

The Italian Lesson.

By U. Steklov

The Paris clerical paper "La Liberte" discussing the recent events of Italy expresses the hope that the french workers will "benefit by that lesson."

That the Italian working class movement is highly instructive no one would deny. But it is not instructive in the sense which the bourgeois press takes it. The lessons to be derived from that failure are not of the kind imagined by the hired scribes of the imperialist press.

The movement presents a number of lessons of the most serious nature. The first is that partial, unsystematic capture of individual enterprises without the overthrow of the capitalist system as a whole is in advance doomed to failure. To take over individual factories while leaving untouched the whole capitalist system of production and distribution, of banking credit and marketing and so forth, is to face certain defeat. Even if the attempt of the Italian proletariat had not been frustrated by government violence and the treason of compromisers that movement would hardly have advanced if it had remained at its initial stage. The very logic of events would have forced it to a higher stage—to the complete socialization of production and distribution.

But a radical change in the existing relations in the economic field presupposes a radical change in the political field. In order to begin socialist reconstruction, in order to make indentures into the sphere of bourgeois economic relationships, and in order to be safe from attempts at restoration by the reactionary elements, the working class must at a preliminary stage, capture in full the political power. To leave the apparatus of the state in the hands of the bourgeoisie while at the same time attacking its economic privileges is to prepare a bitter disappointment. Even without the use of violence or bloody suppressions, the bourgeoisie, since they retain the state mechanism, can gradually paralyze all such attempts on the part of the proletariat and create disaffection in its ranks. The bourgeoisie would naturally, combine the two methods of action, as was the case in Italy.

In order that the proletariat may be able to begin such a fundamental transformation of all the social relationships with full understanding and determination, ready to take the most energetic steps it must first of all purge its ranks of the opportunist, shaky and traitorous elements that are ready, in the most decisive moment to compromise with the enemy of the working class and to betray their own. The movement of the Italian workers failed because it did not develop and remained at its initial stage of disorganized and crude capture of individual enterprises. It was due to the fact that the compromising leaders have tried consciously, to hold the movement at this lower stage and used their influence on a number of workers to draw them away from the main current. They have succeeded in creating confusion and cleavage in the ranks of the workers. They also gave encouragement to the downhearted bourgeoisie, helping its most able and hypocritical group to fool the workers with so called, concessions and thus gradually bring to naught the whole movement.

Such are the fundamental lessons we draw from the events in Italy. In spite of the bourgeois scribes, the proletariat learns from the defeat met by the first revolutionary attempt of the Italian workers these very lessons.

The proletariat learns from his mistakes. As the rising class whose future is before him, his temporary failures and defeats only serve to strengthen him. And, first of all, his failures only help to increase his class-consciousness and to create the revolution in the minds without which the revolution in the social relationships is impossible. There is no doubt that the lessons the world proletariat will derive from the events in Italy will serve to bring nearer his day of victory and to accelerate the collapse of the capitalist system.

But the people will not put up with hunger. The people will learn, and they will learn it very soon, that the bread exists and can be had, but by no other means than refusing to bend the knee before the sacred rights of capital and of private ownership in land.

Nicolai Lenin.