

1919-1926: Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Europe

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'Doctrinal reconstruction means restoring clarity to the aims of the class revolution, which have been totally lost with the prevalence of the formula that put motion and contingent success before the ultimate aim. Since it was demonstrated by the fact that the lack of such clarity turned the expected success into disaster, reconstructing it means restoring to the vanguard of the class, i.e. to the party that rises from crushing, precisely, that conscious will for practical action that cannot be had within the sphere of the person and even less of the great and illustrious leader'.

- Forli meeting, *Il Programma Comunista* No. 1 of 1953

Need for a 'history of the Communist Left'¹.

We are finally tackling a subject that we had been returning to for so long, that of the History of the Communist Left.² It is a work that ties in with the series of articles we published in *Il Programma Comunista* about Lenin's Extremism, explaining its true historical and theoretical background and making a fairly wide-ranging and widespread commentary on it.³ Then at the meeting in Bologna⁴, we gave a first glimpse of the problems that we must deal with in the continuation of this work of ours. I warned you at the time that I would not have wanted to give an exposition on this period, because since there is the unfortunate habit of identifying the histories of the groups, tendencies and currents that have acted historically with personal names, I would have been forced to use my own name very often; and this annoyed me because I would either not have had to say certain things or I would have had to say them by talking too much about myself. This I really wanted to avoid, because we are making a considerable effort to make our movement impersonal, both in general and in each specific case. By trying to depersonalise our small party as much as possible we want to make its work more and more collective, but since this was an unavoidable point, as we shall see, we had to face it bravely. We will see in the future how to solve this problem, but in this case I will naturally try not to talk about myself in third person as Julius Caesar or Napoleon did. Nor will I be able to speak of him as the last fool: first, because one would not understand why he appears so often in the documents of the time and, secondly, because I would devalue all the effort I put into conveying these results to you. So this is a very awkward thing to do and we will see how to do it in the publication for which we have begun to weave the outline.⁵

Our work for the publication is twofold. After the meeting in Bologna, we started to give an account of what was said there, in two instalments, which have so far appeared in the press. The first one was read by everyone because it was published in issue no. 3, the other in issue no. 4⁶ and I don't think anyone has read it yet although this time the paper came out early. I don't think you were able to receive it before you left your locations, so I will perhaps remind you of the most important things. In the first instalment, I tried to explain how the text is organised, which we would like to publish in the form we will see later

¹ The titles of the paragraphs are all added during the editorial phase.

² Part of the *history of the "Italian" Communist Left* had already been treated and later we talk about its publication in volume, which actually took place in March 1964. For further details see the editorial of n+1 #32.

³ The work on *Extremism (left wing communism)* was published in issues 16 to 24 of 1960.

⁴ Held on the 12th and 13th November 1960.

⁵ In the aforementioned first volume of History, edited by Bordiga, anonymity is maintained with the expedient of naming the author's function ("representative of the Italian Communist Left", "the columnist", etc.), what which obviously would have seemed artificial in a conversational situation.

⁶ From 1961.

(I think the mimeographed form is not appropriate here, it is something we could discuss separately at this meeting from a practical point of view).

The work consists of a collection of documents which is not yet complete and yet is already quite ponderous. Something will have to be written that will act as a connective tissue to all these historical texts, that will unite them together. We have started a few chapters with a brief introduction. Of course when we talk about the Left in the Communist International our history could start from when the Communist International came into being in 1919, but it is impossible to talk about the rise of the Third International without talking about the collapse of the Second, and therefore the First World War, so we would have to go back to 1914. In order to explain how the resounding crises of the 'proletarian parties' came about as the war approached, it is necessary to give an idea of the tendencies and currents that existed in the socialist movement even before that. Thus, albeit in broad strokes, we must go back to the earliest origins of the whole proletarian movement. And since throughout this course we claim our allegiance to a theory that is always Marxist, we must go back to the origin of Marxist theory. We must also refer to other more or less ancient texts from our classics, in order to show that we do not represent a school that arose in a contingent historical moment or, worse still, as a result of the evolution of today, but represent a continuous thread, as we have always maintained, a thread that leads us back to those origins. So a kind of historical introduction is needed. We started to make this introduction.

Of course we in this History, as we made clear in an initial warning, do not intend to speak specifically of either Italy, the Italian party or an 'Italian left'. From the time it was formed in the Fraction, in fact, the Communist Left was the most active current in Europe as far as action within the Communist International was concerned until it was impossible to avoid its downfall. So we will not dwell specifically on Italy but talk about problems that were worldwide, in keeping with the worldwide direction of the Third International. Of the criticisms that we made in the years from 1920 onwards and the historical facts that showed what the results of the measures that were being discussed at the time were, we must make an international reference. We started from a picture of the European situation. In these first few pages already written, we have borrowed fundamental texts. We have used, for example, Mehring's History of German Social Democracy, who, in writing his history, starts from a picture of the situation in Germany around 1860. We too have tried to illustrate a picture of Italy around 1860 and, at great speed, we have arrived immediately at around 1870-71, a time when the very important questions of direction began to manifest themselves from which the struggle against opportunism within the

socialist movement began.⁷ In this whole line of ours, we, unlike others, are not to be considered direct opponents of the method advocated by Lenin at the various international congresses and in 'Extremism' (left wing communism), because we in turn knew at the outset that the genuine, pure, orthodox proletarian communist movement had opponents on both sides, however much this expression of combinations is always rather conventional. That is, on one side it had the reformists and revisionists, on the other side it had the libertarians, the syndicalists, the anarchists, who represented another direction comparable to opportunism. So today we are on a path which we can demonstrate that we have always been on, starting from the nucleus that gave us origin in the bosom of the old Italian Socialist Party, well before we had contact with Lenin, read and applied his books, and worked with the Bolshevik comrades in the congresses. We had been on that path well before the 1914 war. We were on that path at least from the time of the Libyan war and we fought later against these two 'dangers', which at international congresses have been misnamed 'right' and 'left' dangers. Now it is obvious that from a revolutionary point of view, right or left means absolutely nothing. If anything, they are all equally right-wing dangers, errors that lead to the successes of counter-revolution and not revolution. In short, this double series of errors has always been fought by us.

Abstentionism, ours and Lenin's

Instead, the way history is told is based on the fairy tale according to which we, the last exponents of the internationalist current, which was very strong in the PSI and overwhelmed the then Communist Party of Italy for many years, were the explicit representatives of what Lenin called left-wing opportunism, to which Lenin was obliged to deliver blows as strong as those he delivered to right-wing opportunism while he lived. Our fine-tuning of the history of the Communist Left will also serve to eliminate the fundamental error inherent

⁷ Germany will come specified in the periodical and in the first volume of the *History*, it had more industry and therefore more proletarians than Italy, although most were in semi-artisan condition, but *"Italy had, over Germany, the advantage of a more complete solution than the great liberal revolution, even if it was in a monarchy and not in republic. Every form of power of the old feudal classes had disappeared statewide and legally; furthermore, it was against the influence of the Catholic clergy and their violent reclamation of papal Rome. By contrast, Germany was still dominated by feudal state forms that do not even have the effects of the Franco-Prussian War and the national revolution from above against Austria had to radically eliminate"*. So to a greater German productive power, corresponded to a more mature Italian situation *as far as i was concerned relations of production*. This allows us to understand why in the "political laboratory" Italy, unlike other countries, both fascism as a more modern structure are developed in parallel of the bourgeois power system, is a harder and more coherent struggle against opportunism. The topic is taken up again in the following paragraphs and is it is important to note how economic determinations are consolidated materially with the ideological superstructure within the framework of a dynamic historical progression that inextricably includes the fundamental core of capitalism: Italy-France-England-Germany.

in this propaganda fable and to demonstrate the orthodoxy of our current, i.e. our consistency with the path on which Lenin also stood. This is why we must start first of all from the fact that the historical origin of our current has the same foundations as the Bolshevik current, the same as the Russian Communist Party. And perhaps, we can claim even more precise origins. Why do we say even more precise? [Because we were determined by a more mature capitalist situation. The Bolsheviks deserve credit for having been able to maintain great consistency at the beginning despite the extremely difficult conditions in backward Russia].⁸ The great strength, we said it then and we repeat it today at every step, the great merit, the enormous achievement that the Bolshevik party, i.e. the communist current in Russia, was to base itself entirely on theory, to maintain the line of principle of the proletarian revolution as it had been established by our doctrine, from the very beginning, precisely where conditions seemed most difficult, most unfavourable, where it was still necessary to take the place of the bourgeoisie in completing a bourgeois revolution, given that the Russian bourgeoisie was inconsistent. And on this impetus to give a completely proletarian imprint to the revolution, apply the full model of the communist revolution, what we consider a general and articulated 'universal' for all countries and all times. From this point of view we had a material advantage over them, which is why claiming 'clearer' origins than the Bolsheviks is not a self-compliment. The ultra-mature Italian situation had simply made it easier for us to set ourselves on the terrain of revolutionary intransigence, because we had been born and lived in a country with ancient capitalist relations, whose democracy dated back to the age of the Communes, whatever the quantitative industrial development suggested by statistics and so on. A country that had politically reached the great bourgeois revolutionary turning point in 1861, but had matured earlier than the other integral class relations, thus earlier and more completely than Germany, just to maintain the parallel with the quoted Franz Mehring.

Germany, as Marx says and as Mehring and we ourselves recall, had developed philosophical idealism to the fullest, which inevitably clashed with the revolutionary achievements of France and England, so the critique of philosophy, at this point not just German but the whole of it, became equally inevitable.⁹ This theoretical critique, combined with the critique of the facts in France and England, countries that were now completely beyond the anti-feudal revolution and the appearance of the bourgeois capitalist epoch, had made it possible to realise the perfect theory of the proletarian movement. The Bolshevik current, too, was the result of the coming together of international factors mostly outside of Russia, thus in the presence of mature conditions. It is on this terrain that we

⁸ As in the transcribed texts from the tape that we published previously, the square brackets they contain, where it has been possible to proceed in this direction, reconstructions of incomplete or missing parts. Everything else is treated as in normal transpositions from written to spoken.

⁹ See on the topic the monograph on double issue 15-16 of this magazine.

believe we were placed by the historical dynamic, and on that same path we were from the years at the turn of the 19th to the pre-war years when the organised current was formed. This was true of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, when in the early years of the 20th century they broke away from the revisionists and revolutionary socialists, when they fought within the old Social-Democratic International the Bernsteinian orientation tending to deform the healthy Marxist position. We were in a perfectly equivalent position, but it was easier for us.

It was more obvious to us the social and historical framework we were dealing with, the intertwining of political problems, the tri-class model in Marx's sense, since the industrial bourgeoisie, the landed bourgeoisie and the proletariat were fully developed classes. Here, the other classes or non-classes were entirely secondary, whereas the Russian model was far more complicated and remained so even after the revolution, which had to do with an economy that spanned the entire historical scale of class societies, from archaic patriarchal relations to feudal ones, from Asian-type autocracy to nascent capitalism with its first very combative nuclei of the industrial proletarian class, and so on.

In dealing with the final part of Extremism, Communism's infantile disease, I had to examine an initial divergence between the 'Italian' Communist Left, the International and Lenin himself, i.e. the famous question of the formation in Italy of the Abstentionist Communist Fraction which proposed, on the occasion of the first major post-war electoral round, on the eve of the events of 1919 and '20, the thesis of non-participation in parliamentary elections. It had been advocating this thesis since the Bologna Congress, in an already perfectly mature manner, organised on a national scale, albeit without great numerical success in terms of congress votes. The question of our abstentionism has never been understood, and I must say that Lenin himself did not understand it, no matter how extensively we explored it then and in subsequent years. We showed in the Meridian light that this 'stunt' of ours (as it were, a stunt it was not at all) of taking up an attitude of boycotting the parliamentary elections, did not derive at all from a question of principle, from our sympathy with abstentionism of the anarchist type. Even the Russian councils had already experimented with abstentionism in certain situations, and Lenin wrote several times about the divergences with the questions of principle put forward by the anarchists, he had discussed with them, dotted the 'i's' and made the divergences clear. And we in our turn, in our own small way, had a large production of clashes with the anarchists, along the same lines as Lenin.

If you will allow me a small personal note, at that time throughout the Italian Socialist Party the socialist most detested by the anarchists was me, because with them, ever since before the war, ever since the first struggles in the socialist youth federation against the anarcho-syndicalists, I always conducted theoretical battles to demonstrate the abyss existing between

Marxism and anarchism. Not in the usual conventional sense that the anarchists were the most extreme, those who wanted to make revolution more impulsively while the socialists wanted to go more slowly, but in the sense that we were the ones who, with respect to the tasks posed by history, followed the most direct and extreme path to revolution, while the anarchists were merely a deformation of conservative and petit-bourgeois positions.¹⁰

[This position of ours was very badly interpreted and we were never able to rid ourselves of what was basically a prejudice, despite having clarified the question several times. For example in his speech to the 3rd Congress of the CI, which we'll get to in a moment, Lenin praised the abstentionists because they would have renounced abstentionism and thus any connection with anarchism. But Lenin knew very well who we were and what we wanted (probably, by the way, the translations we have are not checked by Lenin himself, as was often the case, but are translations of translations). When Lenin lashes out at Serrati it is to tell him that he was wrong not to join the communists in Livorno. He couldn't have said that if he had considered us anarchists. Now I will tell you the little story. If you want, of course, I'll give you the whole chronology, but it would become long and annoying, so if I tell you some little facts now and then you will be more interested. So I am going to mention that fool Bordiga a few times. He lashed out at the good Lazzari who told the Bolsheviks: 'We had 98,000 votes in Livorno, you communists had 58,000, you were wrong from Moscow to order the communists to leave'. At the time, there were many who recognised themselves perfectly in the positions of the Left, even those who would later betray by aligning themselves with Moscow's degeneration, even many of those who stayed with Serrati and Lazzari. So Lenin says: 'Even if those who remained in the PSI had not been true communists, even if they had only been surrogates for Bordiga (and this was not the case, because Bordiga after the 2nd Congress declared with perfect loyalty that he renounced all anarchism and anti-parliamentarism), you would have had to go out and convince your comrades to go with the communists!' Of course it wasn't that Moscow had ordered the split. I would have left anyway, pulling all those others with me, even if Moscow hadn't wanted me to].

