Workers Power and the Russian Revolution

A review of Maurice Brinton's *For Workers Power*

Tom Wetzel

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I was attracted to radical politics in the late 1960s/early '70s when I was in my twenties. Most of the people who were drawn to serious revolutionary politics back then ended up in Leninist organizations of some sort, if only for a time. Third World revolutions were one influence. Various Marxist-Leninist parties had come to power based on guerrilla struggles, in places like China and Cuba, and this augmented the claim of Leninism that it was "successful" in charting a way to a post-capitalist future.

But it seemed obvious to me that workers did not have power in production in the various Communist countries. They're subordinated to a managerial hierarchy. Thus, I reasoned, workers must be a subjugated and exploited class in those countries.

A work I found particularly helpful in the '70s was Maurice Brinton's *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control*. This clear-headed and well-researched little book was an indispensable source of arguments to explode the myth of the Bolshevik party building "proletarian power" in Russia. AK Press has now re-issued this booklet as part of an anthology, *For Workers Power*. Brinton was the main writer for the London libertarian socialist group Solidarity. This anthology collects in one place many of Brinton's writings, including *The Irrational in Politics* and *Paris: May 1968*. In this review I'll mainly focus on the Russian revolution.

Brinton believes that the working class cannot have power in society, cannot liberate itself from its condition as a subjugated and exploited class, unless it gains direct management power over production. He believes that the working class must also gain control over the whole structure of the society to ensure its liberation. But he rejects the idea that the working class could have power in society if it is subjugated in production. This is the heart of Brinton's argument.

People sometimes say that "workers councils" were the organizational means for workers fighting for and attaining power in the Russian revolution.[1] But there were two different types of mass organization supported by workers in the Russian revolution that could be called "workers

[1] For example, Alan Maas of the International Socialist Organization writes: "...the October revolution of 1917 won power for the workers' councils, or soviets, establishing the basic institution of a socialist society" (Maas reply to Michael Albert). Maas therefore identifies "the basic institution of a socialist society" not with a particular economic institution or workers direct management of industry but with the Soviet polity, that is, a state controlled by the Bolshevik Party.

councils": the soviets (soviet is Russian for council) and the factory committees. Let's look at each.

The Petrograd soviet was formed during the tumultuous events in February, 1917 that led to the abdication of the czar. A group of radical and liberal intellectuals formed the soviet top-down when they constituted themselves as the "Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet" on February 27, 1917. They then sent out a call for election of delegates.[2] Moreover, the soviet assemblies were not where the real decisions were made. The executive made the real decisions in the backrooms. Some decisions were submitted to the assembled delegates for ratification, some were not. The soviet assembly tended to be just an open meeting, where anyone could speak. Soviets formed in other Russian cities were similar.

The factory committees, unlike the soviets, were initiated directly by Russian workers themselves, and these organizations became the main vehicle of self-organization of workers in the revolution. These committees were typically made up of elected worker delegates. The most important decisions were made in general assemblies of the rank and file.

On May 30, 1917 there was a meeting of over 400 representatives of factory committees in the Petrograd area. They described the situation they faced:

> "From the beginning of the revolution the administrative staffs of the factories have relinquished their posts. The workmen of the factories have become the masters. To keep the factories going, the workers' committees have had to take the management into their own hands. In the first days of the revolution, in February and March, the workmen left the factories and went into the streets…Later, the workmen returned to their work. They found that many factories had been deserted. The managers, engineers, generals, mechanics, foremen had reason to believe that the workmen would wreak their vengeance on them, and they had disappeared. The workmen had to begin work with no administrative staff to guide them. They had to elect committees which gradually re-established a normal system of work. The committees had to find the necessary raw materials, and…take upon themselves all kinds of unexpected and unaccustomed duties."[3]

The factory committees were described as "fighting organizations, elected on the basis of the widest democracy and with collective leadership," with the aim of creating "the organization of thorough control by labor over production and distribution."

Russian workers found that neither the soviets nor the industrial unions could be used by them to solve their immediate economic problems or help to coordinate activities between different workplaces. The soviets were tightly controlled by their executive and were taken up with fighting the government over political issues such as continued Russian involvement in the world war.

