

# The Original Content of the Communist Programme

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## Marxism and property

One topic that we have frequently found ourselves occupied with is that of the formula which in the communist program correctly counterposes the post-bourgeois historical era to the current one. To this topic was dedicated the old study in the first issue of *Prometeo* on "Property and Capital"<sup>1</sup>. We discussed, and at our last meeting in Turin<sup>2</sup> we returned to it with thoroughness, the most

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<sup>1</sup> Proprietà e Capitale. *Prometeo*, Series I, No. 10 (June-July 1948), No. 11 (November-December 1948), No. 12 (January-March 1949), No. 13 (August 1949), No. 14 (January-February 1950); Series II, No. 1 (November 1950), No. 3-4 (July-September 1952). Available in the original Italian, with several parts recently translated into English.

<sup>2</sup> The Internationalist Communist Party meeting that Bordiga refers to was held in Turin on June 1-2, 1958. The minutes were published in *Il Programma Comunista* No. 12 (June 20, 1958), No. 13 (July 5, 1958), No. 14 (July 20, 1958), and No. 15 (August 4, 1958) under the title *Sfregio e bestemmia dei principi comunisti nella rivelatrice diatriba tra i partiti dei rinnegati* [Affront and blasphemy against communist principles in the revealing diatribe between the renegades' parties].

common propagandistic formula of pre-war socialism: the abolition of private property in the means of production (and of exchange). We use the parenthesis because this is how it is written in a fitting text by Engels.

The noun *abolition* has never been satisfactory. It reeks of a *volitional* act, and as such it is good for anarchists and (logically) for reformists. The adjective *private* raises the question of whether the relationship which we denote by the word 'property' should disappear in communist society, or only change its *subject*.

It is in the search for this new subject where, all things considered, lies the whole basis for deviations and for *immediatism* – old or new but always philistine. Will property pass from being private (in the vulgar sense: big owners' property) to groups of producers, producer-consumer federations, the State, craft associations, or even to social subclasses?

Our research carried out in Turin and in the "Corollarii"<sup>3</sup> within these pages (see issues 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17)<sup>4</sup> led to the thesis that there must not survive any *subject* of property, contrary to the historically sterile petit-bourgeois ideologies, and that there must not survive any object, either: means of production or exchange, land, fixed plant, nor consumer goods; not even *individual* consumption goods.

Since formulas, once picked up, have a terrific staying power, the "Corollarii" were dedicated to proving that this is not a new thesis, but as always a classical one of Marxism, and we derived it from the luminous pages of Engels and Marx. We carried the demonstration forward until we established, using an essential passage from Volume III of *Capital*, that communism can be defined not even as ownership of land transferred from the individual to Society, because the relationship between society and the earth, to the extent that one wants to use a term of the conventional legal system, is not one of property but rather of temporary *usufruct*.

But perhaps someone may think that there are statements by Marx which make an exception for personal property, individual property; statements about consumer goods – at least those belonging to the wage worker, who has certainly not trafficked in the labor of others. It is to be shown that such a line of reasoning is not grounded in Marxism but in a vague and barren philosophy of exploitation which is at the core of many of today's fake leftisms (see Chaulieu of

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<sup>3</sup> Theoretical "appendices" or "supplements" published in *Il Programma Comunista* after each meeting. The "Corollarii" to the Turin meeting were published under the title *Il programma rivoluzionario della società comunista elimina ogni forma di proprietà del suolo, degli impianti di produzione e dei prodotti del lavoro* [The revolutionary program of communist society eliminates all forms of ownership of land, the instruments of production and the products of labor] and are available online in both Italian and English.

<sup>4</sup> Meaning issues of *Il Programma Comunista*; see notes 2 and 3.

*Socialisme ou Barbarie* as an example of a theoretician who is not naïve but nevertheless condemned to the sad immediatist circle).

For Marxists, every commodity in the current society is Capital – inasmuch as Capital is nothing but the mass of commodities that circulate; we're talking the basics here! – and contains a fraction of surplus value, of extorted and unpaid labor. Whoever buys that commodity with money and consumes it appropriates the work of others, even if within the productive cycle others have appropriated his own labor in their turn.

In the course of this research, it is necessary, when we encounter these aberrations of innocent appearance, to go back to the characteristics that distinguish capitalism from pre-capitalist forms of production, and to ask ourselves what is the exact definition of the capitalist mode in classical Marxism.

It would be naïve to say that capitalism is the system in which there is exploitation of man by man, both because exploitation also existed in other modes of production such as serfdom and slavery, and because such definitions should not be concerned with the relation between one individual and the other, but rather interpret the unfolding of the whole social dynamic and the relations between the classes. Even the formula of the exploitation of one class by another, while better, is not complete.

One can posit, at least in theory, a society of private property, and therefore one which is not the least bit socialist, without exploitation of man by man or of class by class. Just think of a society of petty commodity production, or even – if you like – of a society of independent self-sufficient producers, that is of peasants and artisans, who only consume products that they have worked on.

## **Expropriation, not appropriation**

For our school, defining capitalism does not mean defining a structure outside of time, but rather characterizing its historical origins. In Marx, capitalism is defined by the separation of the worker from the conditions of his work, as is made clear in every party text. Capital is formed by the expropriation of free producers who are left without land or instruments of labor, and who lose all rights to the products of their labor. These are the relations and conditions from which they are forcibly compelled to *divorce* themselves, remaining only bearers of labor power which they sell in exchange for a money wage. Capital does not create “privatism” that we, socialists, are then going to destroy; the thing is not so banal. Rather, capital “socializes,” because it concentrates in large masses the fragmented means which it has extorted from free producers, and in doing so attains an economically and historically positive objective insofar as it leads to large-scale cooperation among workers. Initially, this system satisfies better than the old one the needs not just of the capitalists, but of the whole

society and of the workers themselves, above all in the field of manufactured goods, which were practically unknown to the poor of pre-bourgeois times.

The dialectic of *expropriation of the expropriators* – which we have read about a hundred times in the *Manifesto*, in *Capital*, and in *Anti-Dühring* – cannot be reduced to a sin redeemed, to the restitution of loot, to a banal ‘give Caesar what is Caesar’s’, as it seems to the narrow-minded immediatist, but it is the historical addition of one leap forward to another, of a revolution to a revolution, which were generally widely separated in time but which both *did a good job*.

In capitalism, the most collective form of production replaced private production, and in essence this thesis also applies to the appropriation of products. Those products that were first distributed in minimal quantities among autonomous producers, who could consume them or exchange them, now become available in bulk to the few, or to those who are still fewer in number: the owners of enterprises.

That portion of products which we today call capital goods or instrumental goods (the first term is better because, in addition to tools and machines, it also includes the semi-finished products that will enter another processing cycle) continues to circulate in large masses, while only that portion of final products which is called ‘consumer goods’ finds on the market an opportunity to be more finely subdivided and widely distributed by being exchanged against money that comes from the wages of the proletarians, or from the revenue of the capitalists, or even from those belonging to other classes inherited from ancient societies.

Therefore capitalism is a mode of production that is no longer individual but social, and it is only its mode of distribution which is individual. However, even this second part of the thesis cannot refer to capital goods, which form the largest portion [of the social product], but only to direct consumption goods, which everyone does their share of buying, although certainly not in equal quantities.

It should be noted that not even this inequality, just like the previous injustice, is a valid defining feature of capitalism in our doctrine, which rather defines it as the suppression of the freedom of the producer. None of this has prevented the political superstructure of capitalism from decking itself out in freedom, equality, and justice.

Indeed, socialism will do much better than to subdivide land, means of production, and products into as many particles as there are human beings; a thing that would be manifestly absurd when it comes to all goods that are not directly consumable, and childishly expressed when it comes to those that are.

## **Lenin’s theoretical rigor**

There is a writing penned by Lenin at the end of the 19th century, which will be further useful to us, dealing with the vital subject of *Crisis Theory* and bearing the following title (making a mockery of the revisionists): "A Characterization of Economic Romanticism." Perhaps the reader will recall that we have often employed the definition of romanticism for the Stalinist degeneration of the Russian revolution.

This writing is useful to us for some quotations which show that certain formulations, which some today still find it hard to get into their heads, have been the natural heritage of our school for a long time.

Lenin ridicules the Russian economist Efrussi for his mangled definition of crisis, which was also shared by the great Sismondi and by Rodbertus (the German who insisted that Marx had plagiarized his theory of wages). Lenin showed how certain deformations of post-Marxists did nothing but rehash the mistakes that had already been overcome and eliminated by Marx; we can now extend this truth to the present day, that is, for more than another half a century. Keynes and the *welfarists* in fact pick up where Efrussi left off and where Rodbertus and Sismondi left off; crisis is an unfavorable relationship between production and consumption, and solving it is a matter of stimulating and enhancing consumption, above all the consumption of wage laborers.

Lenin derides this lapalissade<sup>5</sup> which claims that crises happen because not everything that is produced is bought, because there is no balance between production and consumption, or that this balance falls short because the producer (capitalist) did not foresee the demand. This is the effect, but not the explanation, of the cause. Lenin points out that *underconsumption* is a phenomenon characteristic of all economies, but that *crises* characterize the capitalist economy only.

Malthus and Sismondi stand against the classical economists because they derive social wealth not from production but from consumption: Rodbertus only took it one small step further when he identified the insufficient consumption of the workers as the cause and gave rise to the reformist and gradualist immediatism. Still following this theoretical line today are the economists who believe they can say more than Marx and (as we said at Asti<sup>6</sup>) exalt Malthus who delegated consumption to the noble landowners and priests in order to solve the economic riddle! In America, the ideal type of this modern priestling is the employee who – with his car, family home, TV set, etc. – shares in the profits.

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<sup>5</sup> Truism; a trite, self-evident statement.