Struggle within the Russian party

[Now I cannot say what Lenin's exact words were. I remember the speeches that were made very well, but at the III Congress of '21 I wasn't there, as I was busy here with party work. Others went there and now I'll show you what kind of trouble they were in once they got there. There were Terracini,

¹⁰ From the point of view of immediate and trade union struggle, however, the communist Left managed to bring on their positions, as well as numerous socialists, anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists to the point of promoting the membership of the anarchist trade union USI, to the Red Trade Union International, effectively creating a combative one "united front from below" (see PCd'I report at the IV Congress of the Communist International, 1922).

Gennari and others. They made Lenin angry because they said things in such a silly and twisted way that they deserved one of those soapboxes... and rest assured he knew how to do it better than I did. If I had been there I would have reiterated very clearly the reasons for our abstentionism and the fact that it was not a question of principle for us but a simple problem of functionality, since the revolutionary party, in a revolutionary epoch, must not get caught up in the rotten dynamics of bourgeois politics. Lenin knew that I always tell the truth and this would simplify things. Not because of a question of 'loyalty', but because our renunciation of abstentionism (anarchism had nothing to do with it) did not imply any renunciation of revolutionary principles. In the International, not only Lenin knew this story of Bordiga's truth. Bukharin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, too, recognised it].¹¹

The other day, for example, we had a laugh when we picked up a bourgeois text that sets out facts based on some documents of the Communist International. It talks about the 6th Congress of 1928 attended by Togliatti who had already taken the Party into his own hands. I was in confinement on the island and naturally was not present.¹² Then Togliatti would have declared... I say would have declared because it was not a protocol, it was the account of a journalist who had interviewed Togliatti and therefore based the conclusion entirely on his words. Togliatti therefore said: *'Here you don't understand anything anymore...'*. It was 1928, that is, the day after the first violent struggles between Stalin and Bukharin on one side and Zinoviev and Kamenev and Trotsky on the other. And it was on the eve of the fiercest action against the Russian opposition. At that time, our Italian centrist friends (excuse the messy exposition), Gramsci and Togliatti had not yet thrown Trotsky overboard, they still doubted, they thought he and Zinoviev might be right after all, they hesitated, they had not yet opted completely for Stalin. It was in this situation that Togliatti, as soon as he arrived in Moscow, said: *'You can't understand anything here, there's complete darkness. It really is a most disgusting situation. The Russians have this congress on their stomach, they don't know how to take the burden off themselves. No one knows what the truth is behind the mutual accusations, no one knows what the way out might be. They did not know which way to go.'* It's a pity that Bordiga is not there this time, because if he were there he would tell the truth as usual. You see, I would have played a very important historical part, a real battilocchio.

Togliatti knew very well that our current would opt for the position contrary to the one enunciated by Stalin; but it was no longer represented in the

¹¹ As the speaker himself will admit shortly, in these two paragraphs and in part of the following one thoughts and memories overlap in a disorderly manner, so much so that we are forced to put some order between unclosed cuts and recordings in different registers.

¹² Bordiga remained in confinement, first in Ustica and then in Ponza (passing through the prison of Palermo on charges, which proved false, of attempted escape) from November 1926 to November 1929.

party and therefore could not express as it had always done a naked position, accusing Stalin, no doubt, of having crossed the Rubicon on the road leading Russia to ruin. He knew, Togliatti, that the Left would proclaim its solidarity with Zinoviev and Trotsky, just as I had done the last time I was in the Enlarged Executive in '26. These are not the stuff of memoirs. I would disgust myself if I became a memoirist. But as I've told you here several times, en passant, in the interlude between other topics, I was the first to say that Zinoviev and Trotsky held the same thesis even if it wasn't immediately apparent, since in 1924 it was Zinoviev who liquidated Trotsky and waged a ferocious campaign against him. In '26 Zinoviev went over to the opposition. That Zinoviev was in spite of everything a true revolutionary, a true Marxist, and in '26 he finally realised that Trotsky was right and switched from the majority to the opposition. So much so that at the 7th Enlarged Executive, by December when I was no longer there, they were unable to speak.¹³

At the Enlarged Executive in February, I had Stalin and Bukharin on one side and Zinoviev, Trotsky, and Kamenev on the other.¹⁴ You know very well how it turned out: Bukharin also distanced himself from Stalin. But I was the first to know that Trotsky and Zinoviev would go together. Maybe because they had confided in me? No, because neither of them knew it. I knew it because I knew them both intimately. Since I was known as the one who always told the truth and who could be told everything (they knew I certainly wasn't going to tell the cops), I received a variety of information from one side and the other, which allowed me to get a precise and detached picture of the situation and to anticipate scenarios that would only take place a few months later. 'Ah!' they would say to me, "what do you want to know about things in the Bolshevik Party, we are old Bolsheviks and we tell you that it is impossible for Trotsky and Zinoviev to shake hands". 'But no,' I replied, 'it's not impossible at all, because personal facts are not at stake here, they support the same theoretical question, they saw in Stalinism the same historical solution. And in the end they were victims of it, since by different routes they were both assassinated for the same cause.

Now, to come back a bit, to conclude on the abstentionist question, I recalled what was this great accusation made against us by the centrists, according to which we are pure theorists, dogmatists, Talmudists who have read

¹³ To the VII Enlarged Executive in reality both Trotsky and Zinoviev intervened. Bordiga probably means that it wasn't possible for them to address the burning topics on the situation of the Russian party and the International.

¹⁴ A telling account the leaden atmosphere dominant in the VI is good Expanded Executive and Bordiga's active intolerance, is in: *Giuseppe Berti on the meeting between the Italian delegation and Stalin*, on our website in the "Historical archive - Related materials" section to the Communist Left". The news is reported in this document of a long clarifying conversation between Trotsky and Bordiga and the passage of the clash between the latter and Stalin on the prospects of socialism in Russia. To understand the complex Bordiga-Trotsky relationship see among others: *The question Trotsky, 1925*, and *Plaidoyer pour Staline, 1956*.

certain books and swear by them as if they were a gospel written by Marx. Except, of course, that we do not even know how to read this gospel properly. Instead, it is clear that they interpret texts and doctrines and then claim to use them as a gospel. This is why this question, before becoming topical again because of the fortieth anniversary of the formation of the PCd'I in Livorno and all the fuss our adversaries made about it, was already topical then. Not because of the issue itself, that of abstentionism, but because of the internal discussions of an international nature that were already raging in Moscow over the differences, with relative reciprocal accusations of revisionism, more explicit capitulations than those heard at the famous conference of the 81 at the end of the 1960s.¹⁵ They had started arguing again among themselves, the Chinese, Russians, Yugoslavs, Albanians, etc., accusing each other of revisionism, taking each other back to the original texts, in short, swearing by the gospels themselves. Only they claimed the sacrosanct right to do so, while they accused us, as they accuse us today, of being dogmatic evangelists, compulsors of catechisms.

Revolution is an exquisitely political fact

I would like to set out the real history of the 'abstentionist question' because it cannot all be traced back to the simple constitution of the Communist Abstentionist Fraction within the PSI in 1919. What was the situation in 1919? The Italian proletariat had endured a very tough war and was deeply imbued with hatred towards its own bourgeoisie. A real class hatred. The party could focus a favourable disposition of the huge Italian proletarian masses on itself, because it had held a fairly satisfactory anti-war position, despite the '*neither join nor sabotage*' compromise formula advocated by the right-wingers. So the party had enormous potential, provided it had driven from its bosom those who had faltered, i.e. the reformists and the extreme right, those who had shown social-patriotic tendencies. This is why our group publicly posed the question of parliamentarism immediately after the end of the war in 1918. Actually, there had always been a clash with the parliamentary group, for example in the clandestine meetings during the war, which were in continuity with the public meetings held even before the war broke out. In May 1915, for example, a meeting was held in Bologna to decide whether a general strike should be declared in the event of war. There was obviously discussion and the main exponent of the position against the general strike was Turati, while we supported the opposite thesis. But in general there was a lot of mystification. D'Aragona and the other leaders of the trade union confederation of labour claimed that the strike would fail. I intervened saying that they were lying

¹⁵ The conference of 81 "Communists and workers' parties" was held in Moscow from November 10 to 1 December 1960. It should have responded to the general crisis of national communist parties after the further revisionist turn in the twentieth Congress of the CPSU (February 1956), personified by Khrushchev, but it resulted in the publication of a generic *Manifesto*. See "Reply to the ignoble manifesto of the 81 so-called communist and workers' parties", *Il Programma Comunista* no. 5 of 1961.

through their teeth. 'Your fear,' I said, 'is not that the strike will fail, but that it will succeed. You do not want it because you cannot bear the consequences, because you know very well what they will be!' Turati recognised that our positions were clear and sharp and that this was the only way to reason. In fact he cut it short and argued that the strike should not be carried out because if it succeeded it would be criminal to strike an army at war from behind. Turati was a consequential bourgeois, a natural adversary, while D'Aragon and the like were nothing more than traitors infiltrating our ranks, always ready to castigate the proletariat's potential for struggle, to argue that it is impossible to break out of the usual patterns. It is not to avoid pushing the proletariat to the brink in fear of defeat: it is to maintain the usual patterns, trade union, parliamentary.

This was the situation, and so the general strike was not proclaimed. In keeping with tradition, instead the party leadership, the socialist representatives in the Confederation of Labour and of course the parliamentary group were summoned. Despite what would be said later, we argued a purely Bolshevik-Leninist thesis:

'What are the parliamentary group and the socialists in the union leadership doing here? It is the Party that must decide. This is a critical moment, we're on the eve of the departure of the trains for the front, it's certainly not the time to call a congress and vote as one does in parliament. It is the party leadership, assisted by some of its organised periphery, that must make decisions of revolutionary significance. The comrades who work in parliament, who work in the union, must receive orders and carry them out, they must not come here to vote and compare opinions, they have no right to do so. The attitude to take when a deadly war breaks out for the proletariat is an exquisitely political problem. The Confederation of Labour will vote on the strike for wage improvements, the parliamentary group will vote when those bourgeois fools bring their laws to parliament. Here we are out of the struggle [for immediate interests], you really must go!'

[I have only given one example, although it is the most striking. This situation dragged on until 1920. By shifting the problems from the terrain of confrontation to the electoral terrain, whether it was the latter within the party or at parliamentary level, these opportunist swines always overwhelmed us. Even in 1920, at the time of the occupation of the factories, the confederation did not call a general strike on the usual grounds of the risk of failure. The opportunists in parliament and in the trade union threatened resignation if the party leadership asserted the political reasons for a strike involving thousands upon thousands of proletarians. They did not want to take deep action 'because the conditions were lacking', but these conditions had been compromised by the opportunists themselves! The problem of privileging the contexts of the muddy confrontation between institutions over the political clash between classes (which, by the way, in 1919-20 was also taking place with spontaneous overtones), came up at the 3rd Congress of the Communist International. The

blackmail of the usual traitorous trade union reformists and bonzes had finally produced a specific policy of the Revolutionary International].

It must be made clear: we had argued that it was necessary to split the party and that a revolutionary attack would be possible immediately after the war, and we had argued this while the war was going on. These two points were incompatible with parliamentary rot. In fact, this was very 'Leninistic'. Ours was an exquisitely historical thesis, completely realistic, linked to 'a careful analysis of situations' as those who criticise us say. We were not arguing about the philosophy of violence or non-violence, whether one should shoot or whether, on receiving the slap, one should turn the other cheek. It was not the time for chatting between gentlemen in double-breasted suits. It was the time of maximum tension between the classes, of an enormous accumulation of violence due to the war. Either the proletariat would throw itself at the bourgeoisie, or the bourgeoisie would throw itself at the proletariat. At that moment we went to the square with our bare hands, but to fight, not to reason. This situation would not last. As soon as the war was over, the forerunners of fascism, the interventionists à la Mussolini, did nothing but shout about Italy being dominated by the Reds. They collected 'glorious fighters', paraded them with their medals for valour, with their campaign ribbons, with their mutilations. It came to a clash, the workers whistled, spat, beat their hands against those who wished to represent the 'glory' of the huge slaughter.

The virulence of western parliamentarianism

It was inevitable that a counter-offensive would form, a movement symmetrical to ours to contest the square we held firmly in our grasp despite the war. As the strike in Turin in 1917 had shown, which had blown away all police and military constraints with their seemingly iron control over the proletariat, placing the latter as an element fighting as equals against its historic antagonist. And indeed historical was the alternative at stake, an alternative of a purely material nature that required purely practical actions and instruments, unrelated to any 'bargaining' or 'discussion'. It was clear that a choice lay before the party: either participate in the elections or take power before the bourgeoisie seriously armed its defenders. While the socialist proletarian movement held the square and repressed the attacks, the party chose elections. It was a question of taking advantage of the anger and indignation of the proletariat to take a huge number of votes and therefore socialist representatives in parliament. If before the war the socialists had around fifty deputies, now the social situation would have allowed them to triple their number, which in 1919 actually happened by exalting the electionists. But the goal they had in mind was not at all different from the one the bourgeoisie had in mind. For which it was absolutely necessary to gain time, to let this enormous wave of class violence vent its momentum by letting it enter parliament.

Meanwhile the fascist counter-offensive was being organised in the squares. When I spoke at the Bologna Congress (and here are the photographs in the very rare volume Saletta did)¹⁶ the fascists were already in the squares. Of course up to that point they had always taken them, but they would soon give them up. I used to say: 'Since the bourgeoisie itself invites us to the square why do we have to go to its parliament? Let us take up this challenge and give battle'. But to get the proletariat to take to the streets and give itself an armed military organisation, we had to avoid diverting it towards parliamentary competition with all that that entails. This was our perspective, anarchism had nothing to do with it, it had a completely different view. On anti-parliamentarism we were all in agreement, me, Lenin, Bukharin, our theses, our speeches are there. The quotation I read earlier must be false,¹⁷ it wasn't I who at the 2nd Congress renounced anti-parliamentarism, nobody renounced it. We were all anti-parliamentarists, it was only a question of discussing whether to destroy this shitty institution that is parliament one must attack from outside or from within. And, without excluding that there might be situations in which one could attack from within, we argued that in the situation after the first post-war electionism could make the revolutionary alternative impossible, since with it came the castration of a revolutionary movement, not yet to come but in progress!