The industrial unions weren't much help either. Unions had been illegal under czarism. The unions had been formed top-down by the political parties and continued to be largely an appendage of the parties. Throughout most of 1917 most of the unions were controlled by the Mensheviks. Although union membership rose from 100,000 to over a million during 1917, this

[2] Oscar Anweiler, *Les Soviets en Rusie,* 1905–1921, cited in Rachleff (see note (4)).

[3] Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, pp. 140–141. John Reed provides descriptions of some worker takeovers in the article cited in note (3).

was largely an effect of the growth of the factory committees. Radical workers tended to join the industrial unions as a matter of principle, not because the unions had a real presence in the workplaces. Bill Shatov, an American IWW member who returned to his native Russia, described the Russian unions as "living corpses."

By September, 1917 the Bolsheviks had gained majorities in the key Russian soviets. About half the delegates in the Petrograd soviet represented personnel in the Russian military. With the troops loyal to the soviets, Bolshevik control of the soviets enabled them to capture state power at the end of October.

The new governmental structure vested authority in the Russian parliament — the 350-member Central Executive Committee of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets. As in other parliamentary systems, the government was formed as an executive committee, or cabinet of ministers, of the parliament. This executive was the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom). Lenin, as chair of this committee, was premier or head of the government.[4] The local and regional soviets, which were little more than rubber stamps for their party-controlled executives anyway, came to function as an "electoral college" (in the American sense) for the indirect election of the parliament. The soviet structure provided legitimacy for the new Bolshevik government, based on the widespread support for the soviets among Russian workers and military personnel in 1917. But the indirect system of election and the tight centralization meant it could not be effectively controlled by rank-and-file workers or used by them to initiate and control decisions.

By October 1917 a complex situation existed in Russian industry. "In practice the implementation of workers' control took on a variety of forms in different parts of Russia," Brinton writes. "These were partly determined by local conditions but primarily by the degree of resistance shown by different sections of the employing class. In some places the employers were expropriated forthwith, 'from below.' In other instances they were merely submitted to a supervisory type of 'control,' exercised by the factory committees." This "supervisor control" included, for example, the right to veto management hiring decisions, to prevent employment of strikebreakers. After the coming to power of the Bolshevik Party, the situation would become even more complex with some enterprises "nationalized from above by decree of the Central Government."

At the end of 1917 Lenin did not favor immediate nationalization of the economy. Brinton believes that Lenin opposed expropriation of the capitalists "because of his underestimation of the technological and administrative maturity of the proletariat." Lenin envisioned that the "dual power" situation of "supervisory control" which existed in many privately-owned enterprises would continue for some time. The right of the factory committees to engage in this supervisory control was legalized in November, 1917 by Lenin's decree on "workers control." Lenin was not advocating that workers take over management of production or expropriate capitalists on their own initiative.

During 1917 many Russian workers envisioned a division of labor where the factory committees would take over the running of the economy while the soviets would become the new polity or governmental structure.[5] The Bolsheviks encouraged the factory committee movement to restrict its ambitions to "the economy." The "workers party" would take political power.

[4] John Reed, "The Structure of the Soviet System," *Liberation,* July, 1918 (reprinted in *Socialist Viewpoint,* Sept. 15, 2002).

[5] Peter Rachleff, Soviets and Factory Committees in the Russian Revolution.

Limiting their aspiration for power to the economy would prove to be the undoing of the Russian factory committee movement. Direct management of production may be necessary for worker power in society, but it is not sufficient. Workers need to also control the polity — the institutions for making the basic rules in society and enforcing them. If they don't, they won't be able to defend their power in production.

Russian workers assumed that the Bolshevik seizure of state power through the soviets would support their aspirations for economic control. The creation of the new Bolshevik government in October thus spurred a new burst of activity by the factory committee movement. Although Lenin's "workers control" decree only legalized the degree of control the factory committees had already achieved, it encouraged workers to go farther because now they believed that their efforts would gain official sanction. Workers didn't put too much stock in the boundary Lenin drew between control and management. Moreover, Lenin's idea that the situation of "dual power" in the factories could be maintained indefinitely was unrealistic. Kritzman, a "left" Communist, criticized the workers control decree:

> "Employers would not be inclined to run their businesses with the sole aim of teaching the workers how to manage them. Conversely, the workers felt only hatred for the capitalists and saw no reason why they should voluntarily remain exploited."