<sup>6</sup> The meeting that Bordiga refers to here was held in Asti on June 26-27, 1954. The minutes were published in *Il Programma Comunista* No. 13 (July 9, 1954), No. 14 (July 23, 1954), No. 15 (August 7, 1954), No. 16 (August 28, 1954), No. 17 (September 16, 1954), No. 18 (October 1, 1954), and No. 19 (October 15, 1954) under the title *Vulcano della produzione o palude del mercato? (Economia marxista ed economia controrivoluzionaria)* [The volcano of production or the swamp of the market? Marxist versus counterrevolutionary economy] and are available in the original Italian.

But let's get to the meat of the matter. Lenin excuses Sismondi and Rodbertus, but we cannot excuse Chaulieu or Keynes. The former were not "capable" of understanding that "the criticism of capitalism cannot be based on phrases about universal prosperity (Sismondi), or about the fallacy of *circulation left to itself* (Rodbertus), but must be based on the character of the evolution of production relations"<sup>7</sup>. They were not able to understand it because they were writing before the rise of Marxism.

What did they not know? No one can say it better than Lenin: "Crises are inevitable because the collective character of production comes into conflict with the individual character of appropriation"<sup>8</sup>. This fundamental theorem of Marxism is repeated a little later with the addition of a parenthesis: "contradiction that is the distinguishing feature of *only one* system-the capitalist system, namely, the contradiction between the social character of production (*socialised by capitalism*) and the private, individual mode of appropriation"<sup>9</sup>

Lenin adds: "'Anarchy of production,' 'unplanned production'-what do these (well-known) expressions tell us? They tell us about the contradiction between the social character of production and the individual character of appropriation"<sup>10</sup>.

We take from this passage by Lenin the notion of *underconsumption*. Many eras have been marked by this phenomenon, the reaction to which was the decimation of the population. The capitalist era feigns to abhor it, and from this stems the myth of overproduction, for which overconsumption and overpopulation are required. It is time to rid ourselves of yet another imitative fixation on the bourgeois order: the proletarian revolution cannot hesitate to go through a period of *underconsumption* if that is what it takes to overthrow capitalism. Lenin's revolution forty years ago taught us that there was no need to hesitate, but the goal had to be the victory of the socialist system, and not of the system of capitalism. Nevertheless, there remains a great lesson for the proletariat and its party: the revolutionary dictatorship will have the character of a dictatorship *over consumption* – the only way to detoxify the servants of modern Capital, and rid them of the class stigma which it branded into their flesh and into their minds.

This is something incomprehensible to every immediatist circle: commune, federation, category, class of producers (we also need to recall Marx's incisive phrase about the *control of society that is not to be surrendered to one class of*

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<sup>7</sup> English translation of Lenin's text quoted here is taken from: Hanna, G., ed. 1972. *V. I. Lenin: Collected Works. Volume 2. 1895-1897*. Progress Publishers, Moscow, pp. 171-172. The insertions are Bordiga's.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 167. Here the passage quoted by Bordiga differs slightly from the English translation, which splits the text in question into two sentences. The translation above conforms to that given by Bordiga.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 171. The insertions are Bordiga's.

*producers*<sup>11</sup> – that is, not even to a class of the non-idle and of non-exploiters). And it is something that adds to the chains of impotence which constrain every form of organization that is not the *political party*: unions, enterprise councils, local councils.

## **The correct formulation**

Once again we claim the full mantle of Marxist declaratory judgment.

The separation of workers from the material conditions of their work is the capitalist form. By realizing this separation using means that are violent and even inhuman, capitalism transforms individual production into social production, but leaves to the appropriation of products its individual character.

The free producers expropriated by capitalism are reduced to proletarians who have no reserves and live by selling their labor power for money, with which they realize the purchase of a portion of the products for their own personal consumption – that is, the reproduction of labor power.

In the socialist form, production remains social, and therefore there is no property on anyone's part in the instruments of production, including land and fixed plant. In this society, there will be no individual appropriation, not even for the purposes of consumption. Rather, distribution will be social and for social purposes.

Social consumption differs from individual consumption in that the physical allocation of consumable goods is not done through the mediation of commodity purchase and with monetary means.

When society satisfies all those needs of its members that are not inconsistent with the best course of social development, *regardless* of their lesser or greater contribution to social labor, all personal property has ceased to exist and with it its measure, that is value, and its symbol, money.

In the beginning of the struggle of the modern proletariat, incomplete formulas were often used, which is not to say, however, that these contained the overall expression of the doctrine. To this must be attributed the frequent recurrence of the expressions: "socialization of the means of production," or rather: "respect for the personal property of the worker." Historically, this did not

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<sup>11</sup> A paraphrase of a sentence from the draft of Marx's letter to Robert Applegarth from December 3, 1869. The letter itself was lost (see MECW Vol. 43, p. 393 and note 495), but its draft (variously titled "Nationalisation of Land" or "The Abolition of Landed Property") was rediscovered and published first in Russian translation and then in the original English in *The Labour Monthly*, Vol. 34, No. 9 (September 1952), [pp. 415-417](#). Nearly identical passages can also be found in a paper titled *The Nationalisation of the Land*, written by Marx and presented in only a very lightly edited form by Eugène Dupont in 1872 at the Manchester section of the IWMA (see MECW Vol. 23, pp. 131-136). Bordiga appears to have drawn from the former text.

lead to any serious ambiguities, since general plunder of the independent laborers' measly personal property in tools and products was the norm until very recently. It is analogous to how Marx himself had to put up with the fact that in the general address of the International Workingmen's Association there were left phrases about justice and the freedom of the individual and of the peoples, which he made sure were relegated to where they could not cause harm.

Today we find capitalism at a much higher point on the curve of its development, namely that which classical Marxism fully anticipated; and it is not enough – as it was then – for an agitation formula to be useful to the working class that it is directed against the powers that be.

Continuing the work of the "Corollarii"<sup>12</sup>, we have a duty to keep giving the demonstration which in the case of the First International was given by Marx's well-known letter to Engels, in order to remove any suspicion that where others make cuts to Marxism, we wanted to give you some additions of our own.

## **Rough outlines of future society**

The ever more extensive research into the Marxist literature that is underway on all sides, conducted even by those currents which maintain that it is time to finish with all of this referring to Marx – thought by many to be too outdated – has had the result of tracking down and publishing even the simple marginal notes that Marx jotted on the pages of the books which he read and to which he dedicated his criticism.

The passage that will serve us now deserves attentive reading, and it is regrettable that it is interrupted by a comment that diminishes its continuity, and thus its power. It is taken from the notes written on the work of James Mill, the English economist who was the father of the better-known economist and philosopher John Stuart Mill, and whom Marx cited extensively in his later works and in his history of the *Theories of Surplus Value*. Here we are dealing with six pages written in a notebook that interest us not so much as a critique of Mill Senior's system, but as a free excursion of Marx's mind into the fields of communist society, which he was always reluctant to undertake.

We must bear in mind that the young Marx had already developed the complete critique of Hegel's idealism, which he declared to have completed with his work on the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* that dates from those years. However, his preferred form of exposition, particularly in a note not intended for the public, could not but "flirt" with the Hegelian method, a thing he even admitted doing in the preface to Volume I of *Capital* more than twenty years later.

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<sup>12</sup> See [The revolutionary program of communist society eliminates all forms of ownership of land, the instruments of production and the products of labor.](#)



It is therefore no wonder that this excerpt, which we choose as a true Manifesto against every form of individualism, sets up the polemic in the individualized form of a dialogue between the characters "You" and "Me"; this is probably the case because Mill's text, when it dealt with the theory of exchange between the producers of commodities that satisfy different needs, did so after the old fashion of economists by trade (still not dead after all this time), and based all its analysis that would come to the defense of the market and of the law of exchange on the elementary case of Tom who had produced a commodity that is useful to Harry.

Marx adopts this scenario of a personal relationship, and dialectically lays the foundation for the construction of a critique that from the egoism of the two individuals, measurable according to the bourgeois economists in terms of value and money and the exact terms on which both of them approach the *deal*, rises above the base and vile borders of a market society. There is an evident concern throughout to place everything on the firm basis of material and real relations, even though the literary form may have an abstract flavor.

*"As a man you have, of course, a human relation to my product: you have need of my product. Hence it exists for you as an object of your desire and your will. But your need, your desire, your will, are powerless as regards my product."<sup>13</sup>*

We apologize for this first interruption; we want to clarify that here we are describing a society of product owners. The member "You" cannot simply reach out a hand and grab the product of the member "Me" that "You" crave so much, because the social form forbids it.

*"That [this powerlessness] means, therefore, that your human nature, which accordingly is bound to stand in intimate relation to my human production, is not your power over this production, your possession of it, for it is not the [faculty of appropriation (thus we translate the term *Eigentuemlichkeit*)], not the power, of man's nature that is recognised in my production."<sup>14</sup>*

We'll translate the meaning, if we may: the social form does not recognize the right of *any and all* human beings<sup>15</sup> to consume my production; it grants that right only to me or to those who pay me – and that's it for the foul language. That was Hegel.

*"They (your need, your inner desire) constitute rather the tie which makes you dependent on me, because they put you in a position of dependence on my*

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<sup>13</sup> English translation taken from MECW Vol. 3, p. 225.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Note that both insertions in square brackets are Bordiga's, and that MECW translates the word *Eigentümlichkeit* quite differently, and arguably more accurately, as "specific character."

<sup>15</sup> In the original Italian, the phrase *l'essere umano* is used both for the translation of Marx's German (where MECW renders it as "human nature") and in Bordiga's paraphrase thereof, where it is more appropriately translated as "human being."

*product. Far from being the means which would give you power over my production, they (your desires) are instead the means for giving me power over you.*"<sup>16</sup>

Up to here, the description has been that of the greedy society of commodity production. Exchange, as a two-part substitute for primitive barter, is described by the various Mills as a matter of free wills that smile at one another as they meet each other halfway. But instead it is about two acts of consummation of an inhuman power. My power over the bread that will quell your hunger is to make you die, and you can only save yourself if you have the money that can slip underneath my power, the money that you received because you had to sell a garment on pain of the human being-buyer dying from the cold. Groundless fears of the young Marx? But who does not recognize in this the chapter of *Capital* on *The fetish-like character of the commodity and its secret*, in which the relation between commodities, marked by a candid arithmetic equality, becomes a relation between men, and one which proves to be worse than that between wolves?