So what is this story about us renouncing anti-parliamentarism? All communists who were on the line of the First Congress of the International were anti-parliamentarists. Everyone who is for the dictatorship of the proletariat is automatically anti-parliamentarist. The system of the soviets and the party as the organ of the class supersedes the parliamentary system, just as Lenin stated. However the reconstruction of how things really went in 1919 I have already done in the final part of the series on Extremism. On several other occasions I have gone into the history of the Left and recalled, albeit briefly, how some controversial events had unfolded. We should expand a little more on what actually happened during the war, which is a very useful period for understanding the nature of our current. The dual, ambiguous position of the Italian Socialist Party during the war was fought by us from beginning to end. Not only: this struggle against ambiguity and mystification continued until 1920 and was conducted by us on various occasions, clandestine and public meetings, assemblies and congresses, organisational meetings and rallies of the revolutionary fraction. Alliances were produced and on many occasions we had a numerical majority, and we were also in the majority when the other tendency was put in charge of the new Communist Party. It will be necessary to write this history starting way back, at least from the PSI congresses of 1900-1908 to the

¹⁶ The XVI, from 5 to 8 October 1919. Bordiga made his speech on October 7. The text is possible read on the *Stenographic Report of the XVI Congress of the PSI*, ed. L'Avanti!, 1920, evidently the book cited and photographed by Cesare Saletta, then a militant of the International Communist Party.

¹⁷ That is, the quote according to which Lenin said that the The Left would have renounced abstentionism.

point where the intransigent revolutionary fraction reversed the numerical ratio in the party against the reformist fraction. We must go back to the years of the struggles within the First International, to the dissent characteristic of Marxists in the struggle against petty-bourgeois immediatism, our struggle against Bakuninism and anarcho-syndicalism. Yes, because if Lenin in Russia could polemise with 100 populists and anarchists, we had to do so with 100 anarchists, 300 syndicalists and a multitude of other currents that did not exist in Russia.

In our youth as a current, we hardened our bones with this struggle. The erroneous and dangerous thesis was the same as that which had to be fought in Moscow in 1919, 1920 and 1921, namely that the revolution could develop and win without the party, on the basis of the trade union struggle or by stirring up gatherings without any structure or programme. However, here the struggle against the old society and its ideas was more virulent. The Russian comrades could not even imagine, because they had not experienced it, what parliamentarism was here. Western Europe, quite apart from particular currents, between 1900 and the First World War was as if divided into two great blocs: reformists of all stripes who, with varying phraseology, advocated the placid evolution of the economy and society towards socialism with the relative idyllic demise of capitalism, and intransigent revolutionaries of various stripes, including the consequent Marxists, i.e. us and a few others. We have always fought unreservedly against the first bloc, against those who believed, on the eve of the great world massacre, that there would be no more fratricidal wars, and who trembled with indignation at hearing talk of armed revolutionary struggle, of dictatorship of the proletariat. This tendency prevailed in Germany, for example, which was only countered by the left wing of the German Social Democratic Party, which won the esteem and appreciation of Lenin and the Russians. Of course, we also struggled against the second, anarchist and syndicalist bloc, while having it on our side in the immediate struggles. In France and Italy, unlike in Germany, the reformists were not a big problem outside congresses and parliament, while the anarchists and syndicalists were (in the PSI we also had to deal with the maximalists, but these only organised themselves into a current in 1919). They were a problem in the very sense that they made 'childish' mistakes as Lenin put it. Generous proletarians, disgusted by the filth of parliamentarians and union leaders, instinctively rejected elections, parliament and party. We were not assimilated not only to organised forces, but not even to this albeit understandable proletarian stratum. Our position was clear: revolution is a political fact, the organ of revolution is the party, the proletariat becomes class conscious, in the course of revolution, only through its party organ. No other form of organisation can replace that of the party.

And we stubbornly stuck to the classic line, so much so that even in the recent work presented by the French comrades,¹⁸ the classic line of the Manifesto appears from the very first pages: first step, organisation of the proletariat into a political party; second step, organisation of the proletariat into a ruling class. These phrases, written in 1848, mean what for us, in 1919 now with definitive clarity, meant political party and dictatorship of the proletariat through the party. Countless tasty quotations from Marx that I have taken from the material collected by the French comrades prove the validity of our conclusion. Where Marx says: '*The proletariat is either revolutionary or it is nothing*', we add, on the basis of other writings: '*It either has the party or it is nothing*'. The proletariat only exists when its party exists, the proletariat becomes class when it organises itself into a party, and it is only through this class party that it can seize power. It is obvious that proletarians are disgusted with existing parties. But their party must be an organism that anticipates future society. It cannot be one party among many, aimed at opposing them in the political struggle on their terrain. It is the true new organism that the revolution needs to make the leap into another era. And in a sense, once it takes power, it will die out as the state will die out. Unless it transforms itself into an organism for the protection of the species.¹⁹ The clarity of this position was unquestionable, so any flirtation we may have with this ill-named left-wing opportunism has nothing to do with the abstentionism question of 1919. Besides, as we have seen, left- or right-wing opportunism is all opportunism, so we might as well not give it a side.

I was therefore saying that this history must be written. To do so, in order to graft one fact onto the other well, it is necessary to have as broad a vision as possible. Is revolution a political fact or not? Revolution is a '*going towards the new society*', it is not '*made*', it is directed. This is where the political fact comes in. We must therefore relate to the 1870-71 polemic between Marx and Bakunin. We must return to the Paris Commune. In it Lenin rightly recognised, along with Marx, the first exemplification of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the fact that revolution is a party fact. When class violence is unleashed, a polarising element is needed, hence revolution is a fact of government (another way of expressing direction, will). Rebellious violence is unleashed in a revolution, but as soon as it is satisfied in overthrowing the old relations, it must in turn suppress the rebellious violence of those who want to return to the old society. You will recognise that it is too much and at the same time too little to want revolution. It is the fruit of material determinations mostly independent of the will of men, but there is the moment in history when one must also want the means to bring it to fruition, to realise its goals.

¹⁸ The reference is to draft meeting entitled "Origin and function of form party", published in n. 13 of *Il communist program* of 1961.

¹⁹ This concept will be taken up in the *Theses of Naples*, del 1965.

The most difficult thing is to get rid of the old society

[The image of the revolution advancing disruptively, sending splinters flying everywhere, is Lenin's and it is correct. The advance must be able to raise its own intelligence and this is called programme, tools, organisation, techniques. The overthrow of the class state occurs by raising the state of another class. Anarchists are horrified because they believe there is no difference between the two steps, as if the domination of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat had the same significance as the domination of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie. But history knows no such symmetries, our species is in flux, each stage reached is different, superior to the other. At the stage summarised by the formula 'dictatorship of the proletariat' there is the state and therefore there is control apparatus, i.e. army and police, instruments for 'dirty work'. Only idealists do not know or pretend not to know that every new society has imposed itself with the tools provided by the old one. The anarchists recall Kronstadt and Stalinism at this point. They would only be right if they reflected on the forces at play in the former case (splinters out of control in the midst of a gigantic clash between modes of production) and the purely capitalist nature of Stalinism in the latter case. I just said that I was known as someone who always told the truth without bending to the convenience of the moment. If it had been convenient for the revolution to tell lies, I would have told them. After all, between armies at war, disinformation is a weapon. The problem is not whether there will be a transitional state in the transition between modes of production: the problem is how to handle such a dangerous instrument. The 'ultimate goal', as the scraps collected by Oscar and Roger put it so well,²⁰ is a good thing, but one has to know how to get there. Even the anarchists agree with us about the ultimate goal, the communist society, without violence of man upon man, without classes and without property. Lenin also says this to Terracini. But it's one thing to get lost on the road, it's another to have a map and a compass].

The difficulty of every revolutionary transition consists not so much in making the new society work, (and for the communist one the prodromes already exist today), but in getting rid of the old one. It is the current one that is the monster, which it will be tremendous to get out of our way. This will be the real trouble for those who understand the present world as an inheritance from the old classes. If we wanted, we could quote many significant passages from Lenin, who in turn drew them from Marx. In part we used them to demolish the Stalinist concept of 'building socialism'. Terror, says Marx, served the bourgeoisie to destroy feudal society and likewise it will serve us. We have nothing to build. It is all too easy to 'build' what is already there: the natural state of human beings is communism; proprietary, class-divided society is a recent legacy. Even ultra-developed capitalism has communist traits; all we have to do is to liberate

²⁰ Jacques "Oscar" Camatte and Roger Dangeville. The French comrades they also contributed to party work by collecting and translating texts Marx and Engels at the time not easily available, especially in Italy.

them, allow them to develop as widely as possible. But just think, in the transition phase in Russia, one would come out and say: 'I am the tsar's grandson and I want to restore the old regime'. What do you do, argue? No, one shoots. After all, in all transitions some representatives of the old defeated classes and some scoundrels have been killed, dirty work in this sense is inevitable. Only the bourgeoisie pretends to be horrified at the prospect, 'forgetting' that in its revolution, the guillotine in its service worked at an industrial pace. Not to mention of course the wars, civil and otherwise. No, at the moment there is nothing to build, only destroy or, of course, limit, like consumerist overproduction. Then mankind will set itself on the line of its natural organisation, which in power and in action already exists, and which exists not as a dream, but as a scientifically demonstrable reality, the only scientifically demonstrable truth of all current knowledge.²¹

It is in this sense that we approached that other work based on a critical proposition towards bourgeois philosophy and science, in an attempt to frame today's results in a theory of knowledge of our own.²² There we argued, on the basis of ancient philosophical traditions and modern scientific disciplines, that the human being will attain satisfactory knowledge first with the social revolution that teaches him how he knows, by what ways and for what purposes he knows, and only then will he mature the qualitative deepening in all branches of knowledge, physics, mathematics, cosmology, biology, etc.

From the conditions of admission to Livorno

Let us return to the history of 1919, a return which, jumping from topic to topic, seems a little difficult. We had arrived at the point where all the questions concerning the discussions that arose in 1920 at the 2nd Congress of the Communist International had to be addressed. On abstentionism then Lenin says: 'You in the abstentionist fraction are wrong, so you must go to parliament'. We reply: 'All right, if the International wants it that way, we'll go to parliament'. Lenin, however, adds: 'You are right to fight that all those reformist people must be kicked out of the Italian Socialist Party. Go back to Italy and drive them out, we are now voting on the conditions under which the Italian Socialist Party (which had adhered to the Third International and Moscow's project in 1919), will not be able to continue to adhere unless this split takes place, unless it adapts its programmes to Marxist doctrine and the theses of the International'. Everyone knows that the tightening of the conditions of admission was a demand I personally made in the committee. I don't know if it will ever be possible to make use of the minutes of the commissions of the Moscow Congress of 1920, as can be done with all the minutes of congresses, but it was I who pointed out to Lenin that if these conditions were not tightened, it would not be possible to

²¹ This passage is reminiscent that of the young Marx, who writes: "*Yes, he will then see how the world has long possessed the dream of one thing, of which he only has to possess conscience, to truly possess it*" (Letter to Ruge, September 1843).

²² See nos. 15-16 of this magazine.

proceed to the purge, to the separation of the communists from all those who were not communists and who gravitated to Moscow only because of the prestige they had won by seizing power. So Lenin added the twenty-first condition: 'All parties will have to change their programmes, members of the congress who vote for the old order against the new will be automatically expelled from the party.'²³

After that I went back to Italy and this struggle was based on what the International had decided. Inside the party the whole story began, and it lasted until 1921, that is, they said that Lenin had given an order and that we were people who had been bought off by Moscow, who had prostrated ourselves humbly at the feet of the Bolsheviks. And to think that it was we who had in a certain sense given tips to Moscow, where we had argued as equals with the Bolsheviks on all the subjects on which we found things to contradict. For example precisely on the topics we were coming to propose to the party not to 'ruin' it but to save it from itself. Of course in '20 there was nothing left to save, there was only to organise the split well, which took place at the Livorno Congress on 21 January 1921. Perhaps the stenographic record of that congress with all the speeches is now unobtainable²⁴ but we had about 58,000 votes, the unitarians 98,000. The reformists had 14,000, among others hiding behind the backs of old Lazzari. We left outside the Goldoni theatre where the congress was being held. Comrade Roberto had spoken before me,²⁵ a good comrade, but like all Italians he was a sentimentalist, it seemed to him a very bad thing to give that blow and cut the party in two pieces. He was one of the party representatives, the ones we sent to Moscow in August 1921 to the 3rd Congress of the International, the first to be held after we left. There were also Gennari, a great orator, Terracini and Grieco, the only abstentionist, the loyalist for whom I was wrong to put my right hand and also my left hand on the fire. The hands are still here but Grieco was the protagonist of the usual political volte-face. It was Roberto who made the last leave-taking, quick and urgent, but first he said to me: 'Listen, back up the idea that we, in order to obey the International, must leave'. Of course, being in the minority we had to leave the congress and go and form the new party elsewhere so there was no logic in his request, but as he made his speech Roberto took his handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped his tears. Now I must amuse you a little. I was wearing a hat at the time. I was very young, in 1921 I was in my early thirties, I certainly didn't need it but it was

²³ Actually Bordiga here summarizes all the tightenings requested and not just the twenty-first condition that read: *"Those party members who reject the conditions and theses on principle formulated by the Communist International must be expelled from the party. The same applies especially to the delegates to the Extraordinary Congress"* .

²⁴Avanti Editions! no they published a reprint the following year, in 1962, with the original title: Stenographic report of the XVII National Congress of the PSI , and with an appendix on the nascent Communist Party of Italy. Bordiga's speech, with extensive references to the 21 points and their implications, is on page. 271.

²⁵ Riccardo Roberto, was in the presidency of the Congress in representation of the Communist Fraction.

customary. I brutally put this hat on my head and with a bag in my hand, or a suitcase I don't remember, I said: 'All the delegates who voted for the communist fraction's agenda, leave the congress, and go to the San Marco theatre to constitute the Communist Party of Italy, the Italian section of the Third International'. A kind of procession formed, which crossed Serrati who turned livid. I was leading everyone towards the San Marco when the good Repossi came towards us to confirm that the hall was ready. As the delegates streamed out of the Goldoni theatre, a terrible shout went up from the hall, from the boxes, from the corridors, from the stalls. Upon the arrival of [unintelligible name, perhaps Serrati] some of our people shouted: 'Here comes the Pope!' So the others hurled jeers and jeers at the International. They even released a symbolic dove that swirled under the vault of the theatre amid shouts to which our people responded with deafening whistles.

