective factors, the only one that clearly facilitates such a choice is the existence of an established cooperative tradition. This was something real in many of Spain's rural areas, and the urban workers were not yet remote from it. The challenge elsewhere, then, is to develop some equivalent to such a culture while still relating to immediate political options. The question of leadership, which this raises, is the final major problem-area that we must consider. What seems to be needed, in effect, is a revolutionary party which would give priority to workers' control at every stage of its development. The difficulty of such a project is already clear.

Being serious about workers' control means foregoing a certain type of discipline, while being seriously revolutionary means taking steps that are not limited by workplace perceptions. The possibility of meeting both these requirements is suggested by some of the experiences we have looked at, but a firm synthesis must be more systematic. It must recall Marx's emphasis on the work process, his interest in cooperative forms, and his distrust of "leaders." [48] Recognizing these facets as having been systematically downplayed in the Leninist tradition, the new synthesis must accept the importance of what Gaston Leval calls, concluding his book on Spain, "the capacity to organize the new society quickly." [49] The latter process is one which depends not only on thorough preparation but also on broad human involvement. If a party is needed, it is more for the movement's self-protection than for any other purpose. The movement's objectives will alert it to the limits of discipline, but its history will warn it of the risks of spontaneity.

## NOTES

1. Unless otherwise specified, the term "workers' control" will be taken as synonymous with "self-management." Each term may be applied, depending on context, either to particular workplaces or to an entire society.
2. Jean-Luc Dallemagne, *Autogestion ou dictature du proletariat* (Paris, 1976), p. 114.
3. Yvon Bourdet and Alain Guillerm, *L'Autogestion* (Paris, 1975), ch. VII.

4. For two excellent recent examples, see Jeff Lustig, "On Organization: The Question of the Leninist Party," *Politics and Society VII* (1977-78), 27-67, and Carl Boggs, "Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers' Control," *Radical America XI-XII* (November 1977-February 1978), 99-122.
5. See *Scandinavian Review*, special issue on "Industrial Democracy" edited by Martin Peterson (June 1977).
6. On China, see Barry M. Richman, *Industrial Society in Communist China* (New York, 1969), ch. IX: the key body ranking above the director is the party committee, and "a majority of the enterprises did not have any workers on their party committees" (p. 762). On Yugoslavia, see Bourdet and Guillermin, *Autogestion*, esp. p. 174.
7. It is along these lines that Jean-Francois Revel tries to dismiss self-management as a non-existent alternative to social democracy and Stalinism. *La tentation totalitaire* (Paris, 1976), pp. 167-74. It should be noted that his remarks on the dynamics of self-management (p. 169) tacitly assume a capitalist environment.
8. See, e.g., his expression of support for the factory committees, quoted in Tony Cliff, *Lenin*, vol. 2 (London, 1976), p. 244. For background on this issue, see E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*, vol. 2 (London 1952), pp. 62-79.
9. V.I. Lenin, "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government" (April 1918), in *Selected Works*. 1-vol. ed. (New York, 1971), p. 424 (Lenin's emphasis).
10. Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control* (London, 1970), p. 12.
11. Lenin, "The Taylor System--Man's Enslavement by the Machine" (March 1914), *Collected Works*, vol. 20, pp. 153f. Lenin's criticism refers to the distribution of labor and of the product rather than to the way the work is carried out.
12. Voline (V.M. Eichenbaum), *The Unknown Revolution, 1917-1921* (New York, 1975), pp. 289ff.
13. Lenin, "'Left-Wing' Childishness and the Petty Bourgeois Mentality" (March 1918), *Selected Works*, p. 451.
14. Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton, 1967), pp.162f.
15. Voline, *The Unknown Revolution*, p. 294.
16. "'Left-Wing' Childishness," *Selected Works*, p. 440.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 444 (Lenin's emphasis).
18. *Ibid.*, p. 448.
19. On current practices, see M. Holubenko, "The Soviet Working Class: Discontent and Opposition," *Critique*, No. 4 (Spring 1975), esp. p. 23.

20. Dallemagne, arguing along Leninist lines, defends such assumptions on the ground that production relations have not reached a high enough level to supersede them (*Autogestion ou dictature*, p.122); however, when he comes to the question of how such a level is to be reached, i.e., specifically, of how the working class, after its demobilization under bureaucratic rule, is to be "remobilized" (pp. 248f), all he can offer are some abstract imperatives.
21. Paolo Spriano, *The Occupation of the Factories: Italy 1920* (London, 1975), pp. 105, 131.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
24. Gaetano Salvemini, *The Origins of Fascism in Italy* (New York, 1973), p. 278.
25. John M. Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism* (Stanford, 1967), p. 117.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
27. Spriano, *The Occupation*, p. 84.
28. Gwyn A. Williams, *Proletarian Order: Antonio Gramsci, Factory Councils, and the Origins of Italian Communism, 1911-1921* (London, 1975), pp. 246 f.
29. Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci*, p. 22.
30. Giuliano Procacci, *Storia degli italiani* (Bari, 1971), p. 395.
31. Antonio Gramsci, "Unions and Councils" (October 11, 1919), in *Selections from Political Writings (1910-1920)*, ed. Q. Hoare (New York, 1977), p. 100.
32. Based on Gaston Leval, *Collectives in the Spanish Revolution* (London, 1975), and on Sam Dolgoff (ed.), *The Anarchist Collectives: Workers' Self-Management in the Spanish Revolution, 1936-1939* (Montreal, 1974), esp. chs. 6, 7.
33. Based on Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth* (Cambridge, England, 1950). Pt. II; Gabriel Jackson, *The Spanish Republic and the Civil War, 1931-1939* (Princeton, 1965), ch. 1; and Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Revolution* (New York, 1970), ch. 2.
34. Pierre Broue and Emile Temime, *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), ch. 5.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 288.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
37. Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (New York, 1961), p. 436.
38. Quoted, *Ibid.*, p. 366.