At the recent congress of philosophers<sup>17</sup>, Marx seems to have been on everyone's mind. A Jesuit calls him a more fertile philosopher in the works from his youth, another professor calls him more mature in his old age, some Russophiles call him always consistent. For now, that's enough about that congress, but our message is that none of the three groups has understood Marx, whom Stalin's disciples cook up into a "dualist"!

## **The flight through time**

The writer then makes a leap (and without warning, too, like he always does to the confusion of his censors), goes beyond the historical commodity form, and takes the bold approach of assuming that the citizens You and Me continue their dialogue, only we now know well that it is the Social Man who speaks with himself. But the little philosophical story is there to say that we have killed the person in him, his ascent to Freedom and Value stopped with our collectivism, Spirit nailed to matter in order to make of the two one.

Marx does not stop at annihilating the all-time adversary with one of his fiery sarcasms. He is going to show just to what heights the human being should rise once mercantile egoism has been killed in it, heights of the joy of a life unknown until then.

*"Let us suppose that we had carried out production as human beings."*<sup>18</sup>  
We must stop here; the reader will want to reread this, even if he has previously

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<sup>16</sup> MECW Vol. 3, p. 225. The insertions are Bordiga's.

<sup>17</sup> A reference to the 12th International Congress of Philosophy held in Venice from September 12 to September 18, 1958.

<sup>18</sup> MECW Vol. 3, p. 227.

skipped over our dullness. Today we produce not as human beings but as slaves and as hucksters. Since we are now assuming that we produce without getting paid and not for the objective of getting paid, this means we have earlier assumed to have transported ourselves into communist society.

"Each of us would have *in two ways affirmed himself and the other person.*"<sup>19</sup> No one has therefore abnegated themselves nor their humanity, contrary to the sneering of the philistine.

"1) *In my production I would have objectified my individuality, its specific character, and therefore enjoyed not only an individual manifestation of my life during the activity, but also when looking at the object I would have the individual pleasure of knowing my personality to be objective, visible to the senses and hence a power beyond all doubt. 2) In your enjoyment or use of my product I would have the direct enjoyment both of being conscious of having satisfied a human need by my work, that is, of having objectified man's essential nature, and of having thus created an object corresponding to the need of another man's essential nature. 3) I would have been for you the mediator between you and the species, and therefore would become recognised and felt by you yourself as a completion of your own essential nature and as a necessary part of yourself, and consequently would know myself to be confirmed both in your thought and your love. 4) In the individual expression of my life I would have directly created your expression of your life, and therefore in my individual activity I would have directly confirmed and realised my true nature, my human nature, my communal nature.*"<sup>20</sup>

In the superb writing of this passage, one could well say that the *individual* and the *ego* stay in the game as a logical subject and as a philosophical category; there is nothing contradictory in this – rather it is a valid game of our materialist dialectic. We want to arrive at the expulsion of the individual from history and from society not with metaphysical exercises *sub specie aeternitatis*<sup>21</sup> but as a result of historical development. It looks like the "You" and the "Me" should be our *dramatis personae*<sup>22</sup>, but the epilogue is their fusion in our category (unknown to the ideological superstructures of the pre-communist eras) of the *human nature*, the *communal nature*; a category in which we discover – in confirmation of the historical invariance of Marx's thought – the *Social Man* of the Grundrisse from 1859, already known to us, which coincides with this point of arrival from 1844: "*My human nature, my communal nature.*"

We have no reason to be surprised that we find these sentences in Marx's study texts and not in those intended for publication. Marx wrote at a time when Germany had not yet completed the transition from (bourgeois) critical

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 227-228.

<sup>21</sup> "From the perspective of eternity"; a common philosophical idiom first used by Baruch Spinoza.

<sup>22</sup> The characters of a play; protagonists.

philosophy to liberal revolutionary politics, which form two complementary aspects of the struggle against scholastic authority in theology and absolutist despotism in politics. We Marxists destroy the individual, but to make that happen we historically need the liberal revolution to have emancipated him.

Marx started from the critique of an economist who wanted to demonstrate that the *two-sidedness* of exchange was a "natural law." His powerful deduction in its luminous course strips the relation of its give-and-take, *quid pro quo* attributes, and frees the productive act from its commodity character. In the society of commodity production, the producer works in order to find a buyer, the text under examination tells us; but in the communist society that will replace it, the producer will work not in order to sell and to find his individual "contractor," but for a one-sided purpose that unfolds in a glorious sequence in which there is no longer any recompense for another's work nor for another's money. The historical *dialogue* between the "You" and the "Me" is no longer resolved, as it has always been throughout history, with the subjugation of one of the two, but neither is it resolved with their balance and equipollence in a society of free producers, a commodity-producing democracy, or, if you will, "popular democracy," that vain petty-bourgeois ideology. The resolution of the dialogue comes after the victory of proletarian communism with the fusion of both traditional characters in the single reality of the *Social Man*.

The ultimate vision of the producer who finds satisfaction not in the craving for, and consumption of, another's product, but in the one-sided act of producing and in that act alone, and consequently, in offering – this vision sketched out here as a matter of doctrine cannot be understood as referring to a society of autonomous producers, but only to a society of cooperative producers, no longer divided by any territorial or statistical borders.

We speak here of having attained the form of society-wide production tied to society-wide enjoyment, in which the end of production is not the consumption of the producer, but the donation of his product to society, in which he recognizes himself.

As a proof that this is not our addition, or a veil that only the past century allowed us to lift on prophetic sayings, we can only quote the words that close the citation in the text in our possession. "*Our products would be so many mirrors in which we saw reflected our essential nature.*"<sup>23</sup>

## **The triumphant invariance**

But all of Marx's texts spread out throughout his immense body of work converge among themselves. What we have expounded so far allows us to complete the exegesis of the writing on landed property, conducted in the "Corollarii" from Turin, which contained the classical theorem cited above: "To

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<sup>23</sup> MECW Vol. 3, p. 228.

*give up the soil to the hands of associated rural labourers, would be to surrender all society to one exclusive class of producers.*"<sup>24</sup>

Marx sees the nationalization of land, a transitional measure, as an act that "will work a complete change in the relations between labour and capital and finally do away altogether with capitalist production, whether industrial or rural. Only then the class distinctions and privileges will disappear together with the economical basis from which they originate and society will be *transformed into an association of 'producers'* (italics in the text<sup>25</sup>). To live upon other people's labour will become a thing of the past. There will no longer exist a government nor a State distinct from Society itself."<sup>26</sup>

Let us recall that this writing dates from after 1868. What splendid *invariance!* The text continues as follows:

*"Agriculture, mining, manufacture, in one word all branches of production will gradually be organised in the most effective form. National centralisation of the means of production will become the natural basis of a society composed of associations of free and equal producers consciously acting upon a common and rational plan."*<sup>27</sup>

Quite literally, this passage is clear enough to show that any economy organized by Regions (Russia) or worse yet by Communes (China) is outside of the historical road that passes through the first stage of socialism and offers the only basis for attaining full communism; and therefore to prove guilty of incurable doctrinal error the resolution of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party from August 23, 1958<sup>28</sup>, which concludes with the following:

*"The primary purpose of establishing people's communes (in which there can be introduced the system of wages!) is to accelerate the speed of socialist construction and the purpose of building socialism is to prepare actively for the transition to communism. It seems that the attainment of communism in China is no longer a remote future event (sic!). We should actively use the form of the people's communes to explore the practical road of transition to communism."*<sup>29</sup>

In the meantime, another text is titled: "The Commune, the primary unit of the future communist society."

Unless the possession of a doctrine is useless baggage, this exploration is already over and no longer in the need of *space probes!* The road is not, as the Chinese would like: communalism, socialism, communism; but it is, on the

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<sup>24</sup> *The Labour Monthly*, Vol. 34, No. 9, p. 417.

<sup>25</sup> Bordiga's insertion, which is not true of any of the extant English versions.

<sup>26</sup> *The Labour Monthly*, Vol. 34, No. 9, p. 417.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Actually August 29, 1958.

<sup>29</sup> English translation taken from: Bowie, R. R. and Fairbank, J. K., eds. 1971. *Communist China, 1955-1959. Policy Documents with Analysis*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, p. 456. The insertions are Bordiga's.

contrary, national concentration, socialism (international and commodity-less!), communism.

But Marx's passage could still lead those readers who are somewhat... conservative to a misunderstanding: that the described communist society would be composed of multiple associations, in the sense that each one would have its own product at its disposal, and would exchange it with the others. That would be an enormous misinterpretation. It would mean returning to the error, already overcome a long time ago, of surrendering society to the cooperative of agricultural producers or to a confederation thereof. The associations of producers of future society, whose membership will normally change many times over the course of a person's active life, will be associations that will have as their sole purpose the function, the act, the joy of producing. Not only because they will *follow a rational common plan*, and because *society will be transformed into a single<sup>30</sup> association of producers*, as in the same context, but above all because these groupings – technical and not economic – will put all of their product at the disposal of society and of its central consumption plan.

We consider ourselves to have successfully proved that according to invariant Marxism, communist society does not permit ownership by groups (just as it does not contain individual owners), not even over the product of their labor and over the object of their consumption. Production, life, and enjoyment are in this system the same act, an act which is its own reward, and which is no longer carried out under the vile whip of consumerist appetites. The dialectical synthesis of work and need is only realized at the level of the Social Man.

Naturally, for the bourgeois philistine, Russian history has already demonstrated that this was a noble but foolish and impossible dream.

But the Western philistine will understand that he cannot cry victory when the Russian philistine spits out the confession that his system has nothing to do with Marxist communism.

