

Theses of Milan: Supplementary Theses on the Historical Task, the Action and the Structure of the World Communist Party

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1. The Theses of Naples vindicate the continuity of the positions which, since more than half a century ago, are the Communist Left's heritage. Both their understanding and their natural and spontaneous application will never come from consultations of codes' articles or regulations; and they won't even be secured – according to the praxis we had as a goal and which we finally adopted – by numerical referendums of assemblies, or, even worse, by colleges or judging courts dissipating all doubts of less enlightened individuals. The work we are carrying on, in order to achieve such difficult aims, cannot be successful if we don't utilize the abundant historical material arising out of the lively experience, made by the revolutionary movement in long historical cycles; which we actually prepared and made known, through an assiduous, common work, before and after the theses' publication.

2. The existing small movement perfectly realizes that the dreary historical phase it has traversed makes it very difficult, at such a great historical distance, to utilize the experiences of the great struggles of the past, and not just those of resounding victories but also those arising from bloody defeats and inglorious retreats. The forging of the revolutionary programme, shaped by the correct and un-deformed outlook of our current, isn't confined to doctrinal rigour and deep historical criticism; it also needs, as its vital life-blood, to connect with the rebellious masses at those times when, pushed to the limits, they are forced to fight. Such a dialectical connection is particularly unlikely today, with the thrust of masses dampened and assuaged, due both to the flacidity of senile capitalism's crisis, and the increasing ignominy of the opportunist currents. Even accepting the party's restricted dimensions, we must realize that we are preparing the true party, sound and efficient at the same time, for the momentous period in which the infamies of the contemporary social fabric will compel the insurgent masses to return to the vanguard of history; a resurgence that could once again fail if there is no party; a party that is compact and powerful, rather than inflated in numbers, the indispensable organ of the revolution.

Painful as the contradictions of this period are, they can be overcome by drawing the dialectical lessons from the bitter disappointments of times past, and by courageously signalling the dangers that the Left warned about, and

denounced as they appeared, along with all the insidious forms in which the ominous opportunist infection reveals itself time and time again.

3. With this objective we will further develop our work of critical presentation of the past battles of the revolutionary and Marxist Left and their ongoing responses to the historical waves of deviation and disorientation which have blocked the path of proletarian revolution for more than a century. By referring to the phases in which the conditions for a really bitter class struggle were present, but in which the factor of revolutionary theory and strategy was lacking, and above all by referring to the historic events which nullified the Third International (just when it seemed that the crucial tipping point had finally been reached) and the critical positions that the Left assumed in order to ward off the towering danger, and the disaster which unfortunately followed, we will be able to consecrate lessons that are not, nor claim to be, recipes for success, but rather serve as stern admonitions to help us protect ourselves against those dangers and weaknesses, and the pitfalls and traps they gave rise to, from a time when history often caused the downfall of forces which seemed devoted to the cause of the revolutionary advance.

4. The brief, exemplified points that follow are not to be seen as directly referring to errors or difficulties that may menace the present day work; they only want to be another contribution to the handing over of past generations' experience, built up in a period when already there existed a very good restoration of the right doctrine (proletarian dictatorship in Russia; work of Lenin and of his followers in the theoretical field; foundation of the Third International in the practical field) and the revolutionary battle of communist parties, with a wide participation of the masses, was in the whole world like in Italy in its full course. Those results play today with a strong "phase shift" in the historical and chronological sense, but their correct utilization still remains a vital condition, both today and in the certain and more fertile tomorrow.

5. A fundamental feature of the phenomenon that Lenin named, branding it with a red-hot iron, with a term that is also in Marx and Engels, opportunism, is a preference for a shorter, more comfortable and less arduous way, to the longer, uncomfortable one fraught with difficulties; on which alone the matching of the assertion of our principles and programmes, i.e. of our supreme purposes, with the development of the immediate and direct practical action, in the real current situation, may take place. Lenin was right when he said that the tactical proposal of renouncing from that moment (end of the first war) electoral and parliamentary action, should not be supported by the argument that communist and revolutionary action in parliament was tremendously difficult, as much more difficult were both armed insurrection and the following long-lasting control of the complex economic transformation of the social world, violently torn away

from capitalism. We maintained being all too evident that the preference for using the democratic method method derived from the tendency to choose the comfortable rites of legalitarian action, rather than the tragic harshness of illegal action; and that such a praxis would not have failed in leading the whole movement back into the fatal social-democratic error, of which by heroic efforts we had just come out. We knew like Lenin that opportunism is not of a moral or ethical nature, but instead indicates the prevailing among workers (as Marx and Engels noticed in 19th century England) of positions proper to petty-bourgeois middle strata, and more or less consciously inspired by the mother-ideas, i.e. social interests, of the ruling class. Lenin's powerful and generous position on parliamentary action, in order to support the violent destruction of the bourgeois system, and of the democratic framework itself, by substituting to it the class dictatorship, instead gave rise, under our very eyes, to the subjection of proletarian MPs to the worst influences of petty-bourgeois weaknesses, resulting in repudiation of communism and even in venal betrayal, in the service of the enemy.