Roberto had spoken in favour of unity in any case between socialists and communists, a unity that should not be broken because it was like breaking the unity of the proletariat. This was an accusation that returned often in later years and even in recent times. It was said that with that split, with that break in socialist unity, we had facilitated the advent of fascism in 1922. I have tried a thousand times to explain what reasoning must underlie any study of fascism and the defeat of the proletariat. These facts cannot be understood with preconceived reasoning or worse still by sticking to the mental scheme of wounded democracy, artificial forms due to the supremacy of ideology over material history. Livorno was a product of the material situation, including fascism and proletarian conditions, not the other way around. This was experienced by all Italian proletarians in all cities and in the countryside.

As we were leaving, all hell had broken loose (there were many others who had spoken, which I won't list here), especially when Serrati had made his theoretician, Adelchi Baratono, a washout with the strength of a hundred thousand horses, speak. Our young men had taken it into their heads not to let him speak at all, but he managed to say that, having heard Bordiga's report, there was no regretting us leaving, since mine was a cerebral ascetic communism. Serrati had come to argue with me in the audience. In short, when I made the declaration to continue in the other theatre, our adversaries shouted desperately at us trying not to let me finish reading (it must have been ten lines) as if they believed that if the declaration was not heard, it would not be valid, the split would not take place. When we came out and found poor Repossi coming busily to say that everything was ready and that we could go to San Marco, the scene was surreal. A sentence launched by me in a loud voice was immediately covered by a scream coming from the Goldoni. Then I would launch another phrase a tone higher, going up half an octave, and someone else would try to cover me with a more savage and belligerent scream again: 'Pig! Coward! Servant of Moscow! Mocker of Lenin!', phrases like that. And I: 'We are leaving!', shouting even more. Our adversaries were also furious because I had said that

the vote had been falsified, which was true only up to a point, and anyway it's clear: all self-respecting votes are never surprising, they are pre-ordained. In fact, the congressmen considered this an offence to their unquestionable honesty, even though I had recognised our evident numerical inferiority.²⁶

Theory, tactics, principles and ends

This was the picturesque side of Livorno. Turning to the serious side, what happened after Livorno is known. The International was not only composed of intact communists like us and the Bolsheviks. They all began to lash out at Zinoviev, and even at Lenin, saying: 'You have given the Italians too much rope. They are terrible communists. Over there, that Bordiga is laying hands on them'. They wanted to do as they liked despite the 21 points. We of course after returning from Moscow in '20 had made an agreement with that part of the maximalists who had been against us at the Bologna Congress. We met with Serrati, myself Gennari and Gramsci. We agreed that we would also go to the elections, that we would withdraw what was believed to be 'the abstentionist prejudice' as long as they voted with us for the expulsion of Turati and the reformist rightists (and this was proof that abstentionism was not a question of principle). It was a desperate attempt to save the party from this plague that polluted and poisoned it, from this stench that infected it in its innermost darkness. In short, we did what we could. As you can see, we also showed that we were capable of making compromises. I say this because another great accusation levelled at us by the exploiters of Lenin's Extremism is that he was capable of making compromises, that communists make compromises. What Lenin meant and allowed I think I have sufficiently demonstrated. He called 'compromises' incidental, transitory facts, in local situations, which did not concern the foundation of principles and theory. Everyday normality.

Therefore, in spite of our critics, we went so far as to say: 'All right, let's go to parliament, as long as we know what we are doing and why we are doing it'. Well, no one has been able to fool me on this point, I have never gone to parliament. When I want to put on airs, to boast about something, I say that I have done what no Italian can do: not be a Member of Parliament if I can. So we offered to take part in the elections, and when they took place, we acted as electoral agents for those who were candidates. And after the Moscow congress of 1920, which ordered the communist party to become a parliamentary party,

²⁶ Just to give you an idea of the atmosphere that reigned at the congress, it must be borne in mind that it was moved from Florence to Livorno for security reasons, given the danger of fascist attacks. The Goldoni theater was surrounded by police and soldiers and very violent battles took place inside it. Here's an example taken from the Report cited: "*Ad a certain moment Vacirca, addressing a stage occupied by the communists, exhibition in Bombacci a penknife, shouting 'penknife revolutionary!'. You can see Bombacci get up excitedly and aim a revolver at Vacirca. The act causes an immediate reaction from everyone around found on the stage. The invectives, the screams, the threats they cross from one side to the other with unprecedented violence... it seems the blows are about to come... The meeting is suspended for 40 minutes.*" (p. 238).

we accepted this imposition and thus rejoined the other socialist group. The centrists themselves published texts in which Gramsci and Togliatti admitted our discipline to the International until well after Livorno 1921.

Speaking of Togliatti. Today he passes for one of the founders of the Communist Party of Italy. I don't remember him. He didn't count for anything, if he was there it was as a journalist. Gramsci was there but he did not speak, he said he did not have enough voice to be heard in a theatre.²⁷ [...] ²⁸ I had met with Serrati, I had actually gone to eat at his house, because I have always been friends with my political adversaries, and Serrati had told me: 'You will be in the minority'. And I had replied: 'But I'm working to be in the minority, because I don't want Avanti. We in Imola are organising the party, we're not organising a fraction'. Aside from the fact that he let the newspaper fool him, poor guy. While he was in prison, Nenni cleverly ripped him off.

After June 1920 and until January '21 we had set up the communist fraction headquarters in Imola. We had organised all our sections well, we had made all our moves. Those 58,000 who voted for us in Livorno, we had organised them group by group. Several federations passed to us, so did several newspapers, entire grassroots organisations, some municipalities. In short, we had woven our network. So I said to Serrati: 'I know very well that you will have the majority in Livorno, but I am not working to organise a fraction, I am definitely organising the new party'. And so it was, we went our own way, they continued on the one before.

1921 was the same year as the Third Congress of the Communist International. The reactions were different, as you know. In writing the material for our journal, the one that has just come out which you will read,²⁹ I dealt with the general, historical international view. Having reached this point, however, the question of tactics arose. So I linked to a passage from Lenin which, as we shall now see, is a refutation of Terracini's intervention. In that passage Lenin says: 'Tactics are one thing, theory is another thing, the goal is another, the principles are yet another'. It is a theoretically exact, perfect passage, and I have tried to use it to explain what tactics is, what theory is, what ends are, what principles are, what the programme is. It is a unity, but one made up of different 'moments' that characterise the way the party functions. Now, instead of standing here explaining what is already written in the paper, which would be

²⁷ In the report Congress stenographer, in fact, Gramsci does not appear, even if he was speaker on the "Trade union movement, factory committees and control worker" with Giuseppe Bianchi and Emilio Colombino.

²⁸ Here the tape is indecipherable. Bordiga refers to a publication with an anecdote about Gramsci, then to Lazzari's wavering position, at "Roberto's tear gas scene" and to a character that we couldn't grab the name of: "*un as a theoretical leader and organizer he was a very skilled and knowledgeable man. We had woven a national network*", perhaps in relation to split.

²⁹ The n. 4 of 1961

scholastic, doctrinal and tiresome, it will be useful to see in what context Lenin said this sentence about tactics. We have already seen, in this connection, the ignoble and disgusting problem of parliamentary tactics, in the sense of whether or not to go to parliament. We have seen that it is not a question of principle because we found it correct that the old European parties went to parliament in certain epochs; that the Bolsheviks sometimes went, sometimes not; that they went to reactionary parliaments. It was in the democratic one, in this epoch, that we did not want to go. When Lenin insisted on telling me that I would be very fit to fight in a parliament and that they should make a parliamentary fighter of me, I replied that I would have no problem going to the reactionary parliament of a proto-capitalist society, but that he didn't realise what a stercorary construction a fully bourgeois democratic parliament was. I could also go, but what would be the point? From day one I spit in everyone's face and walked away. But everyone who goes gets caught up in the machinery, the 99%, all become opportunist renegades. The Russians could not possess this experience, however much they had lived abroad and seen opportunists too. Really, the question of parliamentary tactics is soon resolved for us. But at the Congress of '21, the conceptions that were really opposed concerned the seizure of power, civil war and the attitude to revolutionary violence. It is well known that the maximalists defended Turati and the reformist rightists to the last, 'loyally', making our separation inevitable. Why? Because after all they were all gradualists.

We retreated in order, fighting

We have seen what position the Left took before and during the war, when it pretended to discuss what to do by convening the party leadership, the parliamentary group and the trade union group. This is wrong. It is the party that takes the reins when the war between the classes arises, it is the party that gives the order to attack, it gives it to the proletariat, it gives it to its own members, it gives it to its own military framing. We had a military and illegal framing, even if we began to organise it too late, i.e. immediately after Livorno. The good Fortichiari, from the Executive, was responsible for it. He took care of this sector by immediately arming and militarily organising groups of militants and proletarians close to us. Of course, our armament consisted of a few thousand revolvers and muskets throughout Italy, while that of the fascists, who had illegally and militarily joined before us and enjoyed military and police support, was more complete. Revolutions explode when the ruling class is left with nothing but the military option. They declare class war. When they realise that they cannot do anything else they try to prevent it. They have every interest in exploiting the advantages of pre-emptive attack and in this they have the support of the state machine. The day our struggle can be recounted through documentation, the reports we sent to Moscow in '21 and '22, it will be seen that we were forced to retreat, but we conducted it in order, fighting, without compromising with the bourgeois reaction. This our adversaries of

yesterday and today cannot claim, instead of fighting they did the worst filth, from the Aventine to the pacification pact with the fascists.³⁰

These symptoms of coherence and lurch have to do with general questions concerning the revolutionary process. And I would like to link up with them to comment on the blunder our comrades took at the Third Congress of 1921. They presented themselves to the assembly with this scheme: a) at the First Congress we shamed those of the Second International, the reformists, the traitors, the patriots, the sell-outs to the bourgeoisie, the ministers, and we dishonoured them before the whole proletariat, we threw them out; b) at the Second Congress we better realised the constitution of our communist parties. We have framed a communist party in Germany, in Italy, in France, etc. The Russian party is there, so the phase of party-building has passed; c) the processes in the various countries were obviously not equal, but now we have the party, there's nothing more to wait for, there's no historical interval, we have established the real party and so on! We must go on the offensive. A real theory of the offensive. As if to say that since we are certain that we have a solid party, we must unleash the revolution.

Terracini, who had not felt in 1919, like all the other electivists, the alternative between elections and revolution, between elections and the revolutionary assault, was now for the revolutionary assault just because the party was there. Such an assault was perhaps possible in the first half of 1919. I am not a voluntarist, but I do not exclude this hypothesis. I am the least voluntarist of all. It is true that among our Left wingers there were some, not only voluntarists but even bellicists, devotees of the military solution, I cannot deny it. Among the generous proletarians and comrades there were some who were instinctively impatient to strike, to accelerate the final assault. I was not among them, I am more of a reasoner, I do not believe that with a burst of will one can force a situation. Legend has it that it was Lenin who believed that I, as a good extremist, did. But I never thought so. In a speech I gave in front of Lenin at the '20 congress (we have also published it),³¹ I said that since the revolutionary wave was already retreating in Europe, not only in Italy, it was necessary to hunt down the traitors more severely because, when the revolution advances, it's easy for everyone to say: I am for the revolution. In fact in the beginning everyone was for the Third International, they heard talk of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but they always acted in such a way as to make a revolutionary outcome impossible. That's why I didn't believe at all that, after the Livorno Congress, the new party could settle down in a few months and become strong enough to take the assault and what happened, happened. There

³⁰ The latter was signed on 3 August 1921. Enrico De Nicola, president of the Chamber, acted as moderator. Represented were: the National Council of the Fasci of Combat, the fascist parliamentary group, the Party Leadership Socialist, the Socialist Parliamentary Group, the Confederation of Labour.

³¹ "The left Italian and the Communist International at the Second Congress", *Il programma comunista*, no. 22 of 1960.

was a battle, that yes, but it was a rearguard battle, as they say in military jargon when you fight just to preserve your strength so as to be stronger for the decisive attack. For example, it was a rearguard battle that for the Labour Alliance that took place in August 1922 in the midst of discussions with Moscow on the single front, which we will talk about when our chronicle gets to that subject, certainly not this evening.

While we were conducting this defensive battle of retreat the opportunists were still too powerful, and so time was lost for the party to gather some backward elements. It was in such a context that in 1921 we sent Terracini, Gennari, Roberto and the others to Moscow with the commitment to say: it's useless to argue with Lazzari and Serrati any more, they regretted not having broken with the reformists, but they must not be admitted any more. The Russians were deluding themselves about this. They believed that by inviting them to Moscow, shouting them over the head with a speech by Zinoviev, one by Trotsky, one by Lenin (who really took the skin off their sleeve), and one by some other, they would become good revolutionaries and return to Italy different from how they had left. We all agreed that this should not be done, that the Russians were wrong. So the central committee of the new party, its executive, of which Grieco was chairman, had instructed this delegation to say that the party was now established and that other manoeuvres to take further pieces of the socialist party were no longer to be done. If there were individual members of the Socialist Party who wanted to come with us, they had to resign from that organisation and come individually to ours. Not only that, but this move would be controlled by the local section and possibly its own committee. But other manoeuvres on group combinations were not something we wanted to do. It did not matter that we had not obtained a majority at the congress, being 58,000 against 98,000. This could have been a thesis on party consolidation and in my opinion would have been perfectly tenable.

But Terracini and his comrades interpreted it very differently. And so did many other comrades of the Communist International, because our delegation met with that of the Unified Communist Party of Germany and with the Austrian delegation, two left wing formations, and they presented amendments against the Russian and Lenin's resolution, supporting them with a unified report that was expounded by Terracini. Given the situation of the established parties (which was not true), it was necessary to overcome immobility and espouse the 'offensive theory' that was being discussed in Germany. Such nonsense, as far as I and many other comrades are concerned, was never dreamt of or uttered, nor did the Central Committee ever vote on theses along these lines, nor do our theses of Rome of March '22, which also came after the 3rd Congress, remotely say this. I do not know if in my chaotic way I can follow a sequence of times.³² I should make a picture with the years and months, because those were

³² We searched, in limit of the possible to overcome the inconvenience by rebuilding the chronology, that is, moving some references and paragraphs.

incandescent times, each month that passed was saturated with new events, not like these last decades passed in the mire. Livorno had not solved the problem of revolutionary coherence as we would have wished, or had solved it badly and late. Perhaps we could have, as I said, in 1919 or even in the spring of 1918, when our energies were at their peak and the revolutionary prospect was wide open. Three years in those days were worth thirty today. In 1921, to speak of an offensive, moreover called by the high-sounding name of theory, was nonsense. The game was up for grabs, we could hardly go on the military offensive. Just getting rid of the reformists and wavering maximalists had been a political massacre. A revolutionary current had not formed among the defeatist military, although there were some; on the contrary, the ex-combatants were against us. We had an embryonic military organisation, but its development would take more time. The situation was becoming critical day by day. The fascists meanwhile had become powerfully organised. The bourgeois state had stopped playing its comedy and the combined play was coming to light. Nitti, who was an intelligent bourgeois, told the king about the socialist deputies: 'But even if three hundred came instead of one hundred and fifty, what does it matter to us, let's open the doors and let the elections take place'. Like Giolitti at the time of the occupation of the factories: 'Let the workers go into the factories, when they're hungry they'll leave, as long as they don't come here to the Ministry of the Interior to send me away, as long as they don't come to the prefectures and police headquarters'. And not a single shot was fired. By buying this time, Giolitti and Nitti allowed the fascist squads to organise themselves, to take their revenge.