## **Man and nature**

The brilliant piece by Marx that was of service to the present speaker in elucidating questions of economics and social history brings into the argument the evocative subject of the relations between the individual and society in their development, as well as the question of whether it is possible for human knowledge (not individual but collective and of the *party*, there lies the crucial point) to establish the laws of the society of the future, and in doing so, leads us

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<sup>30</sup> Bordiga emphasizes the word *una*, which in Italian can correspond both to the English indefinite articles (as in the translation of Marx's passage above) and to the meaning of "(just) one." In English, this semantic ambiguity does not exist, and what Bordiga accomplished by a simple shift of emphasis therefore requires inserting an extra word into Marx's phrase

onto the ground of what is commonly called philosophy. It also gave rise to some criticisms directed by the present speaker at the speeches and references of the Marxists (of the Stalinist variety, alas) at the current congress of philosophers in Venice.

We maintain that it is possible to investigate the laws of future society insofar as we imbue the science of human society, as much as it is still in its infancy, with the same capability as the science of nature, which was already in full bloom at the beginning of the bourgeois epoch four centuries ago.

With this the Marxist has overcome the reverence for an insurmountable barrier between the forms of knowledge of the facts of nature and those of human facts. Our claim to be able to describe future society rests on the claim of the astronomer to predict eclipses, a very ancient achievement, and even the thousand-year-long stages in the life cycle of a star or a nebula.

There is no reason for the philosophy of history to be different from the philosophy of nature, and this can be more correctly expressed by saying that, however different their degrees of development, the sciences of nature and of history make use of the same methods of investigation for the sole purpose of establishing the uniformity between the past and present events, and from this rise to forecasting future events.

This would not obtain if one went along with the [hypothesis of the] estrangement of two worlds, that of material nature and that of spirit. On the basis of these elementary distinctions, all Marxists who have concerned themselves with philosophy and with critique of the conventional philosophies of the bourgeois world have proclaimed themselves *monists*, on the grounds of being materialists. Monist philosophy could also be one that is based on the sole world of Spirit, of which the material world could be considered an emanation or (in less abstruse words) a creation. On the other hand, those systems which hold the two worlds to be distinct and opposed to each other are called dualist. Marx and Engels called themselves monists in the face of Hegel and German idealism, Plekhanov and Lenin reclaimed this position when faced with the more recent bourgeois philosophers and with those who contorted classical Marxism even on the philosophical level.

But the so-called Marxists of the Venice Congress pride themselves on not being "monists" and attribute this label to "vulgar and bourgeois materialism." Marx's materialism is said to be, using Stalin's favorite word, dialectic, and according to these parroters, the role of dialectics in this phrase consists in granting an autonomous position to the world of man, against and counterposed to the world of nature.

*Man and nature* was one of the topics in Venice, and this has led to a lot of talk about Marxism: but what Marxism? According to a report in September's

*Unità*<sup>31</sup>, the Congress has been opposed to the tendency to resolve the two elements in each other, "nature in man (idealism) or man in nature (mechanism or vulgar materialism)." The interpretation that is "fashionable" today has established that the two elements are "correlative," and that Marxism is the most vivid if not the only (sic!) expression of this.

The very fact that a newspaper that calls itself Marxist goes looking for success in a symposium of official and professional philosophers is enough to illustrate the tremendous confusion of principles in which it finds itself.

Dialectics is wrongly invoked to smuggle in the claim that the field of human facts is opposed from the outside by the field of facts of nature, and this is nothing but a slippery slope to the confession that natural causes must not be admitted to determine human processes, and therefore, that one might as well introduce non-material factors of which the thinking man is the bearer and which change the world.

That is to suppose that nature is fashioned after models that made their first appearance in Thought, that is in spirit, and find there their whole genesis. The game of dialectics should instead be set up within a very different relation: not between nature and man, but between human society and the individual.

All the ideologies that want to put man above the physical world and give him reign over it that frees him from being determined by it, even when they do not say so, do not think of Man the species, but of man the person. All idealisms are individualisms. All the Croces<sup>32</sup> who say that the origin of knowledge lies in the act of thinking alone take for their area of research the mind and brain, which belongs to an individual man.

## **The different materialisms**

What is Marx trying to say when he speaks of *vulgar* materialism in contradistinction to his historical materialism? Something analogous to when he contrasts vulgar economy with the earlier classical economy, even though both are bourgeois. Vulgar materialism is not that which dates from before, but rather from after the French Revolution. In the *Encyclopédie* there is a philosophical materialism which Marx indeed calls *classical*, and to which he attributes the potential to lead from the destruction of all fideism in nature to that of fideism and spiritualism in human society. But the victory of capitalist society halts these classical doctrinal developments and reduces the economic science to vulgar economy, which conceals the extortion of surplus value and surplus labor, just as it reduces the classical materialism of Diderot and d'Alembert to a vulgar philosophy that does not undermine bourgeois domination and makes apologies

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<sup>31</sup> Official newspaper of the Stalinist Italian Communist Party.

<sup>32</sup> Roberto Felice Ardigò (1828-1920), an Italian Catholic priest turned positivist, politically associated with the bourgeois republicanism of Mazzini and Garibaldi.



for economic oppression after having condemned cultural and juridical oppression. Vulgar materialism in Marx's sense of the word is that which later develops into the rightly ridiculed and scientist positivism of Spencer, Comte, Ardigò<sup>33</sup>, and its various national versions, which decades ago proved to be so enticing for the revisionist socialists of Anglo-Latin countries, while the old-fashioned idealism lured in the Germans and the Russians.

We will try to identify the distinction between vulgar materialism and Marxist materialism in a more linear manner. Let us assume that in both, the substructure and material facts are foundational, and that one wants to derive from the dynamics thereof the science of human actions and behaviors as well as the explanation of human opinions and ideologies. The myopia of vulgar materialism consists in placing this relation within the narrow scope of the human individual.

For our historical materialism, a term Marx considered equivalent to economic determinism, the question expands its scope to the whole society and its history, and the research is no longer concerned with the behavior and thought of the individual, but with the predispositions and ideology of social classes and social forms that succeed one another throughout the course of history.

The determinism of the positivists reduces to a causation between physiology and psychology; the determinism of Marxist materialists takes the social economy as its point of departure in order to construct the explanation of the law, the religion, the morality, and also the philosophy of successive epochs.

The former view is sterile and insufficient, and moreover sets out on a dark and endless path. Like ours, it does take into account the effect of the physical environment external to man, but in a thousand of irreducible specificities, while we are interested in circumstances and general relations such as that between a given geographical climate and the adaptations and behaviors it induces in the people who live in it, as a constant average over all individuals.

Science is very far from being able to infer from the physical facts of the environment in which a human organism lives, and from... the menu of the dishes that are served on his table, the generation of thoughts in his brain, because the link between vegetative and neuropsychic systems has not yet been discovered. But in our materialism we believe we can apply scientific rigor, that is, substantial reduction of error effects, to the study of the causal relationship between the material conditions of life of a human collective, such as its relation to nature and relations between men (between social classes), and the features of its juridical political organization and so on.

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<sup>33</sup> Roberto Felice Ardigò (1828-1920), an Italian Catholic priest turned positivist, politically associated with the bourgeois republicanism of Mazzini and Garibaldi.

The difference between the two materialisms does not lie in the fabrication that Marx decamped from the terrain of monism to establish an empty dignified parity between nature and man, a type of neo-dualism, but in the fundamental criterion that we do not chase that slippery determination which plays itself out within the individual organism and the personal brain, we do not search for the vacuous phantasma of "personality," but rather base the relation on the material conditions of a social community and the entire series of its manifestations and historical developments.

On these grounds we firmly believe, with wealth of historical evidence, that the influence of a personality on social events is nil, and that the history of human sociology must be treated as one of the fields of description into which the knowledge of nature can be rightfully considered to be partitioned, without such a distinction and separation having any preeminent value over all others. Consequently, it is quite right to say that according to the Marxist doctrine, the science of human society is contained within the science of material nature; indeed, the latter must in its construction inevitably precede the former.

## **Why dialectical materialism**

Notwithstanding the fact that dialectical materialism was very poorly presented by Stalin in his book on the subject, which had as its sole aim the justification – with concessions to an aberrant historical voluntarism – of the pretense of building artificial socialism in isolated and backward Russia, we can now make a clarification with regard to the fact that the expression "*dialectical materialism*" can be accepted as the perfect equivalent of "*historical materialism*." The dialectic should not be interpreted as consisting of saying: the economy makes politics, but then politics (basely reduced to state practice) in its own way alters the economy. That is a thesis turned upside down, rather than the synthesis of a thesis and a fruitful antithesis. Marx said that men make their own history – an old objection of various parroters. Without doubt they do make it, with their hands, feet, even mouths, and with their weapons; materially they *make* it, but what we deny is that they make it *with their heads*, namely, that they so much as "construct it" (a detestable phrase, and one fitting for the bourgeois entrepreneur) according to a model, or a project – everything already *thought out*. They make it, yes, but not in the way they understood and believed they would, nor the way they expected and desired to make it. That is the point.

The dialectic arises from asking: does this impotence, this negation of human free will, concern the individual, or does it concern human society as well?

Here, the Marxist response is a classic one. The personal subject is immersed in this impotence to foresee and lead to the utmost, and in societies with an individualist structure all the more so. In these societies, and above all in those that take grandiloquent liberalism for their ideology, the higher the level

that an individual occupies in the hierarchy, the more of a puppet on the string of determinism he is.

Even society as a whole, as long as it is a society *divided* into classes, possesses no vision or direction for its own future; within it, the interests of the contending classes disguise themselves over the course of history as anticipations (prophecies) and contrasting ideologies, but they do not attain the power to foresee and prepare the future.

Only that single class which, present in this capitalist society, has an interest in the abolition of society divided into classes, can aspire to the ability to fight for this end and to obtain within itself knowledge and a vision; and this class (Marxism revealed) is the modern proletariat.

But as long as this class exists in capitalist society, the conscious vision of its future cannot arise in each of its members or even in its totality, and it is simply foolish to demand this consciousness and will of the *majority* of the class; this is nothing but one of the great many bourgeois derivatives which muddle the minds of proletarians and which only the passing of generations can erase.

Therefore an individual cannot rise to the vision of communist society as a result of reflecting on his personal interests and benefits; that would be vulgar materialism. Nor can he concentrate in himself the vision of the class and the future of human society except as a convergence of class forces.