39. As *The Economist* wrote in February 1938, "Intervention by the state in industry, as opposed to collectivization and workers' control, is reestablishing the principle of private property." Quoted in Broue and Temime, *The Revolution and the Civil War*, p. 313.
40. For a fuller discussion of the bases of this development, see Maurice Zeitlin, "The Social Determinants of Political Democracy in Chile," in James Petras and Maurice Zeitlin (eds.), *Latin America: Reform or Revolution?* (New York, 1968), and Victor Wallis, "Imperialism and the 'Via Chilena,'" *Latin American Perspectives*, No. 2 (Summer 1974), 44-57.
41. See classification of nationalizations in *NACLA, New Chile* (New York, 1973).
42. Andrew Zimbalist and James Petras, "Workers' Control in Chile during Allende's Presidency," *Comparative Urban Research III*, 3 (1975-76), pp. 25, 27.
43. The best analytic account of these events is in Gabriel Smirnow, *La revolucion desarmada: Chile, 1970-1973* (Mexico, 1977).
44. Edward Boorstein, *Allende's Chile: An Inside View* (New York, 1977), p. 212.
45. Zimbalist and Petras, "Workers' Control in Chile," p. 25.
46. A striking example would be the decentralizing implications of substituting solar power for nuclear power, See Barry Commoner, *The Poverty of Power* (New York, 1976).
47. On the significance of Marx's emphasis on the work process, see Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1974), Introduction; on Marx's interest in cooperatives, see Yvon Bourdet, "Karl Marx et l'autogestion," *Autogestion*, No. 15 (1971), p.102; for Marx's view of "leaders," see his letter to Kugelmann of April 17, 1871, in Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow, 1953), p. 320.
48. For a survey of the major alternative Marxian tradition, see Dick Howard and Karl E. Klare (eds.), *The Unknown Dimension: European Marxism since Lenin* (New York, 1972).
49. Leval, *Collectives*, p. 354.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

Two unique descriptive sources on revolutionary workers' control are Gaston Leval, *Collectives in the Spanish Revolution* (New York, 1975) and Parts II & III of Patricio Guzman's film *The Battle of Chile*, which should be supplemented by a reading of Andrew Zimbalist and James Petras, "Workers' Control in Chile during Allende's Presidency," *Comparative Urban Research III*, 3 (1975-76), 21-30. A fine general survey incorporating cases up to 1968 is Daniel Guerin, *Anarchism* (New York, 1970). For representative documents, see Branko Horvat et al. (eds.), *Self-Governing Socialism* (New York, 1975), vol. I, pp. 146-253. The outstanding theoretical and descriptive treatment is Yvon Bourdet and Alain Guillermin, *L'Autogestion* (Paris, 1975). A stimulating critique of self-management from a Leninist perspective is Jean-Luc Dallemagne, *Autogestion ou dictature du proletariat* (Paris, 1976). An indispensable periodical is *Autogestion et*

Socialisme; the only English-language periodicals approaching its coverage are *Radical America* and *Telos*.

On revolutionary Russia, Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control* (London, 1970), provides a useful account of the conflict around self-management; as for its actual workings, the as yet largely unpublished work of William G. Rosenberg (History Dept., University of Michigan) promises to give the first comprehensive overview. Marcel Liebman, *Leninism under Lenin* (London, 1975), is an exceptionally relevant background work. On Italy in 1920, Paolo Spriano, *The Occupation of the Factories: Italy 1920* (London, 1975), is essential. Antonio Gramsci's writings for the workers' newspaper *Ordine Nuovo* [New Order], now available in a volume of *Selections 1910-1920* (New York, 1977), have a significance going well beyond the immediate events. On the Spanish revolution, the outstanding general treatment is Pierre Broue and Emile Temime, *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970). George Orwell's classic firsthand account, *Homage to Catalonia* (Boston, 1952), is also well worth reading (esp. chs. V, IX). On Allende's Chile, the best historical analysis is Gabriel Smirnow, *La revolucion desarmada; Chile, 1970-1973* (Mexico, 1977), translated as *The Disarmed Revolution* (Monthly Review Press).

[I have discussed additional cases in two subsequent articles: "Workers' Control in Latin America" (sections on Peru, Chile, Cuba), *Latin American Research Review* XVIII, 2 (1983), 181-189, and "Workers' Control: Cases from Latin America and the Caribbean" (sections on Cuba, Bolivia, Grenada, Nicaragua), in Jack W. Hopkins (ed.), *Latin America and Caribbean Contemporary Record*, Vol. 3 (New York, 1985), 254-263. My discussion of Cuba in the latter article led me to qualify my hypothesis about the distinctive importance of the moment of "revolutionary crisis."]