I don't know whether political mistakes or military ones (military in our sense) are more deadly. It was clear that we could not launch any offensive. We only had the possibility of conducting an effective defence. And even on this ground we disagreed with the International and its supporters. The united front and workers' government, which were discussed in the years that followed, were not expedients for the CI to restart history and take the offensive in other forms, but to resist the capitalist offensive. From the theory of our offensive to the theory of the adversary's offensive, another expression that I actually never took very seriously. What does 'capitalist offensive' mean? We are not talking about an intermittent phenomenon, one time there is, the next time there is not. The capitalist offensive against the proletariat has existed since before I was born and since before the labour movement was born. It is capitalism's way of being. The mere presence of these scum who run an economy and society in a mercantile manner is an offensive, and we are continually obliged to repress this oppression. What kind of offensive did the bourgeoisie have to launch more than a daily one to preserve capitalism? The class struggle is a permanent fact of the offensive. There is a moment in history when the offensive is reversed, but this moment needs, as an essential condition, the existence of the truly communist party. The reverse is not true. One cannot say: we have the party and therefore we launch the offensive. The party is a necessary but not sufficient condition. It

was easy for Lenin to demonstrate this. In theory we are all and always for the offensive, for armed insurrection, revolutionary violence, the dictatorship of the proletariat, terror. It is obvious that the epochal revolutionary rupture will certainly take place according to varying degrees of realisation of the ladder just described. But what does it mean to embrace a theory that reverses the historical process according to which conditions mature, the party is formed and develops, and which directs the revolutionary movement up to the seizure of power and beyond?³³ Lenin was right to say that it was lack of doctrine and dialectics and to address all those bad words to Terracini. I don't know why the three delegations chose Terracini to report. Among other things, he came from the Ordine Nuovo and not from the abstentionist Communist Fraction and this might explain the difficulty in handling party matters. I can't find the exact words Lenin replied to him because we couldn't find a complete protocol of the 3rd Congress, even at Feltrinelli there wasn't one.

Lenin's reprimand

So, Terracini went on to enunciate the theory in this form: 'We Italian communists have driven out all the opportunists, all parties must do so'. Lenin retorted: 'We have moved on from that phase. But what, is it a sport to drive out opportunists? Do you want the opportunists to be there so you can drive them out?' Terracini again: 'Now that we have cleansed, we admit only one tactic: violent, direct, frontal action'. Lenin seized on these three adjectives and gave him one of those scoldings. Had I been there, I wouldn't have posed the question in such a foolish way. He meant to provoke Lenin, to make him spring to the defence of Radek, of Zinoviev, of himself and of the entire Russian delegation. He said: 'If the Congress does not mount a vigorous counter-offensive against such errors and such leftist nonsense, the whole movement will be doomed to ruin. This is my profound conviction. But we are organised and disciplined Marxists, we cannot be content with speeches against certain comrades. These leftist phrases have annoyed us, these Russians ad nauseam. We are men with a sense of organisation, in drawing up our plans we must proceed in an organised manner and strive to find the right line. Of course it is no secret to anyone that our theses are a compromise. Why shouldn't it be so among communists who are already at their 3rd Congress and have worked out precise fundamental theses? Compromises under certain conditions are necessary. Our theses proposed to the Russian delegation have been studied and prepared in the most scrupulous way, they are the result of long reflections and meetings with various delegations, they aim to establish the fundamental line of the Communist International. They are necessary, especially now that we have

³³ Marx stigmatized this way of thinking by observing that, if you open your umbrella when it rains, you don't just open the umbrella to make it rain. The fundamental sequence adopted from Bordiga can be better understood reading the first two chapters of the *Theses of Rome* in 1922 and the notes entitled *Theory and action in Marxist doctrine, I. The reversal of praxis*, del 1951, including outline and commentary thereon (*Party and class*, Notebooks of n+1).

already formally condemned the true centrists and not only that, we have already expelled them from the party. These are the facts, I have to take up the defence of these theses, and when Terracini comes to tell us that we must continue the fight against the centrists and tell us how to conduct this fight, I reply that if these amendments must express a certain direction, an implacable fight against this direction - that of Terracini - is necessary, because otherwise there is no communism and there is no Communist International. I am amazed that the KAPD did not sign these amendments'. The KAPD was at that time admitted to the CI as a sympathising party and represented an extreme wing of the German party, it was anti-parliamentary and against action in the trade unions. For this reason we could never sympathise.

[...] What does Terracini support and what do these amendments say? They begin like this: 'On the first page, first column, line 19, you must delete "the majority" '. There the infamous word majority appears. The sentence was this: 'The 3rd Congress of the Communist International is beginning the revision of tactical questions at a time when the objective situation in several countries has worsened in a revolutionary direction and several mass communist parties have been organised, none of which, however, has taken into its hands the effective leadership of the majority of the working class in its truly revolutionary struggle'. So Lenin seems to take issue with this thesis, to which he counterpoints another thesis: 'We have always said that, according to the situations, the party must have a certain influence on the working class and the working masses, which would be an even less narrow expression of the working class, and I speak of the working class in the European sense, i.e. the industrial proletariat.'³⁴

There may be cases where there is no such majority and action is possible; there may be other cases where there is a majority and action is impossible. It is not a question of counting heads. If we go to Western Europe and speak of a majority, we evoke parliamentarism, we fall back on the stupid idea that we can count men's heads to decide questions. Evidently it is not by weighing the brains of the parties that decisions are made. We have always been against the use of this term. One can very well express the reality through more appropriate language, e.g. 'possibility of leadership over the decisive part of the proletariat'.

Another of the proposed amendments made Lenin particularly angry: 'Instead of the words "the fundamental theses" put "the ends" '. He says something like this: 'What have ends got to do with theses. Fundamental theses and ends are two different things, on ends even anarchists will agree with us, because they too are for the destruction of exploitation and class differences.

³⁴ This part of the recording is very damaged. The paragraph begins with a quote from the amendments proposed by the delegations represented by Terracini and ends with one quote from Lenin's reply.

The final insurrectional struggle is our tactical means, it is part of our principles in this sense, our principled positions are never axiomatic metaphysics, they are always conditional positions, i.e. if the proletariat succeeds in conquering power, it will only succeed through armed insurrectional action, but it is not that we put a gag on history and say, on such and such a day, at such and such a time, or when we wish or when we feel particularly bellicose, the proletariat will insurrect and take power.

This is the voluntarist, non-Marxist enunciation of the revolutionary thesis. The Marxist and materialist enunciation is another: the revolutionary rupture is a conditioning of the historical fact that occurs at a certain moment in the clash between modes of production, when the transfer of power from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat looms. It can manifest itself in an insurrectional action of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, and this action can be victorious, it can be defeated, it can be attempted several times'. This is not the end. Our end is not a human society where we have an insurrection every now and then, that would be the most cretinous of societies. Our end, that is, the end to which we want to lead society, is the reconquest of the human being, in the old philosophical language of Marx. It is a humanity in which class against class no longer fights, because the filth of capital, of mercantilism, of the monetary environment no longer exists, there is no longer the struggle and hatred between men. Insurrection for us is not an end, it is a means. I can put forward a thesis: about what, for example, is the best time to lead an insurrection in a certain historical context, in Germany, in Italy or elsewhere. I cannot 'substitute' ends for this thesis. What does this mean? The claim put forward by Terracini is blatant nonsense. We have seen that our ends agree with those of the anarchists. They agree on insurrection and the elimination of private property in a classless society. But on principles we disagree: for them the state, the class-based political power must disappear the day after the insurrection. We do not speak of the party as the embodiment of this power, of authority. These are differences that lead to painful clashes like the one in Kronstadt.

Our current was badly represented at the 3rd Congress, and unfortunately what Lenin said against us was right. Terracini's intervention, speaking on behalf of three of the most important parties in the International, seemed to him to be a show of strength against the Russians, and so he reacted violently. That's why, when the delegation returned from Moscow... [but let's leave it at that], I would now like to deal with two issues that are of close interest to us, namely the International's tactics and the theory of the offensive. Part of the discussion on tactics formed part of the so-called Italian question, as it was called, because it was an Italian who spoke for the three delegations; but this interests us little, because Lazzari on behalf of the Socialist Party insisted on admission to the International saying that they had understood the need to expel the reformists, that they would put things right, etc. In short, the socialists were again trying to violate the 21 conditions, including the fact that they wanted to keep the

adjective 'socialist' in the name instead of 'communist', so Lenin spoke out on this too. After the Congress we all agreed that we had to deal with this problem of tactics. There was a meeting between July and August 1921 where we decided to call the second party congress for March 1922. It's worth remembering that Terracini was a speaker with me on the Rome Theses, precisely on tactics. And with regard to the offensive theory, it is good to note that the convening of a congress on tactics for the following year proved in itself that we were not on the offensive and that we had no offensive theory at all. We would have been wiped out. We could only try to hold on to the positions we had, save the party and the few Chambers of Labour that were resisting but were falling one after the other under the attacks of the fascists. We carried out commando actions, guerrilla warfare, like the famous 'communist ambushes', while socialists, republicans, democrats, freemasons shouted against the fascists but did nothing more than amplify their military successes, make them publicity. We knew very well that the fight was unequal, that it could not last. We waited for the fascists to attack us, but as soon as we killed a few of them, after stopping the trucks carrying them, the carabinieri arrived, sometimes soldiers, and arrested communists en masse, in their homes, in retaliation.

Counterrevolution in Germany

However, we always tried in our newspapers to emphasise the blows we gave the fascists and not those the fascists gave us, because all that propaganda about the ferocity and invincibility of the fascists, that whining about violated freedoms and constitutional guarantees was one of the elements that led the fascists to success. As you can see, we could not speak of offensive theory. We saw it in the same way as Lenin did with the parliamentarism question: from the point of view of theory, we and the Bolsheviks were all avowedly anti-parliamentarist, while from the tactical point of view, one must see what it was for. Lenin argued that we should go to parliament but meanwhile he hadn't gone to Moscow, he didn't give a damn, and had called in the Red Guards to disperse the embryo of the Russian parliament. So it is on the question of the offensive. All communists are for the principle of the revolutionary offensive. There are moments that must not be allowed to pass, in which the offensive is decisive, as in all revolutions, as in all wars. Class war, as war, is like all wars. The tactical assessment in class warfare does not derive from the contingent situation but from the geo-historical situation and the preparedness of the opposing armies. In March 1921 action was attempted in Germany, the party was more numerous, better armed than ours.³⁵ [The German comrades, true to

³⁵ To fill the gaps and the obscure or difficult to understand parts of the recording, the part that follows in square brackets is the interpolation of original fragments with audio of compatible files recovered elsewhere. We used the content of three texts that deal with the topic: Bordiga's articles, respectively *entitled Moscow and the Italian question* and *Closing the Italian question*, appeared in the issues V, 30 June, and XIII, 15 November 1921 of *Rassegna Comunista*, and chapter VI of the third volume of the *History of Communist Left* .

the theory of the offensive, had said: 'Enough, let us stop waiting, as we have done until now, from now on we will take the initiative and unleash the revolution'. Apparently Frölich had said this, at least according to Radek, who was the one assigned by the CI to monitor German events. These are more or less Terracini's words, which is why the 'Italian question' and the German question are intertwined. Just as the International struggled to understand the Italian situation, so it did for the German situation. Instead of influencing the parties acting on a national basis, the world communist centre was being influenced by them, at least by the social democratic fractions. The reasons that had led to the collapse of the Second International were all still in place. The Dictatorship of the Proletariat was the litmus test to unveil the second-internationalist who at the time swore by the Communist International. We wrote in *Rassegna Comunista* in 1921 that every structure, as in a mechanism, responds to functional laws that admit no violations. If we show that it is impossible to gradually conquer power and transform the bourgeois state for the benefit of the proletariat and communism, we must have the courage to affirm that it is also impossible to transform the structure of the social-democratic parties, their parliamentary and union-corporatist aims, into a structure compatible with the revolutionary class party, an organ predisposed to the violent conquest of power].

[The separation that took place in Livorno was the epilogue of a material historical development. Its determinations were more powerful not only than all the Lazzari, Serrati and Mussolinis in the world, but also than the Communist International itself and the men in charge of its governing body, who behaved tragically contradictory in this regard. If Livorno had for its baptism the above-mentioned determinations, the Moscow Conditions had for their confirmation, which means 'confirmation', the selecting example of Livorno. The one and the other episode of the revolution did not give birth to a 'legislation' written by some oligarchy, but to a legislation that sprang from the whole worldwide proletarian activity, over a century. There was nothing 'artificial' about the separation of the communists from the reformists and the maximalists defending them; if anything, it was artificial to restrain it].

[Since the polemics stirred up within the Comintern by the March action in Germany were intertwined with those stirred up by the Livorno split, further clarifications were necessary on the part of the PSI. First of all political, but also because some representatives of the German party had tussled with Serrati and then argued before Moscow that the PSI and the PCd'I had equal legitimacy to be represented in the CI. In Moscow, these contradictory external stimuli coming from all over caused a short-circuit by bringing together on the same point demands that were by no means homogeneous. On the one hand, it was said, the need to follow the young parties in order to help them overcome the elitist scheme that conceived of them as factors endowed with their own strength regardless of objective conditions and, in particular, of the degree of influence on

the broad masses (a problem that was indeed present, especially in Germany); on the other hand, the concern that the parties that had emerged from turbulent splits from those of the Second International should not close in on themselves in a sectarian manner, etc., etc. Such a short-circuit in the leadership structure of the CI had produced a deformed conception of revolutionary advance. Little by little, but more and more clearly, this structure gave increasing importance to purely quantitative factors, in the sense of achievements, of successes within society as it is. It was not for nothing that Levi, who came to Livorno to tussle with Serrati and tried to do the same with me, wrote a letter to the International praising the PSI all in numbers, knowing that the recipients were very sensitive to this music. So the parties were evaluated according to unrealistic criteria, on the basis of data that changed in a few months, sacrificing the criteria of reliability linked to programmatic and organisational continuity, adherence to principles, rigour, workers' physical organisational capacity and not just prestige with the voters].