The contradiction is that the individual cannot, and neither can the collectivity; and this would lead to an eternal inability to not only want the future, but also to foresee it.

The dialectical exit from this double thesis (that the proletariat both can and cannot, that it is the first class which tends toward classless society, but that it does not possess the light which will shine on the human species after the death of classes) lies in the double step described in the *Communist Manifesto*: first, *party*; then, *dictatorship*. The amorphous mass of the proletariat *organizes itself into a political party* and becomes a class. Only by leveraging this first conquest does it *organize itself into the dominant class*. Armed with a class dictatorship, it goes on to abolish classes. Dialectic!

The ability to describe in advance and to hasten the arrival of the communist future, dialectically sought neither within the individual nor within the universal, is found in the following formula that synthesizes historical potentiality: the political party, actor and subject of the dictatorship.

## **Established passivity of the individual**

The thesis we have established puts vulgar or bourgeois materialism and its communist counterpart in their place. The former, even in its classical origins,

hinges on the *person*. When the Frenchman d'Holbach says "*nihil est in intellectu quod prius non fuerit in sensu*"<sup>34</sup>, that is, nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses, he establishes a relationship between the material influence of nature over the *individual* and the individual's mental manifestations; his opinions. Even for Marx, this was a step forward, because it made it possible to overcome fideism – according to which there is an innate *given* (soul) in every individual's mind that has a divine origin – and also contemporary Saxon idealism, for which too, even though it dispensed with God, there was an ideal substrate located inside every head that did not develop from any material sensations.

But the position of bourgeois materialism falls far short of ours. In Marx, the relationship is instead established between the *average* material conditions in which a certain social aggregate lives and their corresponding manifestations in the realms of the intellect, which are taken to include religion, ideology, art, culture, and politics. The passivity of "spirit" with respect to matter within the individual continues to be an established fact for us, but its mechanics remains inaccessible to the science of the capitalist era, which has chased after it in vain and which today finds itself in a full-blown degenerative crisis. Conventional thought – and it only gets worse at philosophical congresses – does not possess the dialectical key needed to unlock its contradictions. According to the fideist, it was God who arranged everything in man's head (as in every nook and cranny of the physical nature that surrounds him), but the point of departure is still a person, endowed with *free will* to opine and act and with *responsibility* (the indispensable complement of that annoying fetish, personality): hence the system of rewards and punishments.

The bourgeois atheist at first knocked free will off its pedestal and subordinated the head to the belly, but since (to put it briefly) his new "form of production" required empty bellies, he authorized the corresponding brains to think and form opinions, and founded the system of general electoral democracy and legal responsibility, going so far as to make his State – the State of the dominant class – into the social [and] ethical Absolute. Modern culture, which the deserters of the revolution basely blend into, oscillates between these two papier-mâché puppets: the individual endowed with responsibility, and the absolute ethical State.

We hold the result of the *unconscious passivity* of the individual to be true, but in our determinism we do not expect to be able to *verify* it nor to make predictions on its basis at the individual scale. We demonstrate it in the social realm by means of historical (and economical) analysis, and we do not rule out the possibility that the general, average rule should be contradicted by a most diverse array of individual cases, without this affecting our theory. We do not

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<sup>34</sup> The Latin phrase itself predates d'Holbach; it can be found in Aquinas and summarizes a view already expressed by Aristotle.

attempt to find the proof of determinism in the opinions located in the heads of men taken individually, nor do we seek a break therewith in persons' conscience, will, or drive for action, however small or large those may be.

The *break* with determinism does take place, however, and over the course of history the fact of the break has generally always preceded the exact theoretical consciousness thereof. The break that will follow the determination of the bourgeois era, on account of which the victims of the system think in terms of its own ideology, will come, generally speaking; but for the first time ever, its coming will take place in history (and therefore not in the divine creative act through the innate effect thereof, nor in the immanence of the Idea) – and in this consists the “overturning of the praxis”<sup>35</sup> – as a result of the appearance of a knowing and willing subject acting on its own initiative, which is not a person but the revolutionary party. The party expresses the organization of the modern proletarian class, but rather than representing the class in the bourgeois sense of a democratic mandate, it represents it in its program and in the future implementation of this program; it represents the communist society of tomorrow, and this is the meaning of the leap (Marx-Engels) from the realm of *necessity* to that of *freedom*, which is accomplished not by the individual with respect to society, but by the human *Species* with respect to *Nature*.

## Powerful orthodoxy

Negation of the individual, affirmation of the Social Man, of the Species emerging out of its tormented prehistory: we are dealing here with a continuum and, we repeat tirelessly, with a demonstration that the thesis is an original one of the Marxist school, and that it dispels all the stubborn and sickly immediatisms, whose common diagnosis is the *paralysis* of the dialectic, which must be universal rather than contingent and petty to be fitting for revolutionary Marxism.

To demonstrate the first of these effects, let us return to Marx's classical passage found in the pages of the preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*.

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<sup>35</sup> A concept originating with the Italian philosopher Rodolfo Mondolfo (1877-1976), based on Giovanni Gentile's (1875-1944) mistranslation of the phrase “*umwälzende Praxis*” occurring in Engels' 1888 revision of the third of Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*. The phrase is usually rendered as “revolutionary practice” in English (in agreement with Marx's original 1845 wording, *revolutionäre Praxis*) and can be more literally translated as “overturning praxis,” i.e., a praxis that overturns. Mondolfo used the incorrect translation “overturned praxis” to argue for a two-way, “dialectical” relationship between will (theory, critique, subjectivity) and action (practice, objectivity), and considered this interpretation to be so philosophically fertile that even after acknowledging the error, he insisted that it corresponded to the spirit of Marx's text at least as well as the actual wording. The concept became firmly entrenched in Italian Marxism; it was taken up by Gramsci with enthusiasm, and even Bordiga, while criticizing Gramsci, took it for granted as an integral part of Marx's theory, as documented by his report on [The reversal of praxis in Marxist theory](#), presented at the Rome meeting of the Internationalist Communist Party on April 1, 1951.

When we make the entirety of men appear on the scene, instead of just the individual, we carry out not only a quantitative and, it might be said, spatial *integration* from one to many, but a temporal integration as well. The life of the species has no temporal limits comparable to those of the fleeting Person; and in Marxism, Production not only keeps the individual human animal alive, but also constitutes a link in the chain of his Reproduction. The aforementioned baron-philosopher (who, as a person, escaped the determinism of his feudal class) would not have ruled out heritability: every brain *draws* not only upon the sensations of its own life, but also upon those of its progenitors. That is completely scientific, but no less so is the statement – itself quite materialist – that everyone thinks not only with their own brain but with the brains of others as well, even with those of their contemporaries. It is all well and good to say that the brain is a gland that secretes thought, but in this regard we are not *vulgar materialists*, and we are not waiting for someone to discover the thought-hormone; for us, true materialists, there is a collective brain, and the Social Man shall see a development – neglected by ancient generations – of the *Social Brain*. That one thinks with the heads of others, however, is a certain fact, past and present.

*"In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production"*<sup>36</sup>

The text goes on to define as the *foundation* the *relations of production* that constitute the *economic structure* of society.

On this real foundation there "arises a legal and political superstructure [...] to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness"<sup>37</sup>. As in our faithful retread, the *person* did not appear on the scene at all. It is not the socio-economic position of the individual that determines his ideology; this has been said just as frequently as incorrectly. Marx's formula is: "The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life"<sup>38</sup>. What follows is the well-known presentation of the conflict between the productive forces and the forms of production or property relations – that is, the theory of revolutions (of all revolutions). At this stage, the critique goes straight to the point, after making short work of the consciousness of the person and of any given society, that same "consciousness which the revolution has of itself." The text says: "*Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation (and, we add, even less so a period of conformism) by its consciousness*"<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> English translation taken from MECW Vol. 29, p. 263.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. The insertions are Bordiga's.

When a little later on Marx, after having listed the classical sequence of historical modes of production, declares that “[t]he prehistory of human society accordingly closes”<sup>40</sup> with the bourgeois form, since the productive forces have become such as to *resolve* the antagonism between relations and forms of production, that is, to transition to a society without classes, it is clarified that these bourgeois relations, the last to be *antagonistic*, are such “not in the sense of individual antagonism but of an antagonism that emanates from the individuals’ social conditions of existence”<sup>41</sup>.

Thus our reduction to zero of the individual factor in history, in revolutions, and in the communist revolution is scrupulously traditional. So is the elimination of the individual person as the subject of revolutionary action, and even of social antagonism (class struggle).

## Requiem for immediatism

The democratic form of opportunism has a long (and infamous) history reaching back to the Second International; it was buried by Lenin and exhumed by Khrushchev. It says that socialism can be realized by the majority using the parliamentary mechanism. The crass reasoning is a despicable parody of the polemical formula of the *Manifesto*: communism is the movement of the immense majority in the interest of the immense majority. If this distorted formula were true, the proletarian revolution would be the first... to not be a revolution at all, and to resolve without bloodshed the conflict between productive forces and forms of property, the social antagonism intrinsic to the previous form, to the capitalist era! The Marxist denial of this possibility lies in the basic thesis of determinism: the ruling ideology of every epoch is a superstructural mirror of its economico-productive base, which today consists of capitalist property. The rupture in the superstructure will be a result of the rupture in the base; the oppressed class of the workers will move *en masse* in violent revolution, but only after this revolution will they acquire *en masse* the new superstructure: the communist ideology. To *consult* their opinions before the fact, even if it were true that proletarians comprise the majority of voters, would mean making the revolution impossible and capitalism eternal.

Herein lies the cornerstone of total opportunism, such as that of the reformists at the turn of the century – champions of legality turned nasty – or that of the much-vaunted *Marxists-Leninists*, fathered by Stalin and brooded by Khrushchev and other such mother hens.