Such an historical examination, carried on in the space of an immense historical scale (though it may seem that such a broad generalization is not contained in Lenin's teaching, as he was like ourselves a pupil of history), warns the party to avoid any decision or choice, when suggested by the will to obtain good results with less work or sacrifice. Such a feeling may seem innocent, but it well represents the slack nature of the petty-bourgeoisie, and obeys the fundamental capitalist norm of obtaining maximum profits with the slightest cost.

6. Another constant and recurring aspect of the opportunist phenomenon as it rose within the Second International and as it triumphs today after the even worse ruin of the Third, is that of showing at the same time, both the worst deviation from party principles, and a pretended admiration for the classical texts, for the words and work of big masters and chiefs. A constant character of petty-bourgeois hypocrisy is the servile praise of the power of the victorious leader, of the greatness of famous authors' texts, of the eloquent speaker's fluency; while in practice the most despicable and contradictory degenerations are displayed. A body of theses is therefore worthless, if those who welcome it with a literary-type enthusiasm are not able afterwards, in practical action, to understand its spirit and to respect it; and try to disguise their deviation from it, through an emphasized but platonic adherence to the theoretical text.

7. Another lesson we can draw from events in the life of the Third International (in our writings these are repeatedly recalled in contemporary denunciations by the Left), is that of the vanity of "ideological terror", a horrible method in which it was attempted to substitute the natural process of diffusing our doctrine's via contact with harsh reality in a social setting, with forced

indoctrination of recalcitrant and confused elements, either for reasons more powerful than party and men or due to a faulty evolution of the party itself, by humiliating them and mortifying them in public congresses open even to the enemy, even if they had been leaders and exponents of party action during important political and historical episodes. It became customary to compel such members (mostly with the threat of demotion to less important positions in the organization's apparatus) to publicly confess their errors, thus imitating the fideistic and pietistic methods of penance and mea culpa. By such totally philistine means as these, smacking of bourgeois morality, not a single party member ever improved, nor was a cure found for the party's impending decadence.

Within the revolutionary party, as it moves inexorably towards victory, obeying orders is spontaneous and complete but not blind or compulsory. In fact, centralised discipline, as illustrated in our theses and associated supporting documentation, is equivalent to a perfect harmony of the duties and actions of the rank-and-file with those of the centre, and the bureaucratic practices of an anti-Marxist voluntarism are no substitute for this.

The importance of this lesson in the correct outlook of organic centralism, is pointed out by the tremendous memory of the confessions, in which great revolutionary leaders were compelled, before being killed in Stalin's purges; and of the useless "self-criticisms" to which they were forced by the blackmail of being expelled by the party and dishonoured as sold to the enemy; such infamies and absurdities never being repaired by the not less sanctimonious and bourgeois method of "rehabilitations". The growing abuse of such methods just marks the disastrous triumphal path of the latest wave of opportunism.

8. Due to the requirements of its own organic action, and to ensure a collective function that goes beyond and leaves behind all personalism and individualism, the party must distribute its members among the various functions and activities that constitute its life. The rotation of comrades in such functions is a natural fact, which cannot be regulated by rules analogous to those concerning the careers within bourgeois bureaucracies. In the party there are no competitive examinations in which its members compete for ever more prestigious positions and a higher public profile; rather we aim to achieve our goals organically. This is nothing to do with aping the bourgeois division of labour, but rather a case of the complex and articulated party organ naturally adapting itself to its function.

We know well that historical dialectics leads all fighting organisms to improve their offensive means, by utilizing the enemy's techniques. In the phase of armed struggle, communists will therefore have a military organization, with precise hierarchical schemes, which will assure the best result to the common action. Such a truth will not be uselessly aped in every party's activity, with

reference also to the non-military ones. The transmission of directions must be unambiguous, but this lesson of the bourgeois bureaucracy cannot make us forget how it can be corrupted and degenerated, even when adopted within workers' organisms. The party's organicity does not at all require that every comrade must see in another comrade, specifically appointed to pass on instructions coming from above, the personification of the party form. Such a transmission among the molecules composing the party has always at the same time a double direction; and the dynamics of each single unit is integrated in the historical dynamics of the whole. Abuse of organizational formalisms without a vital reason has been and will always be a defect and a suspicious and stupid danger.

9. Capitalism, the present historical form of production, with its myth of private property as a right of men, that mystifies and disguises the monopoly of a minority-class, needed to mark the knots of its structures and the stages of its evolution – and today's involution – with big names of growing notoriety. In the long epoch of the bourgeoisie, the inauspicious history of which lies heavy like a yoke on our shoulders of rebels, at the beginning the most valiant and strongest man used to win great fame and to aspire to the maximum powers; today, in this predominant petty-bourgeois philistinism, those who become important are perhaps the most cowardly and weak ones, thanks to the dirty publicity method.

Amongst the many tasks within the party's difficult brief is its current effort to free itself, once and for all, from the treacherous impulse that seems to emanate from well-known people, and from the despicable function of manufacturing, in order to attain its aims and victories, a stupid fame and publicity through other big names. The party in every one of its various twists and turns must never waver in its decision to fight courageously and decisively for such an outcome, considering it to be the true anticipation of the society of the future.