"The spontaneous inclination of the workers to organize factory committees," wrote historian E. H. Carr, "was inevitably encouraged by a revolution which led the workers to believe that the productive machinery of the country belonged to them and could be operated by them at their own discretion and to their own advantage. What had begun to happen before the October revolution now happened more frequently and more openly; and for the moment nothing would have dammed the tide of revolt."[6]

Out of this upsurge of activity came the first attempt by the factory committee movement to form its own national organization, independent of the trade unions and political parties. In December the Central Soviet of Factory Committees of the Petrograd Area published a Practical Manual for the Implementation of Workers' Control of Industry. The manual proposed that "workers control could rapidly be extended into 'workers' management'." The manual also announced the intention of forming the factory committees into regional federations and a national federation.

Isaac Deutscher explains what then happened:

> "The Factory Committees attempted to form their own national organization, which was to secure their virtual economic dictatorship. The Bolsheviks now called upon the trade unions to render a special service to the nascent Soviet State and to discipline the Factory Committees. The unions came out firmly against the attempt of the Factory Committees to form a national organization of their own. They prevented the convocation of the planned All-Russian Congress of Factory Committees and demanded total subordination on the part of the Committees."[7]

However, the Bolshevik Party had only just taken state power — and their grip on power would become even more tenuous with the onset of the Russian civil war in May, 1918. This

[6] E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution,* Vol. II, p. 69, cited in Rachleff.

[7] Quoted in Brinton, p. 320.

resulted in a compromise in which the party committed itself to trade union control of the economy.

This helped the party leadership to gain the cooperation of the party's trade union cadres in suppressing the drive of the factory committee movement for direct worker management. The trade union control concept would be encapsulated in Point 5 of the program adopted at the 1919 Communist Party congress:

> "The organizational apparatus of socialized industry must be based primarily on the trade unions…Participating already in accordance with the laws of the Soviet Republic and established practice in all local and central organs of industrial administration, the trade unions must proceed to the actual concentration in their own hands of all the administration of the entire economy, as a single economic unit."

The first step in supplanting the workers' drive for economic self-management with central planning from above was the decree on December 5, 1917, setting up the Supreme Economic Council (Vesenka), under the direct authority of Sovnarkom. Vesenka was made up of Bolshevik trade union officials, Bolshevik Party stalwarts and "experts" appointed from above by the government. Vesenka was assigned the task of creating "a plan for the organization of the economic life of the country" and was to "direct to a uniform end" the activities of all existing economic authorities. Here we have the beginnings of a central planning apparatus assuming managerial functions.

The fate of the factory committee movement was fought out at the first All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions in January, 1918. Here the Bolsheviks put forward their plan to subordinate the factory committees to hierarchical union control. The main Russian political tendency with a vision for direct workers management were the anarcho-syndicalists. At the congress, the 25 anarcho-syndicalist delegates, representing Don Basin miners, Moscow railway workers and other workers, made a desperate effort to defend the factory committee movement and its drive for direct workers' management. They proposed "that the organization of production, transport and distribution be immediately transferred to the hands of the toiling people themselves, and not to the state or some civil service machine made up of one kind or another of class enemy." G.P. Maximov, a prominent anarcho-syndicalist, distinguished between horizontal coordination and hierarchical control of the economy:

> "The aim of the proletariat was to coordinate all activity,…to create a center, but not a center of decrees and ordinances but a center of regulation, of guidance — and only through such a center to organize the industrial life of the country."

However, the Bolsheviks got the decision they wanted. They had the majority of delegates, and Menshevik and Social Revolutionary Party supporters at the congress also voted for subordination of the factory committees to the trade unions.

With control over the government, the armed forces, the trade union apparatus, and majorities on many of the factory committees, the Bolshevik Party was able to tame the factory committee movement. Any factory committee that didn't go along could be isolated; a factory could be denied resources it needed.

"Bolshevik propaganda in later years," Brinton notes, would harp on the theme that the factory committees "were not a suitable means for organizing production on a national scale." Deutscher,

for example, says that "almost from their creation, the Factory Committees…aspired to have the…final say on all matters affecting their factory, its output, its stocks of raw materials, its conditions of work, etc. and paid little or no attention to the needs of industry as a whole."