The uprising of '21 in Germany posed the great general question of the method, the right moment, the general historical conditions, all of which throw off any purely quantitative assessment of the forces in the field. Isolated, local struggles of varying intensity take place all the time. Often the proletariat rises up spontaneously, without organisation, without framing, without a party. It does not always find the strength to give itself a structure in the course of the struggle. And without leadership it is most often repressed, the most prominent leaders exterminated. In Germany the potential was enormous and the errors in doctrine and tactics were consequent, given the confusion that occurred at three levels: that of proletarian spontaneity, that of the German party leaders, and that of the International. The history of the Italian proletariat is also marked by struggles, massacres, and the burning down of town halls and police headquarters. Proletarian formations have sometimes managed to prevail in local military actions. But never in Europe and in the world had there been a potential of 200,000 armed proletarians in revolt as it was in Germany. In the following report, we will see the unfolding of this incredible affair in detail, for now let us deal with the consequences.

On the one hand we have the warnings of the offensive theory, which is wrong because of its irrational foundations. On the other we have political leaders abandoning the workers, albeit strong ones, to their fate. The International overpowers all by swaying from events, thus failing to take a leading role. The result was a stinging defeat, which had enormous consequences on the course of events. They said to the German workers and those few of their leaders who threw themselves into the battle: "*You are not revolutionaries, you are putchists, you believe that the party cannot be a mass party that gathers the majority of the proletariat, you believe that it must be a nucleus of armed conspirators, you have returned to that system of sects that Marx fought against until he let the old leagues dissolve in favour of the*

International and established that proletarian organisation is not secret but public. We" and that would be those of the International "do not do as the bourgeois revolutionaries who prepared their national revolutions and liberal emancipations by abounding in secret sects, conspiratorial societies and coups d'état".

The Manifesto says that communists do not hide their aims. Everyone knows that on the path to revolution our method contemplates the insurrectional step. But there are gaps in history where this becomes active practice, and others, much more lasting in time, where this is not possible. As banal as it may seem, it is the very context of the revolution, the path towards a society antithetical to it, that describes the programme. And it has high aims, to which high paths, i.e. tactics, correspond. A clash between modes of production requires more than coups. Neither did Mussolini's in '22. He called it a revolution, but apart from the comedy atmosphere, nothing passed from the hands of one class to those of the other. Nor was it a coup d'état, the army was not involved, the carabinieri stood by and watched, in the sense that their concern was the proletarian potential, not the sleeping car race. Nor did power pass from the beast of one colour to the beast of another, whether blacks or whites were on the outside, always bourgeois were on the inside. And even with regard to our analysis of the nature of fascism, of course, they attacked us then and they attack us now. In doing our long history, when we finally write something real and documented about this much vilified current that is the 'Italian' Communist Left, we will have to line up all the criticisms that have been levelled at us and in a certain sense strip them down to the bone, to better understand their historical significance. Which is one: there is a deadly antithesis between those who defend the categories of present society and those who advocate those of future society. I have only touched in passing on all the 'isms' we have been saddled with: dogmatism, Talmudism, idealism, asceticism (cerebral, of course), Bergsonism, militarism, and nothing less than putchism.

The generous German proletariat was diverted from its insurrectionary path not by the lack of a party, but by the existence of too many confusing parties. Some of these were accused by others of elitism. It was said that they did not conceive of the formation in the deep folds of society of necessarily differentiated and specific bodies and parties, requiring separations on the one hand and composite fronts on the other. We have always rejected the slanderous combination of elitism and theoretical rigour, consequent tactical coherence and rejection of quantitativist theories of the party. The party is a function of the real relations between the classes in the context of socio-economic development and not the product of the 'decisions' of Carlylian heroes. We know that the proletariat will not be able to storm this society if it has not developed its party-organ. But don't tell us it will be just any party, like those functional to the political struggle within this society. Call it an elite if you like, but the party of

the future society is a real body that represents something more than an organisation of men.

When is it possible for the party to arise and develop from a historical entity into a formal organisation? And how extensive must it be with its roots in the class? Ten thousand, a hundred thousand, a million militants? Those who seek an arithmetical answer to these questions are wrong. The answer lies in the work prepared by the French comrades I mentioned earlier. And then: assuming and not conceding that there was in the variegated Marxist milieu an elitist interpretative doctrine of history, would it not be less cretinous than vulgar liberal democratism?

A voluntarist theory of the offensive is nonsense, but when material conditions lead tens of thousands of proletarians to go down in armed struggle as in Germany, it is criminal to accuse them of putchism, to accuse their leaders of having an elitist conception of revolution, moreover ventilating as an alternative frontist hypotheses with representatives of the other classes infiltrating our movement. In the background of proletarian defeats there is always the democratic, majoritarian, frontist option. Those who conceive of modern history as being made up of parliamentary games, from local national ones to international ones such as the League of Nations etc., espouse a doctrine just as stupid as that of the hero, of the leader who enlightens majority crowds with the power of his example, with the eloquence of his speeches, with his far-sighted imagination. And this is as true in the negative as it is in the positive. The rogue and criminal anti-hero is the mirror image of the positive hero, the rebel angel slapped into hell.

Revolutionary victory is a qualitative fact

Revolutions can only be anticipated by minorities. The mutant germ of the new society that begins to take root in the old one can only be part of a temporarily isolated, even misunderstood whole. When delegations from the English and German workers' movement went to Marx and Engels to put on the table their conditions and organisations for founding the International, offering them the leadership of the new body, they refused. One wrote to the other and said: 'You and I, to represent the historical movement, need no other proxy than that of ourselves.'³⁶ The passage is famous, and these gentlemen are dismissed. They were washouts, one could not deal with them. It is the enunciation of a method: the historical party is not a quantitative entity, it can find its material expression in a few or many men, it does not matter. The quantitative, formal element, the one that makes us speak of 'mass movements', is a consequence. But we need those conditions that we have called, borrowing the language of

³⁶ Letter from Marx to Engels, 18 May 1859. Further on: "lavativi" they were the representatives of petty-bourgeois socialism, which they had not overcome the waning experience of the Communist League.

physics, 'social polarisation', as in electric fields, crystalline solids, the ionisation of a gas. The number of electrons and atoms involved does not matter to trigger the event, but it is necessary for it to occur in order to expand quantitatively. Conquering the so-called majority therefore comes after the initial conditions of theory, action and environment have been met. We can experiment with all the tactics we want, as long as there are no words in our revolutionary delivery that could sound in opposition, contempt or even simple forgetfulness of our principles. That is why we did not want to make the majority question a condition. The 'conquest of the majority' may well occur, but it is not a bridge through which one must pass before the revolution has ionised the social molecules. We have given the Russian example a thousand times: at the last meeting of the party's Central Committee before the uprising, the ruling group breaks up just as social polarisation reaches its climax. Lenin has to treat everyone as traitors and manages to get them to digest the notion: if this hour passes, all is lost. Does he proclaim action alone? No. At that moment, action is proclaimed by this mysterious force field, by the irresistible physics of revolution that chooses in Lenin its instrument. It is the social brain in motion. There, you see, sometimes it seems that we invent terms, that we distil new formulas from our brains, when in fact they are already anticipated in Marx and it is excellent that you French comrades have brought them to light, unearthing them in the palimpsest of the revolution, where they had already been written for more than a century.

Today there are few of us, are there many of us? What does it matter if we can stand on the line between the hundreds of millions who have fought and the hundreds of millions who will fight? That is the real problem, the historical arc that connects the revolutions from original communism to developed communism. That is why Marx says, 'I don't give a shit about appearances, let us look at the substance'. Of course, our work is not intended to enlighten ourselves but is part of the broader struggle that sees proletarians clashing with the adversary. So our criticism of the latter, whatever guise it takes, pseudo-communist, liberal, or fascist, is not for the purpose of winning window seats. Now, as an old man, I have less chance of a political career than when I was young and rejected it, so I would simply like to contribute to leaving this handover to the young, to convince them that revolutionary work is above people, generations and time. It is a bridge that we want to re-establish, it is a struggle that has been going on for over forty years now, that goes beyond the contribution of any individual, even in his or her prime. It is a collective contribution. I want to emphasise: collective.

The International did not function like this, nor did the other parties. There, individuals represented opposing currents and forces, detrimental to any organic functioning. Thus names would pop up, and among the names was that of Bordiga. If we want to make the history of the Left, we cannot avoid using the

protocols. And from these documents we can clearly see that we were the only ones to say:

*'It's not that in Moscow you "dust off" the various reports on what was done in Italy or what was done in Denmark, Bulgaria, etc. and then give this comrade or that comrade the job of leading the party in this or that country. No, the criterion must be reversed. The International represents the world proletariat and must be the centre in which its thrusts converge, it is the representatives of the proletariat who must be able to put the International on trial, whereas we only ever see the latter put the representatives of the proletariat on trial.'*³⁷

It says here in the minutes that applause and laughter broke out at this point. The congressmen knew that was the trend.

In these speeches that we are going to publish, Bordiga's name recurs very often along with that of the others with whom they were discussing, so it seems as if we were witnessing a duel between people, and since they were united against our current, it seems as if they were taking it out on a lone knight who delighted in taking them by surprise. Of course, they had all the power to silence him and finally did silence him. But when they had not yet reached that limit, these comrades from Moscow had great sympathy for me, they held me in high esteem, even though they criticised me fiercely. They knew very well that when they spoke of the 'Italian question' I was shifting the discussion to the 'question of the International', which was that of world revolution. At the Fifth Congress, the discussion of the tactics of the Communist International was put on the agenda for the first time. Up until that congress, it had been discussed on the sidelines of all other issues, but no theses on tactics had been voted on. Those of Rome had left no trace. So I replied to Zinoviev that I found the agenda on tactics necessary. As you know, we thought that there should be a kind of regulation on the tactics of the International valid for all its national sections, and the comrades in Moscow were happy to leave this tactics paper blank, that one could send any section any order in any direction, even at the cost of going in the opposite direction in Denmark to what was considered necessary for Bulgaria, etc., giving greater importance to the development of tactics in the International, giving more importance to the development of the national situation in each country. Therefore, the question of tactics was not to be strictly codified.

The 5th Congress took place from 17 June to 8 July '24 and was the last one in which we participated in force, after which there was only the 6th Enlarged Executive in '26. At this congress, I was saying, we were pleased that the problem of tactics was finally being addressed. But it's one thing to discuss

³⁷ Bordiga spoke at length on the Zinoviev report 25 June 1924 at the XIII session. The expression "give the pulverino" means "to approve without even reading" (the powder was powdered mineral that was poured onto fresh ink to let it dry, before there was the absorbent paper).

the general tactics of what we want to be the planetary party of the proletariat, it's another to discuss what we want to do at a specific time in a specific country. From this point of view they considered it useless to generalise because, they said, we all knew the Executive Committee's report 'on what had been done' between the 4th and 5th Congresses, so the 5th set the tactics until the 6th. They told us: *'You have the opportunity to speak on concrete topics, why would you want to establish a tactic that applies forever? That is a fixation of you sectarian, dogmatic, doctrinaire people. It is reasonable to think that today's tactics may not be valid tomorrow, situations change in time and space, there may be events that we cannot foresee today'*. Instead, we argued that it should be universally established for every similar situation with regard to economic and social development, especially with regard to class relations. England, France, Germany, Italy, etc. were the terrain of a unique tactic. Backward countries of Asia and Africa, colonies, etc. required a different tactic from the West, but one for the whole.

The International could not materially answer such questions. Its way of functioning was already flawed. Congresses were no longer true international meetings between the centre and the periphery but places to report on what had been done in such and such a country. And especially whether it had been done according to the criteria imposed by the International on the basis of total tactical indeterminacy. At the 5th Congress Zinoviev divided his speech into several pieces. One on Bordiga, of course, because I was certainly not going to report on contingent facts. We had made our reports on the situation of the proletariat at the 4th Congress, at the 5th we made the one on fascism. I cared a little about the minute events. We were interested in the future of the party, for which we had done titanic work, and we wanted to explain what would happen in Italy if the International forced us to make turns incompatible with real economic relations, with armed confrontation between the classes. We had already seen what had happened in France and above all in Germany, how bad the Frontist political turn had produced in many countries. And so we felt obliged to use the world forum to come out and say what the dangers were so as to avoid the precipice of increasingly unfavourable situations.

The representatives of the other parties were far from such an attitude. They behaved as if they were in a bourgeois parliament. Imagine Comrade so-and-so representing the Danish or Bulgarian Communist Party. He represents a current within that party. He has every interest, in his speech before the congress, in highlighting his own current to the detriment of the other or others. In return for Moscow's support, he will vote without a murmur for the theses presented by Zinoviev. Thus he will come out the winner and will have the party secretariat. You see how democracy works, this is how majorities are formed. In fact, you don't even need to wait for the vote, you can sort it out in the corridor. This is the constitutional-bourgeois system! A Geneva rubbish that reeks of the League of Nations! We were against this system. We said: 'While we discuss the

future of the world revolution, we must divest ourselves of the fact that we are Italian, Danish, Bulgarian, German or French, and we must deliberate together what the International must do, because it is not right for the Russian party alone to identify itself with the International to the point of giving it its own specific stamp. The Russian party will contribute with all its strengths, which are considerable, with the value of its traditions, which are absolutely exceptional, but the other parties also have a duty to intervene with their weight, otherwise a true world communist party will never be formed'. These were prejudicial issues that should have taken over from the very beginning, i.e. from 1919, when the Communist International was formed.