But we claimed to reduce to an analogous denial of the basic thesis, of the first principle of Marxism also the positions of the *immediatists*. Are these also opportunist? Undoubtedly yes in their substance, a little less perhaps in their form; that is, in the phony “consciousness which they have of themselves.” A

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 264.

type, then, of third-stage syphilis: non-lethal but hereditary. The opposite would be preferable.

The libertarian position is hopelessly individualist. Once the knowledge is acquired that society is *unjust*, the rebel, with his possibly heroic unselfishness, considers himself awakened: the spirit before the body. This is the exact opposite of determinism. As far as others are concerned, he does not want to use violence against them: that would mean accepting the position of Marx and Engels that a revolution is an authoritarian act *par excellence*. Everyone will therefore have to liberate themselves, starting as much with the person as with the superstructure: Marxism turned upside down. (The rest we do not care about: everyone is allowed to deny Marxism... until true Marxism is in power.)

The workerist position, which comprises both the laboralism of the right and the syndicalism of the left, falls under the same analysis. It is not a political party that has to lead the revolutionary struggle, but rather economic organizations uniting all workers (and only workers), they say. But the association of worker with worker (and one that furthermore takes place within the restricted circle of one's trade) does not detract from the fact that the worker lives as a wage earner within the bourgeois relation of production and as such should be predestined for the bourgeois superstructural ideology. To associate the workers strangled by the capitalist relation, and to believe that in so doing the conditions for socialist society have been prepared – that is the colossal error of the workerists. To demand of these proletarian organizations, of their internal democracy, doctrinal and programmatic elaboration; to demand that they take action – in this consists the immediatist illusion. Such a mechanism will never rise above the immediate contact with the bourgeois structure of production, and therefore with the ideology derived therefrom, which must be destroyed rather than denied and which, by following this formula, would be neither denied nor destroyed.

A negation of the immediatism that lies at the root of every fake leftism (attributable to all historical groups except our so-called 'Italian' Left), consists in acknowledging, in accordance with sound Marxism, that just like a member of the oppressed class may well happen to belong to one of the parties of the ruling class, conversely it may well happen that a member of the revolutionary party does not belong to the oppressed class. In a mediated way rather than immediately, even those elements that have no direct interest in the revolution end up contributing to it. To immediatism, this is incomprehensible.

But that is what the *Manifesto*, basing itself on social history, expresses in its description of the revolutionary climax in the following words: "in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour [...] a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future



in its hands [...]”<sup>42</sup> and so on, showing that bourgeois ideologues go over to the proletariat and to the revolution, just like sections of the nobility went over to the enlightenment, to its philosophy, and sometimes to the extremism of the sansculottes.

Here, we find the immediatist coupled with – no, tripled with!<sup>43</sup> – the hypocrite and the demagogue in one and the same person. The opportunist danger, we are told, does not consist in the blindness of immediatism, but rather in this acceptance of non-worker ideologues and leaders! Where is the remedy to be found? We answer without hesitation: in the *political party*, once it has overcome the diseases of opportunism and immediatism and once the decisive criterion is affirmed that the cause of the revolution prevails over every consultative majority.

Recently, we quoted a statement made by Engels at the end of his life, as dark and unselfish as that of Marx: “[W]e can use in our Party individuals from every class of society, but we have no use whatever for any *groups* representing capitalist, middle-bourgeois or middle-peasant *interests*”<sup>44</sup>. If you reduce the party – the depository of the revolution – to a complex of economic associations or enterprise councils, you can boast about its membership being limited strictly to workers as much as you like, but the fact is that you have made it a slave to petty bourgeois and bourgeois interests. The historical examples are innumerable, first among them the English one. We only need to recall Lenin’s most resolute position on this matter, as illustrated in our Russian studies, in theoretical works such as *What is to be done?*, and in the historical revolutionary practice of the Bolsheviks; in the condemnation of every risible “economism” and “enterprise socialism.”

Only a working class capable of association can take the direct revolutionary road. But an immediate *collage*, an inert bond is not enough. There are dialectical and dynamic mediating terms, indispensable and mutually reinforcing: the revolutionary theory of historical determinism, the program of communist society, the party-form of organization; and it is only in these that the subject and the engine, the will and the power of complete revolution find their realization.

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<sup>42</sup> MECW Vol. 6, p. 494.

<sup>43</sup> In the original text, a play on words making use of the French verb *se doubler*.

<sup>44</sup> From the article *The Peasant Question in France and Germany*, written by Engels in November 1894 as a critique of the agrarian program adopted by the French Workers’ Party at its Nantes congress in September of the same year (English translation taken from MECW Vol. 27, p. 492). When Bordiga says that the party recently quoted this text, he is referring to the theoretical appendix *The revolutionary program of communist society eliminates all forms of ownership of land, the instruments of production and the products of labor*, published in [Il Programma Comunista](#) two months earlier.

## Freedom and value?

One of the subjects discussed at the philosophizing Congress excited the Stalinists, who were unable to see that the topic *Man and Nature* was raised with bourgeois aims in mind, and in a conformist manner to which one can apply the following trite binomial: "I" and the "Universe," followed by making two autonomous spheres of these, and worse still, by reducing the Universe to a deformed function of the "I" – and it is certainly not the opportunist or immediatist ex-Marxists who can counterpose to this the correct formulation, that of *Nature and Species*, between which there does not arise a dualism but a monism. This monism places the science of the species within the domain of nature, and it does so using that same scientific methodology – or a unified philosophy, as we can call it until we finally see both the noun and the profession abolished. Only so long as we speak of philosophers will we continue to have discussions about the nobleness or dignity of the elements: but if we wished to accept the use of this language for a moment, we would declare that there is more Beauty, Harmony, and Dignity to be found in extrahuman nature than the history of human nature has hitherto offered.

In a way, this brings us to the second topic of the Congress, also expressed as a binomial: *Freedom and Value*. Here, too, the ex-Marxists have grazed in the pastures of petty bourgeois ideology. For them it would be a matter of an eternal, laborious search that humanity has been tragically launched into, and all the revolutionary battles would have been variations on the same theme: taking a step further toward absolute Freedom, and the Discovery of the true Values of life. The most daring of philosophers have admitted that this race is not yet over, for Man – it is understood that it is always the individual whom they are thinking of when using that word – while no longer a slave or a feudal serf, is nevertheless not free. But this is not so because he is a commodity-producing wage earner, but rather because violence is still used in the wars among States and classes, producing totalitarian power and the suppression of opinions. Hence a vague desire to end "exploitation" and war, phenomena which make it difficult to talk about freedom and values. A similar stale pacifism and tolerantism has also been adopted by the Stalinists to be placed side by side with that *fundamental requirement of Marxism*, humanism! And here we have another disgusting commonplace to join the already swelling ranks of the philistine repertoire.

It must be declared very forcefully that revolutionary Marxism has nothing to do with vague proclamations of humanism, which can be historically defined in different ways – all of which, however, are profoundly alien to us.

Historically, humanists were the first bourgeois who in the fields of art and philosophy reacted against theological domination by rediscovering the real and non-mystical values of the pagan life of Classical times: values which were useful for the bourgeois revolution in the broad sense but which have nothing to do

with proletarian revolution, which finds itself pitted against the atheist as well as mystical bourgeoisie. In more recent times, the oft-abused term humanism has become nothing but a cover for all the deceits which certain sectors of this capitalist world of brigandage have used in this century for their ugly little comedy – the prime cause of opportunist betrayals – of pompously condemning aggression, atrocities, personicide, and genocide.

To these people, Marx gave his classic reply that up to now and in one more stage still to come – and worse still if, as the philistine would have it, our ultra-optimistic theory, according to which we are the last of the class societies, should be mistaken – the inexorable advance of history has passed and will pass right through persons and individuals, and thus through human bodies and “spirits”; and also (it might well be added, even though we have no quotation handy) through whole nations – a fact that the puritan civilization of ultra-humanist America knows a thing or two about!

## **The Marxist position**

The first topic of the Congress that a bunch of oh-so-learned professors held in Venice prompted us at our little meeting in Parma<sup>45</sup> to vividly highlight our anti-individualist thesis, which resolves the old standoff between monists and dualists, between matter and spirit. The second topic, apart from the obvious connections between the two, gives us an opportunity to restate our anti-market thesis. Just as our revolution will be the first and only to decisively break with personalism, so too will it be the first and only to overcome another plague that takes on many forms: that of production for the market.

The category of *value*, now very fashionable, is nothing but a hollow superstructure that corresponds to the economic base of *exchange value*. We are not joining the procession of those who search for new values, nor do we stand at the head of it. When the product of human labor and this labor itself no longer have as their purpose that of being exchanged for another product or for their equivalent in money; when work and production is performed for its own intrinsic joy, going beyond the restrictive aim of consumption – then there will remain no ideological *values* to blather about in literature and at congresses. Just as the category of *freedom*, which has historically always signified the struggle of men against their oppressors, will lose its subjective meaning in a society free of hired work, and thus of antagonisms – and freedom will accordingly no longer have the individual or the oppressed class as its subject, but rather the *Social Man*, who will have no one and nothing to lose it to aside from the limits imposed by natural, physical necessity – so too the category of *value*, emptied of its content in the realm of economy, will disappear as a topic of verbal exercises with only sheer nothingness behind them.

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<sup>45</sup> The interfederal meeting of the Internationalist Communist Party that Bordiga refers to here took place on September 20-21, 1958, and the present article makes up the minutes of its third session.

A few pages further in our *Critique of Political Economy*, we read:

“As useful activity directed to the appropriation of natural factors in one form or another, labour is a natural condition of human existence, a condition of material interchange between man and nature, *quite independent of the form of society. On the other hand, the labour which posits exchange value is a specific social form of labour.*”<sup>46</sup>

The text goes on to give the example of a tailor whose work, in its aspect as concrete labor, produces coats but not exchange value, but which today nevertheless does produce exchange value as abstract generic labor, which is unique *to a specific social framework* (artisanal or capitalist market production) “that was not sewn with the tailor’s needle.”

In ancient times, weavers produced coats without producing the exchange value of coats, adds Marx. And we confidently add: in communist society, too, coats will be produced, just like everything else, without producing exchange values. Socialism – always in a dialogue with Stalin!<sup>47</sup> – is the economy without exchange values, both in the lower phase and in the higher.