The Leninist argument makes a false assumption: Either anarchic and uncoordinated autonomy of each individual factory, or a central planning apparatus to create a plan and then issue orders through a hierarchy, top-down. Leninists "dismiss workers' self-management with derogatory comments about 'socialism in one factory'," says Brinton, "or with profundities like 'you can't have groups of workers doing whatever they like, without taking into account the requirements of the economy as a whole.'" But there is a third alternative: A system of horizontal, self-managed planning and coordination. Why can't workers and consumers themselves create the plan?

Through their own experience the Russian workers themselves had come to realize the need for coordination and planning of the economy on a broader scale. This was the point to the proposals for regional and national federations of factory committees, and the convening of a national factory committee congress.

The consumer cooperatives in the Russian revolution grew to 12 million members. When workers took over factories in 1917, they sometimes developed links with these organizations for distribution of the products of their factory. This relationship could have been systematized to provide consumer input to some sort of grassroots-controlled, participatory planning system.

The proposal for union management of the economy, endorsed by the Communist Party congress in 1919, was never implemented. In exchange for their efforts to suppress the independent initiative of factory committees, Communist Party trade union cadres had been appointed to various government and management bodies, but this was combined with government appointment of managers and control from above. As early as November 9, 1917, the Central Soviet of Employees that had taken over the postal system during the revolution was abolished. The new minister in charge decreed: "No…committees for the administration of the department of Posts and Telegraphs can usurp the functions belonging to the central power and to me as People's Commissar."

By 1921 worker discontent was widespread and strikes broke out in Petrograd and Moscow. The immediate danger posed by foreign embargo and civil war had ended and now the trade union base of the party was pushing for a greater say in the running of the economy. This debate would come to a head at the Communist Party congress in March, 1921. The Workers Opposition charged that the party leaders had failed to carry out the promises in the 1919 program, and had "reduced to almost nil the influence of the working class." With "the Party and economic authorities having been swamped by bourgeois technicians," they argued that the solution was union management of the economy. They thus proposed to invoke an All-Russian Producers Congress to elect the management of the national economy, with the various industrial unions electing the management boards of their respective industries.

Lenin denounced the push for union management as a "syndicalist deviation." "It destroyed the need for the Party. If the trade unions, nine-tenths of whose members are non-Party workers, appoint the managers of industry, what is the use of the Party?", Lenin asked. Here we see Lenin's view of the party as managers, implementing their program through a top-down hierarchy. He assumes that the workers themselves are somehow incapable of running the economy, that the party intelligentsia must be in charge.

Trotsky denounced the Workers Opposition for raising "dangerous slogans":

> "They have made a fetish of democratic principles. They have placed the workers' right to elect representatives above the Party. As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy."

The party congress ended not only with the defeat of the Workers Opposition but with the party banning internal dissent. The officers of the Russian metalworkers union were leaders of the Workers Opposition. When the party fraction in the union refused to go along with party orders to kick them out of office, the party-state leaders imposed a trusteeship (as the AFL-CIO would say). The union's elected officers were replaced with party appointees. This was not the first time this tactic had been employed. In 1920, Trotsky, as Commissar of Transport, had broken the railway workers union by appointing new leaders.

Shortly after the 1921 party congress Bogdanov and his Workers Truth group (of Bolshevik origin) were to declare that the revolution had led to "a complete defeat for the working class."

Probably the most important condition that made victory difficult for the workers revolution in Russia was the fact that the working class in Russia was a small minority of the population, no more than 10 percent. Russia in 1917 was still semi-feudal. The vast majority of the population were peasants whose concern in the revolution was mainly to expropriate the big landlords and gain control of their small farms. Peasants produced largely for their own consumption; productivity was low. The poverty, disorganization and illiteracy of the Russian peasantry prevented them from imposing their own solution on Russian society. In Russia there didn't exist the sort of widespread worker unionism in agriculture that enabled the Spanish agricultural workers to play an important role in the Spanish revolution in 1936.

Did the minority status of the working class doom it to defeat? G.P. Maximov, who was an agronomist, had hoped that czarist war industry could be converted to the manufacture of tractors, electrical generating equipment and other things to exchange with the peasantry for their products. He hoped that a strategy of investing in the agricultural economy would encourage collective organizational methods, a collectivist outlook, and increased productivity in the peasant communities. This was Maximov's libertarian socialist path for Russian agriculture.[8]

Even if the Bolsheviks had wanted to pursue this peace conversion strategy, the onset of the Russian civil war in May, 1918 would have gotten in the way. Virtually the whole of Russian industry was converted into a supply organization for the Red Army. The cities produced nothing that could be traded to the peasants for their products. So, the Bolsheviks resorted to forced requisitions, seizing agricultural products at the point of a gun. This strategy was not very effective. The peasants resisted and the cities starved. The urban population of Russia was cut in half during the civil war. Workers moved in with their country cousins. At least they wouldn't starve in the countryside.