Farcical implications of the one front

In the beginning, in 1919, the concern, as I tried to show in the first instalments of the work on Lenin's Extremism, had been right to gather against the traitorous social-democracy all those forces which could have converged on revolutionary theses. Such work was conducted while the war was still going on. There was certainly a danger that elements on the right would come with us from the Second into the Third International. This danger was determined immediately. It was not just a matter of excluding the openly social-patriotic elements or bodies, i.e. those who had supported the war, for whatever reason they claimed. It was clear that all of them would undoubtedly be easily excluded. But there were many other elements who, without having been responsible for a policy so openly contrary to all class and even traditional socialist directives, had nevertheless maintained an erroneous position. These were, for example, the social pacifists, those who were against accepting the insurrectional dynamic of the October Revolution, the armed struggle for power, the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, the dictatorship of the proletariat and the exercise of terror. These were the elements that anticipated the united front. Some could admit the course of events in Russia, but none of them admitted that this was applicable in western countries in the transition from democratic constitutional regimes to the proletarian state.³⁸

[...] and all the areas where the proletariat had begun to set up its local power formations were swept away, so the battle was lost, but it was, like all lost battles, fraught with many lessons. Levi's 'Open Letter' opened the way for the united front and this tactic eventually led to the workers' government. Our position was simple and straightforward: the theory of the offensive is reduced to a tactical aberration and cannot suffice to define the complete action of a revolutionary party. It is certain that it is necessary to act on the whole horizon, propaganda, press, agitation, presence in all workers' struggles, presence in all unions, union network to try to conquer the central leadership of the unions,

³⁸ A fragment follows recorded on another reel. It is certainly part of the same meeting as can be seen from the text. Unfortunately there is not enough material for processing a link.

illegal preparation. On this horizon of action we showed not only in theory but also in practice that we were completely on Lenin's ground. But we opposed the fact that in Italy and other countries the tactic of the single front was applied uncritically as an alliance pact of the Communist Party with other parties. At that time, of course, we were only discussing the parties that referred to the proletariat, the communist party, the social-democratic parties, those of the independents and those that belonged to the Two and a Half International.³⁹

We were even forced to attend a conference held in 1922 in Berlin, in the Reichstag building, between the three internationals. Of course the two social democratic internationals rejected all our proposals. I could only arrive on the last day because of stories about the German visa. There was a lot of tension because of the concessions they demanded of us and it almost came to a break. Radek, who was present, was possibilistic, Bukharin and Rosmer, also present, were perplexed. Lenin, while in favour of the united front, had reservations from Moscow. The very comrades who had brought us there recognised that we would end up with shameful concessions. Nevertheless, they argued for taking the social democrats to a new world conference. They wanted to show the proletarians that the communists were full of goodwill but that the failure was the fault of the 'yellows' as we called them. These comrades were quite well disposed towards the two-and-a-half social democrats who pretended to be more to the left than the others, but I said those were worse, because they were more ambiguous and therefore dangerous. There was also Serrati, who played the maximalist in Berlin, while here he aligned himself with the compromises of the PSI and the Confederation of Labour. I only managed to insert a declaration against the formation of any standing committee of the three joint internationals. Radek quibbled by pointing out to me that it was only a committee with the task of preparing the international socialist conference.

Lenin also said that precisely that conference had to be prepared, but then reproached the delegates for giving in too much. He wanted the united front and then criticised the comrades if they made concessions. But fronts are made to concede. This was dangerous. When you tell comrades: 'Go and make an alliance with other groups and parties', they obey and do everything to make the alliance. And indeed those went to the limits, even though I was fighting all the time, as Rosmer recounted in his book.⁴⁰ The delegates of the International two and a half had already obtained our signature as communists on a resolution that said nothing at all, that left things as they were, and in addition they had

³⁹ The communists thus called, in a derogatory way, the organization founded in Vienna by those socialists who had supported an ambiguous position in the face of the war (Adler, Bernstein, Kautsky) with the name Union of Socialist Parties for International Action or simply International Union Socialist.

⁴⁰ Alfred Rosmer, anarchist in his youth, he moved on to revolutionary syndicalism and then to the Communist International, for which he held several positions before moving away from it. He wrote the memoir *A Moscow in the Time of Lenin*, with a preface by Albert Camus (published in Italy by Jaca Book, 1970).

obtained to attend the trial against the revolutionary socialists.⁴¹ Lenin said that we had done very badly to give in on this matter of the trial, Russia was the only country where the proletariat had seized power and it could not be admitted that representatives of the bourgeoisie like these fake socialists were making claims to control it. Now, with all the respect we had for Lenin, we used to say that the proletariat could not understand why we violently attacked all the representatives of the bourgeoisie and then invited them to conferences and negotiations. But he argued that precisely that was a means of making the proletariat realise how treacherous our opponents were, that the problem was to learn to apply the tactic of the united front well, that therefore no political concessions of the kind we had to make for the trial of revolutionary socialists should be made. I may have been a doctrinaire and dogmatic simplicist for Lenin, but I was simply arguing that the proletarian masses need clear deliveries, to know exactly who the enemy is. It cannot be explained by which circuitous route in Moscow we try the enemies and perhaps shoot them in the civil war and in Berlin we sit in conference with them, calling them comrades. The 'famous question' was all here.

What the hell is 'workers' government'?

But that was one, there were others, of course.⁴² For example that of the workers' government, which came out at the 4th Congress. It began by saying that the proletariat was not going to fight in the rest of Europe because the opportunists, aided by the bourgeoisie and the anarchists, had made such propaganda against the delivery of the proletarian dictatorship that the masses were now afraid of it. It was true that the counter-revolution used these arguments, that it told the proletarians to be careful, that they would fall from the frying pan into the fire and, instead of liberating themselves, would erect a new scaffold of domination with their own hands. But it is not as if we, out of manoeuvring skill, would have gained any advantage by hiding the expression 'proletarian dictatorship' and replacing it with 'workers' government'. What the hell does 'workers' government' mean? Various versions of it were given, by Radek, by Zinoviev and others, but practically the general model was a government like the one in Budapest, i.e. a hybrid government in which other

⁴¹ Against a retained peace unfair and in an attempt to start a revolt, in July 1918 groups of members of the Left Revolutionary Socialist Party had the German ambassador to Russia and military governor of Ukraine killed. All representatives of the Revolutionary Socialist Party of the Left who were present at the V Congress of Soviets which was held in Moscow were arrested by the Bolsheviks. The revolutionary socialists, after having organized a group of armed rebels of about 2,000 men, they had in turn arrested Dzerzhinsky, the director of the Extraordinary Commission of the Russian State (i.e. the nascent security services). The rebels had been easily defeated by the Red Guard. The imprisoned leaders had been sentenced to death with the suspension of the sentence if the acts of terrorism and of hostility against the Soviet government ceased. The leaders who remained free were then united with the White armies, the workers' members with the Bolsheviks.

⁴² In reality we had begun to talk about "workers government" in Germany, already in 1920, after the Kapp putsch.

parties participate besides the communists, and this only because they call themselves 'Workers' Party of this or that country' or "Socialist Party", including half-socialists and half-communists.⁴³ Not seriously, Lenin had condemned this very model when referring to Budapest, 1919. As if we were to say: 'In Italy we have taken power and now we want to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat by ruling together with Togliatti, Nenni and Saragat'. That would obviously be absurd, it is absurd now and it was absurd then too. The expression 'workers' government' was meant to be a pseudonym for "dictatorship of the proletariat" but in reality it was simply nonsense. We rebelled. We said at the Congress, and we said it in our theses: *'We demand that the workers' government be given a third-class funeral. Both for the model and the name. Above all for the name, because the model in itself does not work, while the buzzword can mislead masses of workers.'* Lenin had a nice saying that even if we went into government with some opportunists, the question of power would be resolved by taking them out, as happens in all revolutions. In fact it proved that they were taking us out.

The vast majority of the congress rejected our point of view, which was then the same as described in the Rome Theses. On the point of the united front the discussion was violent and the usual accusations were repeated against us. Then I used an expression that I cannot repeat verbatim: 'We are ready to shake the hand of the traitor, the renegade, if you can technically show us that by shaking this hand one minute later we will come to seize him by the neck and choke him. Even wrestlers who meet in the arena to do Greco-Roman wrestling begin with a handshake, but then it is a question of seeing who it is that knocks the other one out cold. But if we show you that after shaking this hand it is he who grabs us by the throat and throws us to the ground, then you must give up this tactic. We do not reject it out of aesthetic or moral scruples, and this is the substance of the theses prepared in Italy: if sleeping with opportunists disgusts us, we are prepared to do it if you are able to demonstrate realistic success. Otherwise you will have to answer for failure, etc., etc.'

On the workers' government we were even more radical than on the united front. Zinoviev began to make one of his usual big speeches. He said there are many types of workers' governments, there are bourgeois and liberal workers' governments, there are social democratic workers' governments, ours will be a communist workers' government. He cited Australia and a few other countries. We told all those who insulted us that power is one, either you take it or you don't. At our cry 'dictatorship of the proletariat!' huge masses had become enthusiastic and had fought, they didn't need a pseudonym, that was a very clear watchword that by now the whole world had understood. Today it is

⁴³ From Bordiga's speech at the IV Congress: *"It could be said that the workers' government is not what we suppose; but I have to observe that I intended to explain what the workers' government is not; I have though yet to hear from the mouth of Zinoviev or of others what the workers' government is"* .

no longer understood, after so many years of defeatism, of denial of fundamental principles, but back then it was understood. We all had a very strong feeling of a burning atmosphere in which the European proletariat was moving with generous impetus. And among our opponents themselves, the revolutionary doctrine had imposed itself, plunging them into terror. That is why it seemed particularly deleterious to support a policy that was leading us swiftly and directly to ruin.

It was too late for comrades of the calibre of Zinoviev and Bukharin to realise this, by which time Stalin's machine was dragging them to face the firing squad. Who knows what would have happened if they had listened to the criticism we had addressed to them in '22 and '24. Perhaps they would have recognised that we had predicted ruin. Trotsky, who had fought before them and managed, in vain, to escape, if not death, then at least the infamous trial, was not saved. How could they have imagined that, from no less than three congresses, the masses would accept a watchword that we ourselves, their great Marxist leaders of the world revolution, could not explain? Who had ever had a clear idea of what the hell a united front and then workers' government was? How could they have believed that millions of proletarians engaged in daily struggle, already generously lined up under our flags, in need of clear words, would digest our behaviour, which was becoming that of opportunism?

The Red Union Central

The issues were being discussed not only in the large congress hall but also in committee meetings. Disagreements between comrades exploded. I remember spending entire nights arguing with Comrade Zinoviev. He insisted on the matter of the pugnacious Bordiga, who would have been an excellent deputy in a parliament devoted to the one-front policy and the workers' government: 'You' (in Russia, comrades called each other "you"), are the man to realise this programme of ours. It is precisely you who refuse, while we have to put everything into the hands of certain half-bourgeois fools. The blame for any failure will be yours and those like you'. And I, who had already had to listen to Lenin's lecture, replied: 'No, it's you and your Bolshevik comrades who will ruin everything, including the party and Russia. If you make these mistakes our enemies will win, the counterrevolution will win. Not only among us, which would be the least of it, since in the West the bourgeois regime, whether it takes the fascist or democratic form, has never been loosened. But it is in Russia that the power of the proletariat will be overwhelmed if the International and the Bolsheviks take this false direction. It may harm us, it may annoy our people, but for the proletariat it will be the same'. And, if I may be allowed a rather dramatic and sentimental image, I'm sure that when Zinoviev found himself in front of the guns being aimed, he must have thought back to what I had said to him during our discussions.

There were other big issues such as the trade union issue, which we mentioned. We need to take it up again, albeit quickly. With regard to international trade union tactics to be followed in the national arena, our party could boast of being the only historical example of the full application of Moscow's trade union theses. In those years, we violently opposed another move of those that now precluded not to degeneration but to the liquidation of our international communist scaffolding. We said: 'Nationally we work in the General Confederation of Labour, affiliated to the Amsterdam International, which brings together all the "yellow" trade unions. It fell apart on the eve of the First World War and was then reborn after the war in the hands of the reformists. But since '20 there has been the Red Trade Union International in Moscow and since "'21 the Communist Party, so let's launch the campaign against those who, like the socialists, including Serrati, pretend that it is possible to join both Amsterdam and Moscow". In 1926 there were the first signs of liquidation but we could do nothing. In fact in 1927 the opportunist leadership dissolved the union.

[...] it expressed the party's directive very clearly without the rest [...] ⁴⁴ as they did before parliament when they returned. When the centrists made the mistake of coming out by joining all the anti-fascist forces, from the social democrats to the right-wing bourgeois liberals, it was we abstentionists who brought the communist parliamentary group back from the Aventine. It was our Reossi who spearheaded this re-entry, reading a strong declaration of war. ⁴⁵ The fascists, green with rage, kicked him out, dragging him by weight. They threw everyone out. After that came what Lenin said in his 1920 pamphlet. ⁴⁶ Lenin said: '*We were wrong to boycott the Duma of the reactionary Stolypin and we were rightly reproached by the Mensheviks.*' You see how history is, how

⁴⁴ Irrecoverable gap between two fragments. From the context one can easily assume that Bordiga is here making a comparison: on the one hand, the international united front between proletarians for immediate struggles; on the other, the political front between parties for... we didn't know exactly what. The Aventine episode was significant in the confusion that reigned among the centrists: they had practiced dead bourgeois parliamentarism and now that this was in danger at the hands of Fascists rushed to his aid *elsewhere* instead of supporting its sinking *inside*, as Leninist tactics would have demanded. Parliamentarians to the core, they became *abstentionists* not to in favor of the revolution but in defense of parliament alongside the bourgeois.

⁴⁵ Here is an significant excerpt: "*The proletariat does not forget the responsibilities of those who prepared and flanked fascism, anyone who favored its coming to power... Already then we foresaw that, by restricting the anti-fascist struggle to search for a parliamentary compromise... no positive outcome could be reached. Indeed, they were helping fascism. We don't live waiting for a bourgeois compromise for which the bourgeoisie is calling today the intervention of the king... and hopes for a superior and foreign administration to the interests of each party', that is, a military dictatorship that should prevent the inexorable advent of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The center of our action is outside this chamber, among the working masses who become ever more deeply convinced that the end of the shameful situation in which the country is held by you, by your pro-fascist supporters and your democratic and liberal allies and supporters, it will only happen with your return to the field and with your team prevailing over you their organized force"* .

⁴⁶ These are: *Extremism, Leftwing communism - an Infantile Disorder*

many times on individual facts the Bolsheviks were wrong and how many times the Mensheviks. But it is the whole of history that counts. Lenin, in calling us doctrinaires, brushes us off with dialectics. So we say: 'Dialectics is fine, if the party is able to grasp it, digest it, deepen its great contradictions and the truths hidden beneath the mirror of contradictions. But the proletariat in the struggle does not sit and discuss philosophy, it follows up to a point. If once we participated in the Duma, all the Bolsheviks end up in Siberia (and this was also the result) there is a problem. On that, on the preservation of the party, we agree. But all the stinkers elected now, after Matteotti's murder they no longer risk anything, fascism teeters and they go on a democratic strike, they retreat in indignation. Our abstentionist parliamentarians do well to send those parliamentarians back. What are they doing arguing in the palace wing? Off to fight! This is the only way to do revolutionary parliamentarism'. And the fascists were really put in a tough spot. Then what happened happened.