If Marxists, then, eliminate value from the economic structure of the base in their theory, what *values* will they have left to pursue in the superstructure? When there appears an economic value, then, by the law of exchange, for another party it must have necessarily disappeared. Where there is value, there is subjugation. That same “abolition of economic exploitation” is a formula that we have already criticized (see above) for being inadequate and historically incomplete, and we say more precisely that it will be a question of abolishing every form of exchange value and every form of value production by labor. If no values are being produced by labor, what values should there remain in the sphere of “philosophical” research, which we gladly leave to the philistines? In conclusion, the binomial *freedom and value* only resonates with some meaning within a society like the present one where the ripping off of man by man is not an isolated, more or less criminal incident, but rather the very basis of its structure of production and consumption, and thus of its thought.

Therefore, the search for freedom and value does not interest revolutionary Marxism, which in the doctrine of its party posits the struggle of the proletariat in a way completely different from any participation in the universal competition for a new formula to be added to that deceptive sequence which antagonistic societies have offered to men throughout the vicissitudes of their prehistory. This sequence ends with the present-day bourgeois era, which leaves us with just one more step to climb, but which is the most adversarial and hostile of all, and the most deserving of totalitarian destruction as well as the

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<sup>46</sup> MECW Vol. 29, p. 278.

<sup>47</sup> A reference to Bordiga’s [earlier text of a similar title](#), published in *Il Programma Comunista* No. 1 (October 10, 1952), No. 2 (October 24, 1952), No. 3 (November 6, 1952), and No. 4 (November 20, 1952).

ruthless negation of all the lie-packed *values* to which it so tortuously aspires in its official masquerades while degenerating to the extreme.

## Person and Party

The vulgar trap which our adversaries lay before the formidable Marxist construction of the theory of the revolutionary party consists in this: after our critique has overcome the problem of the relationship between the individual and society, they tendentiously put forward that of the relationship between the person and the party – or in other words, the old subject of the leader and hierarchies. This subject concerns every form of organization and not just the political party, to the extent that every type of organization has its notorious “apparatus.” Therefore, we have shown on numerous occasions (among others, at the Pentecost meeting<sup>48</sup>) that if there are dangers, they can only be brought under control and overcome within the party-form – in opposition to all others, whose history is full of degenerative phenomena that have accompanied the successive waves of opportunism. The classic “boss rule” of the executives, commanding lavish salaries and rendered uncriticizable by a stupid reverential fear against which we fought tooth and nail in Lenin’s times, was the connective tissue of the Second International, and spread to the union and electoral forms, stifling the vitality of the organic centers of the political movement and subjugating them to itself. Herein lies the crux of Lenin’s destructive critique of opportunism – in all countries.

When responding to this insinuation on the part of the detractors of Marxism, it should not be forgotten that we are not defending the “party” *in general*, whatever historical party among many, but rather that special and unique form which is the revolutionary party: that revolutionary party which is the first and only one to embody the historical task of the modern proletarian class, and makes that task not just an end in itself, but a means to the realization of the communist program. Socialism, said Engels in his first catechetical draft of the *Manifesto*<sup>49</sup>, is the doctrine of the conditions of the liberation of the proletariat. No less common is it to quote the sentence that the emancipation of the workers must be the act of the workers themselves. These are dialectical positions, meant to confront the claim that the modern proletariat has already been emancipated by bourgeois liberalism in the latter’s final stage,

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<sup>48</sup> The internationalist meeting that Bordiga is referring to was held in Paris on June 8-9, 1957. The minutes were published in *Il Programma Comunista* No. 13 (July 3, 1957), No. 14 (July 18, 1957), and No. 15 (August 2, 1957) under the title *I fondamenti del comunismo rivoluzionario marxista nella dottrina e nella storia della lotta proletaria internazionale* [The fundamentals of Marxist revolutionary communism in the doctrine and history of the international proletarian struggle] and are available online in both [Italian](#) and [English](#).

<sup>49</sup> A reference to *The Principles of Communism*, written by Engels in October and November 1847. In his letter to Marx of November 24, 1847, Engels, referring to this work, wrote: “I think we would do best to abandon the catechetical form and call the thing Communist *Manifesto*.”

and the even worse and now pervasive claim that it can be emancipated by the petty bourgeois mass of “the people” – the claim of populism.

And another maxim, this time Lenin’s, that the revolution has to serve the proletariat instead of the proletariat having to serve the revolution, must be understood dialectically (each of our theses should be used only after clarifying the antithesis that gave rise to it) in the sense that the working class is not a force at the service of *any* revolution *whatever* (at the time, it referred to the revolution that created the German Weimar Republic) but that for us, the revolutionary struggle has to be carried out for the proletariat’s own ends, namely for the communist program.

The objection that the leaders *will ruin everything* is a centuries-old resort of the anti-socialist polemic of the gilded bellies<sup>50</sup>, who say to the workers: you want to unite so as to defend yourselves? Very well, but you will need someone to organize you, and you will have to offer them the same sacrifices that you claim to now be making for us, the bosses. The highly modern timidity displayed by the embittered spinsters of the revolution in the face of the brave, fair, and disinterested claim of the dictatorship of the communist party to represent the only real form of the dictatorship of the proletariat is nothing but yet another iteration of this traditional reactionary objection.

The only form that will avoid degeneration into *boss rule* is the one in which the open proclamation by the party of exercising total control over the revolutionary struggle will not be replaced by the hypocritical offer to democratically consult the masses, more or less “popular,” and to serve their will thus expressed, whatever it might be. First of all, in practical experience, the formula of *servicing* the proletariat has historically been used by *all* traitors to the revolution, sell-outs as well as demagogues; besides, it echoes with a filthy bourgeois mentality. *Service* (one profits most who *serves* best) is the slogan of the international *Rotary Club*, that is, of the world organization of plunderers of surplus value interested in making a show of caring about the customary common good.

The long and bloody history of the travails of the workers’ class party will end when the party has overcome the shameful phase of stupidly courting the proletarians, whom it wants to turn into voters or dues-paying union members, but whom it does not revolutionarily free from the chains of their servitude, chains that are less visible and against which all heroism is powerless – the chains that they carry *within* themselves.

We will therefore not repeat the history of the past errors and of the dangers inherent in *non-party* forms. Is it possible, for example, to find a remedy for the problems of bossy leaders, of the much-feared *cliques* and *gangs* usurping power, of palace coups, and of other such novel-like sinister shadows in

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<sup>50</sup> Big capitalists; from the title of Émile Fabre’s comedy dealing with the same subject.

decentralization, in the devolution of power from the State to local communes, as some Chinese ideologues seem to have deluded themselves into thinking? It is enough to respond to this baby talk with an episode that has been recounted to generations of youngsters. After passing through a poor Alpine village, Julius Caesar, the dictator *par excellence* (in comparison with whom the modern ones are nothing but piss-poor losers), manfully exclaimed: I had rather be the first man in this village than the second man in Rome!

If the person poses a danger – while in actuality, the person is nothing but a thousand-year old daydream of men wandering in the shadows, which cuts them off from their species history – the means to combat it is only to be found in the universal qualitative unitariness of the party, in which there is effected revolutionary concentration beyond the limits of one's locality, nationality, category of work, beyond the limits even of the enterprise, that life sentence of wage earners; in which there lives-*in-waiting* [*vive anticipata*] the future society without classes and without exchange.

## **The “charismatic” party**

The typical bourgeois as well as some left-wingers gone bad see instead another remedy for the recent forms of bourgeois degeneration; for the oligarchies, praetorian cliques, criminal gangs, packs of power-hungry vampires, and other cartoon-like figures which, thanks to the gullibility of idiots, fill the pages of the press and form the subject of so much contemporary chatter. The remedy: a “guarantee” borrowed no less idiotically from the arsenals of the bourgeoisie, “democracy” transported from the realm of constitutional universality to the more restricted terrain – where it represents an even more hollow illusion – of the class and of the party.

Within well-defined historical limits, the elective and consultative mechanism has a certain effective role to play, to the extent that it can never escape from the constitutional and market-imposed bourgeois confines, but it can serve to mitigate – for clearly counterrevolutionary purposes – some of the worst blunders of mismanagement and abuse of power, which benefit individual members of the ruling class but not the cause of self-preservation of the ruling class as a whole. But even within these specific confines, we would like to observe, the guarantee that abuse of authority will be avoided or suppressed does not lie in the autonomy of the peripheries or of trades but rather in the extension of the scope of organization and power, which, as it rises and extends further and further, applies higher authorities and corrective powers to lower and limited ones.

The internal organization of the party was (and will be) able to make use of a similar system for purely mechanical purposes, a system which undoubtedly has a hierarchical character, but this internal organization does not, by virtue of its inner workings, confer any “safeguard” against historical crises whose causes

lie elsewhere. Therefore, our Left has been saying for decades that not even the party is infallible at any given time, and that its structure is dialectically affected by its own outward-facing actions; that it suffers crises and ailments, and when it deviates from the invariant classical doctrine or muddies its internal organization and strategic operation, it pays the price with curative scissions and long historical periods of waiting: hence our condemnation of blocs, fronts, amalgamations, networks embedded in other parties and so on. This is not the place to demonstrate how all lapses into opportunism are historically linked to episodes of this nature; that will be shown in greater detail in a "history" of the struggles of the Left currently in preparation<sup>51</sup>.

This difficult problem of contemporary life is only comprehended in a banal way by bourgeois ideologues, who treat developments in the structure of all modern parties in all countries in the same metaphysical way, completely generally, regardless of their program, or as we would more accurately put it, their class base.

In the liberal revolution, the pure and healthy form of the party would play by the rules of internal democracy and the free association of members resulting from their cherished *opinions*, their *beliefs*. This mechanism is now presented as a predominance of "culture" over "politics." It did not rule out the possibility that the general party should be hierarchically organized, but it defended this hierarchy with the following ingenuous schema: the leader would be the wisest and most learned person of all, and in the 19th century, that sweet heyday of the liberal bourgeoisie, the political leadership would have been exercised by teachers over pupils; authority within the parties would therefore have had intellectual content to it. This political apparatus would have even provided a corrective to the burdensome administrative bureaucracy!