Lenin's solution to the growing peasant discontent was the New Economic Policy, enacted in 1921. This policy encouraged capitalist development and free trade in agricultural products. Eventually it was Stalin who "solved" the problem of low agricultural productivity through forced collectivization and mechanization. This allowed much of the rural population to be moved to work in urban industry, beginning in the late '20s. The state hierarchy could then capture the efficiency gains from agricultural investment to build up Russian industry.

[8] G. P. Maximov, *Constructive Anarchism.*

Bolshevik apologists usually point to various "conjunctural" factors to explain the defeat of the workers revolution in Russia — foreign invasion and civil war, failure of the revolution in Germany and other European countries, and so on. But neither these factors nor the minority status of the working class in Russia are sufficient to explain why the Russian workers' revolution was defeated in the peculiar way it was. Worker revolutions have often been defeated by a violent reaction that saves the property system of the capitalist class, as in Italy in the '20s, Spain in the '30s, and Chile in 1973.

But the capitalist class was expropriated in Russia, and a new economic system emerged, based on public ownership, and subordination of the economy to central planning, not market governance.

A new class emerged as the rulers of this economic system. Unlike the capitalist class they were hired labor, employees of the state. Brinton refers to this class as "the bureaucracy." But there are "bureaucracies" in all kinds of organizations. A class, however, is distinguished by its particular role in social production.

I think it is helpful here to look at the sort of hierarchy that was being developed in capitalist industry in the U.S. in the early 20th century. The emergence of the large corporations gave the capitalists sufficient resources to systematically re-design jobs and the production process to their advantage, destroying the skill and autonomy of workers that had been inherited from the artisan tradition. "Efficiency experts" like Frederick Taylor advocated concentration of conceptualization and decision-making in the hands of a managerial control hierarchy, removing it from the shopfloor. The point to Taylorism was to shift the balance of power on the shopfloor to the advantage of management. This attempt to gain greater control over what workers do was justified to the owners in terms of the ability of the firm to ensure long-term profitability, but it also empowers a new class. The period between the 1890s and 1920s saw the emergence of a new class of professional managers, engineers, and other expert advisors to management. These were the cadres who made up the new control hierarchies in the corporations and the state. As hired employees, the power of this techno-managerial or coordinator class[9] is not based on ownership of capital assets, but on concentration of expertise and decision-making authority.

The coordinator class was only in its early stages of development in the Russian economy in the early 20th century. In the actual situation the Bolshevik party intelligentsia were thrown into the breach, along with technicians and managers inherited from the capitalist regime. The Russian revolution showed that it was possible to use the state to build an economy where the coordinator class was the ruling class. Bolshevik ideology and program are an essential part of the explanation for the emergence of this new class system.

Brinton makes a convincing case that neither Lenin nor Trotsky ever believed in or advocated workers' management of production. After the Bolshevik takeover in October, 1917, Lenin's "whole practice," Brinton notes, "was to denounce attempts at workers' management as 'premature,' 'utopian,' 'anarchist,' 'harmful,'" and so on.

Much of the debate within the Communist Party in 1920–21 was over "one-man management." As early as April, 1918 Lenin wrote:

> "Unquestioning submission to a single will is absolutely necessary for the success of labor processes that are based on large-scale machine industry…today the revolution

[9] "Coordinator class" is the term that Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel use for this class. Albert and Hahnel, "A Ticket to Ride: More Locations on the Class Map," in Between Labor and Capital, Pat Walker, ed.

> demands, in the interests of socialism, that the masses unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of the labor process."

But the "one-man management" debate was somewhat misleading since the real issue is not whether there is a committee in charge or one person but the relationship of the mass of workers to the authority of management. Would they possess this authority themselves or not?

Nonetheless, the logic of central planning does favor having one person in charge. If plans are crafted by an elite group of planners and then implemented as a set of orders that must be carried out by the workforce, the planning apparatus will want to have the ability to enforce their orders. And this is easier if there is just one person who is answerable to those above rather than a whole collective.

