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Lest the Spanish Revolution Finish Up Like the Russian

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Comrade Arshinov's article "The Spanish Revolution and the Russian Experience" in *Solidaridad Obrera's* 4 June edition contains a whole series of arguments and conclusions which, given the moral authority that the writer enjoys within the anarchist movement, might lead to huge confusion among Spanish workers. Which is why the signatories to this present item have decided to produce this document by way of a rebuttal of his point of view.

The author of the article concerned, when he comes to describe the Soviet, claims that "the members of the Soviet were elected from among the various groups and political bodies, affording the Soviet a universality."

In actual fact, at the outset the soviets numbered among its delegates not merely members of political groupings but also non-party workers, the merely unionized or sometimes the unorganized workers; as a result, the Soviets were appointed by the entire workforce of a factory, heedless of the political beliefs of those elected; later, they were not, as a reading of the

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article might have suggested, a collection of various mandates from the political groups and bodies existing within the factory.

This correction is an important one, as it restores the primitive Soviets to their actual class character, having nothing to do with the different parties that later strove to bring them to heel by snatching away their independence.

It is, to say the least, surprising that the author has not a single word of explanation as to how the Soviets were later stripped of virtually all of their rights by the Communist Party; yet that too is part and parcel of the Russian experience. But the author's silence regarding this point is clearly explained when we find that he goes on to urge the Spanish syndicalists to form a united front with the communists. Indeed, having named and included the Bolsheviks among those who – he tells us – established just such a united front in Russia, he announces: “In other countries, the revolution's victory is not going to be feasible until such time as a united front is formed like the one in Russia.”

Albeit that he lives and works in France, comrade Arshinov has never deigned to join the CGT-SR, a branch of the IWA, let alone any other trade union; which explains his utter ignorance of the conditions in which the revolutionary syndicalist movement exists, as it would otherwise not occur to him to urge Spanish proletarians to form a united front with those who, only yesterday, in their central mouthpiece *Pravda* were arguing that Barcelona's anarcho-syndicalists fought on the police's side during the First of May clashes.¹ If comrade Arshinov is interested in the formation of a united front with those who jailed his co-religionists, his fellow-strugglers in Russia – the

¹ Mett and Lazarévitch were present in Spain during the first of May demonstrations in 1931. The Civil Guard opened fire on the demonstrators and were invited by the Army to withdraw.

likes of Baron, Barmash, Rogdaev² – let him go for it! But the common sense and the nous of Spain’s syndicalists will place them on their guard against any such alliance. Unity from the grassroots within the CNT’s unions will be achieved between all workers, but these bodies must never be seen opening negotiations aimed at some arrangement with any political party, even should that party be the Communist Party. To argue, as the author does when he speaks about Moscow’s agents “let us leave these groups and parties aside”, or “to be sure, they behave as they do out of ignorance” is tantamount to deliberately closing one’s eyes rather than gaze upon a great danger.

This sort of semi-tolerance towards the supporters of the Russia government pops up again in the sentence where the writer, pointing an accusing finger at the Russian anarchists, says, literally, “The Russian anarchists’ biggest mistake was their failure to take into account and show any interest in or devote any special attention to the ferocious resistance that the bourgeoisie would inevitably put up against the proletariat’s victorious onslaught.”

We three reckon that, as a result of our having no well-defined organization, we three Russian comrades made tactical errors that led to a defeat, inflicted, not by the bourgeoisie, but by the dictatorship of the bureaucrats.

What is more, comrade Arshinov, having been a participant himself, is very well aware of the resistance to Denikin and Petliura that was orchestrated by comrade Makhno, and of the detachments of anarchist rebels in Siberia and in the Far East, mounted by the many Russian libertarians who even saw action within the Red Army itself.

The Italian comrades stand accused by comrade Arshinov of believing that “the capitalists and the bourgeoisie would give

² Aron Baron (1891–1937), Vladimir Barmash (1879–1938+), Nikolai Rogdaev (1880–1932) all Russian anarchists repressed by the Communist Party.

up”. Though it may not sit well with the author, the whole of the workers’ movement today knows that the factories in Italy were evacuated due to a treacherous arrangement made between Giolitti and the centralist trade union organizations, of which the leaders of the Communist Party that comrade Arshinov is presently urging us to look upon as allies in a united front were, at that point, part.

According to him, the Russian working class “has sought out and prefers the line of organization and the rule of the proletarian class over the bourgeoisie, the clear understanding being that the organization of such proletarian rule over the revolution’s interests can assume a variety of forms and that the Russian format is not mandatory for every other country. Relying upon such organization, the working class has fought off all the furious onslaughts from the bourgeoisie and broken every attempt to restore the capitalist bourgeoisie; the anarchists should never lose sight of that and should steer revolutionary struggles in that direction.” Just yesterday, the very same comrade Arshinov was telling us that the Bolshevik route had led to the installation of the GPU, with Russian libertarians shot and jailed by means of secret trials and to the unmitigated rule of state “trusts” before which Moscow’s fake unions kowtow, with the whole press completely done away with, and with there being no labour voices left, other than those licensed by the Communist Party.

That was not a path chosen by the Russian proletariat which was instead cornered and cruelly mistreated by Bolshevik repression, resulting in the cream of the Russian workers’ meeting their end.

The lesson of the Russian experience will not be missed by the proletariat in Catalonia and Spain; it will achieve its emancipation through its own efforts; it will keep faith with the CNT; it will shun the flattering appeals emanating from the supporters of bureaucratic dictatorship, no matter what labels they may flaunt.