So, the Trade Union International... Ah, well, since Repossi had gone there, his speech in the Chamber, together with the problem of the two fronts, trade union and political, led me to this other digression. So instead of making a long and complicated exposition, this little chronicle is lightened up and perhaps even amused you a little. [The international trade union question for us consisted of this: nationally, we are in the central trade union affiliated to Amsterdam, that is, we are against the KAPDist misconception. What was this error? Because of the frontist thrusts, the March Action in Germany had been a disaster certainly because of the party's political unpreparedness in the face of the determination to fight coming from below. But the insurrectionary movement proved weak despite its numerical strength also, and perhaps above all, because of another kind of unpreparedness, that due to neglect of the immediate trade union struggle. This negligence manifested itself both in an almost aristocratic passivity on the part of the party's Zentrale and in the refusal of other bodies, such as the KAPD, to work for the necessary enlistment of proletarians for the trade union struggle regardless of their political affiliation. It was not that these comrades were insensitive to the demands coming up from below regarding working and living conditions, but they tended to bring them into a conceptualised praxis of revolution, so they misused the right instruments for this type of struggle, they tended to separate the daily war for immediate results from the war for a new society, whereas communists have always said that the trade union struggle is the 'war school of communism'].

So we were working in the Confederation of Labour even though it was affiliated to Amsterdam, and at the same time we had our trade union central, the Red Trade Union International (Profintern), which we joined with all the economic organisations. This was so as not to break with the Italian Confederation by creating a 'communist trade union', which would have been a mistake from the point of view of theory and practice. On the other hand, it would not have been logical for the Profintern to join in Amsterdam, since we

denounced every day in our press that that was a den of brigands, the longa manus of the League of Nations, an agent of imperialism. At a certain moment, alas, the proposal came up to disband the Profintern and join the yellow trade union international in Amsterdam. The Italian Party was unconditionally opposed to this and Zinoviev, as usual, was angry with us. But the stakes were high: 'At this rate,' we said, 'if you find it expedient as a tactical manoeuvre to disband the Profintern you will also one day disband the Comintern'. Naturally we were answered: 'Ah! these are the usual insinuations of Italian leftists, because never, ever, we Bolsheviks, at the cost of dying to the last, will ever disband the Comintern!' They did indeed die, Zinoviev kept his pledge because he was shot, but the day came when not only the Profintern but also the Comintern was disbanded.

Last act, Bolshevization

We believed that if we had reacted then, that is to say from the first congresses, not only from the fourth, when Trotsky reacted, unfortunately belatedly, something could have been done to oppose degeneration. Trotsky at that juncture demonstrated despite everything that he was a great Marxist. I say this not only because he was finally in de facto solidarity with us on the main issues on the table, but above all because he understood, unlike Zinoviev, Bukharin and others, that the process we were denouncing was counter-revolutionary. Then they reduced him to silence by throwing him out, but objectively he held positions similar to ours. Then they threw out Zinoviev and, of course, myself, the dogmatic doctrinaire who understood nothing of practical questions, of historical questions, whose predictions were unbalanced petitions of principle and who in 1924, before leaving Moscow, had shouted: 'Look, Trotsky and Zinoviev will form a single communist opposition in the party. They are two revolutionaries, it won't be long before they realise their mistakes. It's not a prophecy, it's a material fact. You at the Stalin-dominated congress don't dare speak, you come in great secrecy, Trotskyists and Zinovievists, separately, to confide in me how far the decomposition of the milieu has progressed, you do it with me because you know that with others you risk too much, those who, in order to get ahead, go and spill the beans and Stalin uses them. I didn't foresee Bukharin's jump, I don't remember. That was the environment and Bukharin was no fool either, so they killed him too. It was his mistake, as it was Trotsky's and Zinoviev's, not to have understood that Stalin was using the machinery of the state against an opposition tendency in the Party. It had to be understood that this was inadmissible because the proletarian state is our machine for exercising dictatorship and terror against the bourgeoisie, whereas Stalin was using it to terrorise those within the proletarian class area. And the phenomenon was reflected in the International.

Here we come to the last big issue of this track that I follow in brief, the so-called Bolshevization, a consequence of what we have said so far. One began

by making syllogisms like this: 'There is confusion in the western parties. They have difficulty adopting the Bolshevik model that has proved so successful. They are poorly centralised, poorly disciplined, crossed by fractions. They do not have a proper relationship with the factory. Since the Bolsheviks won because they had established this relationship with a system of workers' cells, then the western parties must also organise themselves by factory cells. We strongly opposed this and argued that even the trade union should not be reduced to trade and factory subdivisions but should be organised territorially, let alone the party. We were accused of following Second International type social democratic criteria. We replied that this novelty of the party organised by factory cells, whereby the only place where proletarian communists could meet was in the workplace, suffered from the effects of immediatism. The Fiat cell would naturally be brought to discuss the problems of and in Fiat, the cell of a small factory in a small town would be brought to discuss at that level, the cell of the labourers also, and so on. In this way the party will never be able to tap into a collective vitality above individual contingencies as it is in the complete Marxist and revolutionary conception. This was one of our last campaigns, both in the discussions we held in Italy and in the general discussions in Russia up to 1926.⁴⁷

[This compendium of our statements on what the policy of the International and thus of the communist parties should be, this list of demands that demanded an answer on their tactics, on the theory that should illuminate it, serves to ensure that history does not remain a blank page on which anyone can write whatever they want. The party must never again be exposed to surprises, to sudden tactical somersaults, announced from one day to the next. You see that the vice still rages today, when at the 20th Congress of the PCUS it is announced to the world that the universal principle established at the previous congress is abolished and another, of course still universal, is adopted, which would be that of national paths to socialism, peaceful coexistence and even emulation between states. What was tragic yesterday, is ridiculous today, but it continues to be proof that our half-century-long historical work has always been founded on solid foundations, the only ones capable of explaining how we could foresee with such precision what was to come. Ours was a timely denunciation before the world proletariat and its natural organisation, which only by historical contingency resided in Moscow. Unfortunately, this denunciation went unanswered and the painful years of the general collapse of the revolution, of the proletarian movement, of its revolutionary energy, came inexorably. The pivot of this historical overview is the 3rd Congress of the Communist International. I have insisted on the diatribe between us and Lenin about the

⁴⁷ The following part, fra square brackets, is a summary and elaboration of the original: as it concerns the closing of two meetings, of which some were held at the second months after the premiere, there are at least two summary pages on the surgery of Terracini and on Lenin's response, practically a repetition which in our context is completely superfluous. We then eliminated the virtually identical parts and highlighted the conclusions drawn by the rapporteur.

unfortunate ambiguity that arose regarding the intervention of our delegation, even representing other parties. Why was there this damnable misunderstanding which then affected our entire action within the communist movement? It is worth explaining it materialistically, because it is impossible that everything was due to Terracini's speech on a handful of amendments. Evidently the counter-revolutionary wave was in motion that would sweep everyone away. This is an important lesson that must make us reflect on the power or otherwise of people's 'thinking'. The individual is swept along by the wave and becomes its spokesman, it is not he who makes history and it is not by fighting him that history is changed. That is why we say it is important to safeguard the theory, from which the tactics descend. The Bolsheviks did not win the revolution because they adopted factory cells, that's just nonsense; they won because they succeeded in restoring doctrine after the disasters of social democracy. In international fora we demanded more than amendments, rules or appeals. We even demanded that the world party no longer reflect the categories of bourgeois society. That's why we can clearly say, vis-à-vis the filthy traitors who have called themselves Marxist-Leninists, especially those of today, that we are 99 per cent of them while they don't even have 1 per cent left, i.e. the name and that's all. Marx and Lenin were one hundred per cent killed by these scoundrels, so sooner or later they will do without the name too.⁴⁸ And in any case we do not like to use names to call ourselves communists].

Were 'mistakes' made?

The programmatic approach of a revolutionary party is like the Tables of the Law, every militant voluntarily joins and, membership card or not, accepts what is written on these tables. If he does not accept it, it is not clear what he is coming to do with it. If he accepts it and then reneges on it, he is out. All those who are for another system of boards and therefore of principles must leave. This was made clear. And the meaning of our centralism was also made clear, which must respect what we now call 'dual direction'. That's why we demanded to 'reverse the pyramid', i.e. to remove the mortgage of the Russian party-state on the International and its parties. They wouldn't do it, they couldn't, and the result was that opportunism won its battle. The counter-revolution triumphed and capitalism now controls all countries and Russia itself completely. Today it is easy to say that mistakes were made then, but we said so at the time. Did Lenin make mistakes? He knew as well as we did that the Frontist policy was dangerous, and in fact he never adopted it in Russia. But at that time it seemed that there was no time to lose, that the masses would soon rise up to engage in struggle, if not on the world plane, then on the whole European plane; and so we had to take the risk of not alienating ourselves more than necessary from the parties which had a following among the masses. Evidently the revolution had

⁴⁸ It is known that in the second after the war the Communist Left predicted the victory of the United States on Russia by means of the dollar rather than weapons. A "Great confession", that is, the admission that there was never such a thing in Russia as socialism, and that capitalism would have become inevitable.

not yet aroused a sufficiently rational policy with respect to the need for drastic change. The Moscow centre was crushed by this supposed responsibility, it wanted to discipline centrifugal forces and ensure that the fundamental forces that were with us, which were showing formidable momentum, dragged all the others along, including those that had already betrayed us more than once. Perhaps at that time the International did not want to specify too much, wanted to leave elasticity because it believed we were too close to the battle to enunciate rigid rules and subtlety. Time passed without those favourable opportunities occurring and today we can say that we were right and Lenin wrong. Of course, this is not how history is made. As we have seen, there were justifications for the revolutionary haste. After all, we stayed and fought precisely because we did not consider all doors closed to revolution, at least until 1926, even though by 1921 and even earlier there were many signs to the contrary.

We are at the end of this general framing of our history within that of the entire revolutionary movement. It is now time to let the mass of collected documents speak for themselves. Since these are distant epochs, very few of us have lived through them, and the vast majority of us are fortunately young people who do not have these memories, it will be wise to proceed with a historical-philological work. We will publish it and hope that it will be both instructive and narrative. A lot of documentation is coming to light and we are sorting through it. We will try to place it in a living historical framework, one that highlights not only the events but above all the play of the forces in the field, in a truly revolutionary and not simply historiographical treatment.

In order to proceed in an orderly manner, we have prepared chronologies, and in this regard I leave the floor to the comrade who will deal with that of Germany, i.e. the country in which the problems of the revolution were condensed, problems that in a certain sense are related to those of today, and not only because today, to our great joy and for the first time, German comrades are present. I ask the comrade to explain.⁴⁹

Recommended readings

- AA.VV., *Annali Feltrinelli VIII* , 1966.
- Lamb Luigi, *Amadeo Bordiga* , entry in the Dictionary Biographical of Italians - Volume 34, Treccani, 1988 (present on the Internet).
- Augusts Aldo, *The Third International 1919-1928, Documentary history* , 4 volumes, Editori Riuniti, 1974.
- Broue Pierre, *Revolution in Germany* , Einaudi, 1977.
- Courteous Luigi, *The origins of the Italian Communist Party*, Laterza, 1977.

⁴⁹ Unfortunately this one "chronology" we only have a few pages that we will publish in one of the next issues of the magazine.

- Daniel Chiara (ed.), with an essay by Vacca Giuseppe, *Gramsci in Rome, Togliatti in Moscow - The correspondence of 1926* , Einaudi 1999.
- Direction of the PSI, *Stenographic Report of the XVII National Congress of the Italian Socialist Party, Livorno 1921* . Reprint. Avanti Editions! 1962.
- Hamlet Abstentionist Communist of the PSI, *Il Soviet*, periodical 1918-1922 (the complete collection is in the collection of our CD Roms from the historical archive).
- Gauls Giorgio, *History of the Italian Communist Party*, Bompiani 1976.
- Martinelli Renzo, *The Communist Party of Italy 1921-1926, Politics and organization*, Editori Riuniti, 1977.
- n+1, *A "Italian" Communist Left and the Committee of Understanding* . Notebooks by n+1, 1993.
- PCd'I, *Rassegna Comunista*, organ of Communist Party of Italy, complete collection, 1921-1922. Reprint International, 1969 (present in our collection of digitized material on CD Rom).
- PCd'I, *The Italian question at the Third Congress of the Communist International* , publishing bookshop of the PCd'I, 1921. Reprint Edizioni Rinascita, 1980.
- PCInt., *History of the Communist Left*. Volume one, from its origins to 1919. Volume two, 1919-1920. Third volume, 1920-1921. Volume four, 1921-1922.
- PCInt., *The Communist Left in Italy on Lenin's line*, Quaderni di n+1, 1992.
- PCInt., *In defense of the continuity of the communist program*, Quaderni di n+1, 1992.
- Accountants Ernesto, *The Third International and the Italian Communist Party* , Einaudi, 1978 (we cite it only as an example of typically centrist mystification: over 400 pages, Amadeo Bordiga he is mentioned three times in the note for completely marginal issues. Note that in one of these it is said that Bordiga was great long the most mentioned in the workers' dedications for subscriptions to the *Unity Gramsciana*, while Gramsci almost didn't appear!).
- Rosmer Alfred, *In Moscow in the Time of Lenin* , Jaca Book, 1970 (complete in French on Marxists Internet Archive).
- Somai Giovanni, *Gramsci in Vienna*, Argalìa Publisher, Urbino 1979.
- Spriano Paolo, *History of the Italian Communist Party - Vol. I, From Bordiga to Gramsci* , Einaudi 1967.
- Pocket Angelo, *The first ten years of the Party Italian Communist*, Laterza, 1971.
- Get away Palmiro, *The formation of the group leader of the Italian Communist Party*, Editori Riuniti, 1962.
- Trevisani Giulio, *Small encyclopedia of socialism and communism*, Editions of Il Calendario del Popolo, 1963, entry "Bordigism" (pages 77-78, also in this case a clear example of slanderous Stalinist disinformation).