The Bolshevik leaders assumed that the sort of hierarchical structures in industry evolved by capitalism were class-neutral. They maintained that managerial hierarchy could be wielded in the interests of the working class as long as the "workers party" controlled the state that owned the economy.

This idea was not unique to Bolshevism but was common among social-democratic Marxists prior to World War I. For example, in The Common Sense of Socialism, published in 1911, John Spargo, a member of the American Socialist Party, argues that control of the state by the labor-based socialist political party is sufficient to ensure working class control of a state-owned economy. In Brinton's view, the commitment to the persistence of hierarchy — the division of society into those who give orders and those who are expected to obey them — is as rooted in social-democracy as it is in Leninism.

When Marx drew up the statutes of the first International Workers Association in 1864, he included Flora Tristan's slogan: "The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the workers themselves." Brinton's analysis of the Russian revolution shows how the Bolsheviks failed to take this principle seriously. Brinton agrees with Marx that the class struggle is a process that drives social change, and that through this process the working class can liberate itself. The fact that workers must work, not to fulfill their own aims, but are forced to act as instruments for the aims of others — our situation in capitalist society — is what Marx called "alienated labor." Brinton believes this condition of "alienation" is pervasive in existing society, not just in work. Liberation presupposes that this condition be replaced by self-determination in production and all aspects of life. In order to work out a path to liberation, Marx believed it was necessary to be realistic, to "see through" all phony ideology, like the rhetoric in bourgeois liberalism about "freedom" and "democracy."

The emphasis upon self-activity, class struggle, and realism about society are the good side of Marx, the part that Brinton retains in his own thinking. But in the Marxist political tradition this is combined with hierarchical aspects. Why? In Marx's theory of "historical materialism," social formations become vulnerable to instability and replacement when they "fetter the development of the productive forces." Marx assumes that a drive for ever-increasing productive output is a trans-historical force that is the gauge of social progress. If Taylorism and the development of hierarchy in industry are the particular way that capitalism increases productive output, these must be "progressive," some Marxists infer. "We must raise the question of applying much of what is scientific and progressive in the Taylor system," Lenin wrote in 1918. Lenin thus supported the adoption of Taylor's piecework schemes. "The Soviet Republic…must organize in Russia the study and teaching of the Taylor system." The fallacy in this argument is the assumption that produc-

tive effectiveness could not be achieved through the development of the skill and knowledge of workers, under workers' self-management.

In Marx's analysis of capitalism the division between labor and capital takes center stage. Because the working class does not own the means of production, we must sell our time to employers. The class power of the owners enables them to rip off the working class, accumulating surplus value as private capital.

But there is another systematic rip off of the working class that becomes entrenched once capitalism reaches its mature corporate form. The logic of capitalist development then systematically under-develops worker potentials, as expertise and decision-making is accumulated as the possession of another class, the techno-managerial or coordinator class. But Marxism doesn't "see" this class.

This failure makes Marxism self-contradictory. The hierarchical dimension of Marxism converts it into a coordinator class ideology, a program for the continued subordination of the working class. The concept of the "vanguard party" as managers of the movement for social change, concentrating expertise and decision-making in their hands; the idea that "proletarian power" consists in a particular party leadership controlling a state, implementing its program top-down through the state hierarchy; control of the economy by a central planning apparatus — these things don't empower the working class.

Hierarchies of the state, like the similar hierarchies in the private corporations, are based on the concentration of professional expertise and decision-making power into the hands of a coordinatorist elite. A statist strategic orientation that thinks in terms of a party leadership capturing a state and then implementing its program top-down through the state hierarchy is a stategy that empowers the coordinator class. This contradicts the liberatory and egalitarian rhetoric that socialism traditionally appeals to to motivate activists.

I'm not here arguing that the empowerment of the working class would not presuppose the taking of political power. The working class can't empower itself if it doesn't take over both the running of industry and the governing of the society. This presupposes that it control the polity — the structure through which the basic rules in society are made and enforced. But a hierarchical state is not the only possible form of polity. We can also envision a self-managed polity — based on grassroots conventions, accountable to base assemblies of residents in neighborhoods and workers in worksites. The point is that it must be the mass of the people themselves who "take power," through institutions of mass participatory democracy that the people create and control.

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