It is obvious, however, that democracy was the panacea, and that in these party-schools the pupils elected their own teachers. Over the last century, however, such illusions were dispelled, because there arose "mass parties" in which the base lost its democratic rights, while the leaders somehow fell from the sky and were mysteriously legitimized after the fact. The whole lesson that we can derive from this historical recapitulation consists in saying that the herd follows the leader and the small entourage that backs him up because they see in him certain "charisma," that is to say divine-like grace, which is possessed by him alone and which he can confer on others if he so wishes. Culture ended up screwed; in 20th century society, politics would trample "culture" underfoot. The Leader does not become who he is because he is the wisest man of all; rather,

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<sup>51</sup> Only the first volume of the intended series was completed before Bordiga's death in 1970: [\*Storia della Sinistra comunista Vol. I\*](#), published in 1964 and dealing with the period of 1912-1919. Four more volumes have since been published by Edizioni *Il Programma Comunista* (the last one in 2017), still only covering events up to the fascist offensive against the Italian party in the early months of 1923.



his word becomes law because he is the Leader. Even if he is a fool, he shall be the *Best*<sup>52</sup>.

## Force or reason

We famously criticized the conception of the mass party and the manner of leadership of communist parties that was introduced in the Third International under the malformed name of Bolshevization, but we have never wanted to see this criticism of ours confused with a criticism conducted from the standpoint of apologetics for general democracy, which proposes an ideal model to be adopted by parties of all stripes, and which leads to the exact same place where the Stalinists, as we were easily able to predict, ended up as well: a dull social pacifism.

Thus we are dealing with two very different questions: that of the nature of the communist party, and that of the evolution of the party-form during the bourgeois age, or the relationship between politics and culture.

This present-day formula of turning such a relation on its head in favor of the political term and at the expense of the cultural one we find attributed in Perticone's<sup>53</sup> articles to the renowned German sociologist Max Weber, who at the time of the Great War still theorized the "demo-cultural" party, only for it to be later swept away in the Hitlerist-Stalinist disillusion. It is, it would appear, always the former semi-Marxists who get in the way of good intentions...

We are interested in establishing, before we go on to say anything about the most recent totalitarian forms and before we explain (and lament) the "charismatic" conception, that Marxism has never had anything in common with those theories "of parties" in which the dynamic of these parties is determined by the mass equilibrium of the opinions of their adherents. In our conception of the revolutionary party, said party has its doctrine that all of its members accept and share, but that does not give them the ability to change it at every turn with numerical consultations, because the doctrine is born collective but unitary – due to the force of historical events rather than any association of individual cells. But then, our conception is that of *a single* party.

As for other parties, we cannot but laugh at the myth of a golden age, democratic and of a scholastic or kindergarten-like character. In the period of bourgeois revolution, these other parties, too, rested on dictatorship and terror; they called themselves enlightened, but this self-deception was destroyed not even by Marx, but already by Babeuf, when he theorized that force was more

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<sup>52</sup> An allusion to Palmiro Togliatti (1893-1964), the long-time leader of the Stalinist Italian Communist Party, whose nickname was "*Il Migliore*" ("The Best").

<sup>53</sup> Giacomo Perticone (1892-1979), an Italian philosopher specializing in the history of political parties and movements. He edited the proceedings of the above-mentioned session on "Freedom and Value" of the 12th International Congress of Philosophy (published in 1960).

powerful than reason in the social struggle. Thus the rational party envisioned by Weber has no proletarian-socialist origin. We are always ready; the school of the proletarians will be the victorious revolution, which, for the time being, asks for their armed hands but cannot ask for their diploma in politics; even those who become members of the party are not asked to take a "cultural exam" first. Ever since the struggles within the Second International, the Left has mocked the idea of a "culturalist" party<sup>54</sup>.

Ever since their inception, the parties of the bourgeoisie have expressed and defended its class interests instead of crystallizing its professed opinions: the many middle-bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties have established mechanisms for transforming the demands of big capital into political superstitions<sup>55</sup> of the middle classes and petty bourgeoisie. Those which mainly recruited their adherents from the ranks of "intellectuals" were the ones that perceived history and society less clearly, and ended up supplying naïve heroes for the conquests and endeavors of European capitalism by allowing its unsavory appetites to be turned into high ideals. In the entire history of the Italian Risorgimento<sup>56</sup>, we find only one great exception to this mystified rationality and "culturalist" political struggle: in the person of Carlo Pisacane, the *Marxist* who never got a chance to read Marx, but who nevertheless dedicated his life to the national cause, killed by a mob of illiterate and class-unconscious peasant rabble before the police was able to do so.

## **The ridiculous epoch of the big<sup>57</sup>**

As for the contrast made by Perticone between the phase of voluntary-democratic parties and those which are characterized by blind obedience to a central driving force, which the base identifies with particular names or worse yet, with a single Name – and here we do not mourn *à la* Weber the disappearance of the former type, and see no possibility of its future reissue in the form of a new liberal pluralist merry-go-round (which never really had any importance in the past) – it can only be understood in the context of a critique of the contemporary degeneration of bourgeois society, and insofar as this critique is sufficiently developed as to not metaphysically take the opposite direction, in which one would arrive, for example, at the party of Stalin, or at those of Hitler, Mussolini, or today, we imagine, of de Gaulle.

What is characteristic of these monstrous organizations – whose real cause is the passivity of the masses in a decomposing society, which is due, not

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. Bordiga as quoted in *Avanguardia*, October 20, 1912: "The need for study should be proclaimed in a congress of school-teachers, not socialists."

<sup>55</sup> A reference to *The Holy Family*: "Only *political superstition* still imagines today that civil life must be held together by the state, whereas in reality, on the contrary, the state is held together by civil life." (MECW Vol. 4, p. 121)

<sup>56</sup> Literally "resurgence"; the bourgeois revolutionary struggle for Italian unification, starting in the 1830s and ending in 1871.

<sup>57</sup> In English in the original text.

to any deficit of "culture" or lack of "teachers," but rather to the lack of revolutionary physical force, whose causes are well-known [but] complex and remote – is the strange paradox that the very same modern "charismatic" system which, wherever it is found, under all skies and in all climes, make the leader into an idol (and what a fragile and fleeting one!), defends itself from all sides precisely by exalting the stupid democratic panacea, and boasts of holding plebiscites to consult the so-called "consciences" of its membership.

Totalitarian states like Germany, Italy, and Japan were swept away by the war, and with them their governmental parties. Among the winners, the Western Allies are permanent parliamentary democracies, and it is to this juridical form that they have been increasingly trying to convert the countries of the world on which exert influence. Russia and her satellite States have internally preserved the one-party system and have no parties competing for power, but the policies which the *nominally* communist parties carry out abroad are all based on open promotion of electoral democracy, which they demand of local governments. In the dispute between the two blocs of States and parties, the demand for democracy is always at the forefront, and the most common accusation is that of offenses against the electoral manifestation of the will of the people. Either contender uses the accusation that the other perpetrates this infamy as a self-evident truth.

Despite this profusion of invocations of popular sovereignty on the broadest possible basis, every time these world powers meet, they observe a common rule while contradicting each other: namely, that the millions of people whose interests (we refuse to say: "whose opinions") are at stake are but distant spectators to a gathering of four or five personages firmly perched at the top, representing the four or five governments of the most monstrous States on the world, and everything in this democratic and popular world is decided by these five "biggest" [*cinque al massimo "big"*]; that is, by five specimens of the two billion members of the human species, all of them "demo-sovereign"; by the five highest figures to whom we dedicate the apostrophe<sup>58</sup> of a forgotten poet, ironically cited as the most beautiful hendecasyllable<sup>59</sup> of Italian literature: "O big *piramidai, che fai tu lì?*" (O big man atop the pyramid, what are you doing there?)

Could democracy possibly get more decadent and disgustingly shameless than this?

Against this, what chance does rational sociology stand, the sociology of the opinions of the *élites*, of the choices made by cultivated men, who according to Weber's fantasies should lead the world's political life, every so often

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<sup>58</sup> A literary device consisting of a solemn exclamation addressed to someone who is absent or cannot respond.

<sup>59</sup> A line of verse consisting of eleven syllables.

exchanging power among themselves, always with elegant “fair play” and tolerant chivalry?

The Marxist left, that persistent disbeliever in the monstrous mega-party [*partitone*] and in the adulation of the masses, used to be accused of holding a theory of intellectual *élites*. But we are just as much against democracy in society, in the class, and in the party, where we call for organic centrality, as we are against any role for executive *élites*, nasty substitutes for the Leader-person, a collective puppet offered as a substitute for an individual one, which at given moments actually represents a step backwards. The difference in substance consists in the fact that our doctrine does not prescribe a whole constellation of parties, but the role of a single party, whose dialogue with all the others is neither intellectual nor cultural, and never again electoral and parliamentary, but rather entrusted to class violence, to the material force that has as its aim the subjugation and destruction of all other parties.

The party, which we are sure to see resurrected in a bright future, will be composed of a spirited minority of proletarians and anonymous revolutionaries who, like the organs of the same living being, may perform different functions, but who will all – whether at the center or at the base – be bound by an inflexible rule that will override everything else: the rule of deferring to the theory, of continuity and rigor in organization, of a precise method for strategic action. The acceptable range of possibilities for such action will be drawn – and will in the same manner become binding for all – from the terrible historical lesson of the devastation inflicted by opportunism.

In such a party – one that is finally impersonal – no one will be able to abuse power, pertaining to its inimitable characteristic that has distinguished it in an uninterrupted thread stretching back to 1848.

That characteristic is the absence of any hesitation on the part of the party and its members to affirm that their sole purpose is the conquest of political power and its centralized exercise, without ever concealing this purpose even for a moment and until all the parties of Capital and its petty bourgeois lackeys have been exterminated.