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Anti-Parliamentarism and Council Communism

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An unsigned piece in the October 1935 (volume 1, issue 12) edition of International Council Correspondence, the journal of the United Workers Party, of which Paul Mattick, Sr., was a leading member.

For many years the left communist groups have been referred to as the Anti-Parliamentarians because they were opposed to parliamentary participation and parliamentary activity. They are still designated by that name and even refer to themselves as the Anti-parliamentary movement. During the reformist era of capitalism this was correct as it differentiated them from the parliamentary socialists in the labor movement. The controversy between these two sections raged about the question as to which was most effective in getting reforms – legislative action in parliaments or direct action and strikes on the economic field. The struggle between the opposing ideas and tactics dates back to the first international, and even before.

During the upswing period of capitalism, when it was expanding and developing, it was possible to grant concessions to the working-class because of the increase in productivity and the resulting increase in profits. These reforms, however, were seldom granted without much struggle. There were victories and defeats in both wings of the movement and the economic and political organizations grew and developed with capitalism. The controversy as to which was most effective of these activities continued.

The present period of capitalist decline, however, is one in which generally no concessions are possible for the working class. Further, we have definitely left the era of democracy, the era of free competition. This democracy which served the conflicting interests of small capitalists during the developing stage of capitalism, is no longer compatible. Monopoly capitalism in a period of permanent crisis, where the short waves of upswing and “prosperity” are the exception and where capitalist crisis is the general rule, finds dictatorship and organized terror the only means to insure it a tranquil proletariat. Democracy, parliamentarism and the parliamentary organizations become obsolete and in fact cannot be tolerated. Where parliamentarism still remains, it only indicates that the general world crisis has not attained sufficient depth. The unquestionable tendency throughout the capitalist world is toward fascism and the dictatorship of the monopoly capitalist class.

This development also renders the controversy of the parliamentarians in the movement with the left communist groups obsolete as well. The name “anti-parliamentary” therefore is historically outworn and should be discarded. In its place the better title, **council communism** should be adopted as its designates as a name the major principle difference between the old and the new labor movement. This difference on the role that the organization plays in the class-struggle and in the proletarian revolution is of increasing importance, while the question of parliamentary

activity is of decreasing secondary importance throughout the world movement.

The name **Council Communism** has been adopted by some groups and is used extensively in our literature. It should be used by all left communist groups who adhere to the international council communist movement. This new movement growing up in the new historical period in which we live, holds that the proletarian revolution is a class question and it devotes its efforts to aiding the working class to carry through its historical revolutionary role, a task in which the old labor movement failed.

In contra-distinction to the old party form of organization, universally common to the parliamentary politicians in the old labor movement, the new labor movement holds that the soviets, the workers' councils are the real fighting organizations of the working class.