

The Fundamentals of Revolutionary Communism

International Communist Party

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Foreword (2004)

The following text is the written account of a party general meeting held in 1957.

The negative historical phase which prompted the writing of the *Fundamentals* is still very much with us today, and the text expresses the hard, tiring work of doctrinarian clarification. As Lenin taught, and as the Left has confirmed, this is a never-ending task for a revolutionary party even in the heat of the armed insurrection. It should be read in a spirit of extreme patience and humility (not typical attributes of the rather impatient and conceited petty bourgeoisie) because it represents a powerful synthesis of crucial, unforgettable proletarian struggles, carried out in a programmatic and theoretical vein. The main point the worker needs to understand is what we unapologetically see as the *fundamental Fundamental*, which we sum up as follows: “The petty bourgeoisie becomes not only *as* reactionary as the upper bourgeoisie, but *even more* so. Any steps taken to establish links with it are tantamount to opportunism, destruction of the revolutionary forces, and solidarity with capitalist preservation. This is valid today for the entire western world”, and a further step is made towards the en-

emy, we could add today, each time the programme and its doctrinal positions are distorted and adulterated.

On this foundation stone, and having demonstrated that the enemies of revolution may be classified respectively as “deniers” (outspoken anti-communists), “falsifiers” (social democrats, anarchists, etc.) and “modernizers” (present day left-wingers), the text deploys several arguments to show that the worst of these are to be found amongst the latter two groups, with the third group the worst of all. By referring to the well-aimed slaps which Marx gave Proudhon, Bakunin, Stirner, etc., over a century ago, the text exposes the positions of the present-day “falsifiers”, and those of the sixties and seventies, decades before they appeared; showing that the “new” elucubrations of these people aren’t that new after all. And since 1957, these plague-ridden “falsifiers”, dosed up with the various remedies prescribed by the petty-bourgeois alchemists, have made further inroads by spreading their contagion into various sectors of the proletariat and even into the party. The distinguishing characteristic of every “modernizer” is the alleged discovery of a “revolutionary” side to the petty bourgeoisie. Depending on which type of “modernizing” swindler we’re talking about, this “side” might be an ill-defined “people”, or “revolutionary students”, or “workers’ autonomy”, and so on and so forth. Consequently they en-

visage pathetic “fronts” and imaginary “revolutionary camps” into which are crammed a motley array of anarchists, leftists, extra-parliamentarians, internationalist communists and anyone else who is around.

Eleven years before, in 1946, the same issue had been confronted in our text *Tracciato d'impostazione (Fundamentals for a Marxist Orientation)*: “The revolutionary communist movement of this violent epoch should be characterized not only by the theoretical demolition of all conformity with, and reformism of, the contemporary world, but also by the practical, tactical position according to which *there is no further we can go* with any movement, whether conformist or reformist, not even in limited sectors or periods of time.”

The battle cry of revolutionary communism, which we need to shout loud and in advance, which we are forced to repeat a thousand times to break the opportunist spell and to combat their divisive influence, is this: “THE PARTY WIELDS THE STATE WEAPON. WITHOUT THE PARTY, INDISPENSABLE ORGAN OF THE WORKING CLASS, THE CLASS HAS NO LIFE, AND NO STRENGTH TO FIGHT”. This central tenet of revolutionary communism is dialectically linked to another one; that “if the alternative between world crisis and war on the one hand, and international communist revolution on the other, is simply a question of the revolutionary strength of the class, THE QUESTION OF STRENGTH DEPENDS PRIMARILY ON THE RESTORATION AND DEFENCE OF REVOLUTIONARY THEORY, AND ON A COMMUNIST PARTY WITHOUT FRONTIERS”. These are—you scoundrels!—two sides of the same issue, not two “stages”! That is to say, in Lenin’s words, that “without revolutionary theory there is no revolutionary action”. But theory is not conquered once and for all, it has to be studied, digested, and crystallized in the militant party, and even then it cannot be taken for granted. Never!

Nothing new under the sun then. Just the ongoing and continuous work of presenting new generations of militants (and in the future, the armed class) with the cornerstones of our theory. And as each day goes by, the petty events of today’s capitalist world only serve to confirm the scientific validity of Marxism, demonstrating its ability to explain the most intimate mechanisms regulating not only the past and present of this inhumane mode of production, but its future as well.

Although written almost half a century ago, the *Fundamentals* was an excellent response to this traditional need of our movement, and it still it retains both its power and its scientific rigor.

Introduction

We need to begin, first of all, by explaining that the aim of our present exposition is not to systematically examine every economic, historical and political aspect of the communist scheme and its programme, nor to provide an exhaustive treatment of what we might call the “connective tissue” which binds all these different aspects of communism together, by which we mean our original and completely distinctive way of resolving the questions of the relationship between theory and action, economy and ideology, determining causality and the dynamics of human society; that is, the method which Marxism, and Marxism alone, has used since it first appeared in the first half of the nineteenth century, and which, for brevity’s sake, may be referred to as the philosophical aspect of Marxism, or dialectical materialism.

Moreover, if we tried to systematize these concepts in order to explain our particular view of the function of the individual in society, of the relation of both individual and society to the State, and the significance our doctrine attributes to class, we would be laying ourselves open to the usual accusation of abstractionism; we would thus risk being misunderstood, and appear as though we had forgotten a key element of our doctrine; namely, that the formulas needed to unravel these questions are not fixed for all time, but are variable within a succession of great historical periods, which for us are equivalent to different social forms and modes of production.

Therefore, though asserting the consistency with which Marxism has responded to events in different historical situations, our “re-proposition” will be closely linked to the wretched, world-encompassing, phase which has been affecting the revolutionary movement against capitalism for the last few decades—and will certainly affect it for many decades to come. Our aim will be to set the cornerstones of our science back in their correct position, realign the ones which our enemies are most keen to undermine, and take action to compensate against their deforming tendencies.

In order to do that, we will focus on the one genuinely revolutionary doctrine's three main groups of critics, paying particular attention to the criticism which most stubbornly claims to be drawing on the same principles and movements as ourselves.

The reader might recall that a similar theme was developed during our 1952 meeting in Milan ("Ivarianza storica del marxismo nel corso rivoluzionario", in *Programma Comunista*, nos. 1-5, 1953, and reproduced in nos. 5-6, 1969). The first part of the report lay claim to the historical invariance of Marxism which, it was maintained, is not a doctrine still in the process of formation, but rather one completed in the historical epoch appropriate to it, that is, the period which witnessed the birth of the modern proletariat. It is a touchstone of our historical vision that this class will go through the whole arc of the rise and fall of capitalism using the same unaltered theoretical armoury. The second part of the report—"The False Expedient of Activism"—developed a critique of the perennial illusion of "voluntarism", portraying it as an extremely dangerous and degenerate form of Marxism which continues to be exploited whenever there's an outbreak of the opportunist disease.

Survey of the Opposition

In the first part of that report, we divided our position's enemies into three camps: those who deny the validity of Marxism, those who falsify it, and those who claim to be bringing it up to date.

Today, the first group is represented nowadays by the open defenders and apologists of capitalism, who portray it as the ultimate form of human "civilization". We won't be paying too much attention to them; they have already received a *knockout blow* from Karl Marx and this frees us to apply the same knockout blows to the other two groups (We put here in parentheses here, once and for all, that our declared "re-proposition" does not aspire so much to a definitive polemical victory, but aims, within the limits of this summary, to clearly define our positions and our characteristic features, and to show how they haven't changed at all in over 100 years).

The defeat of Marx's *deniers*, today only doctrinal (tomorrow social) is confirmed by the fact that as every day goes by more and more of them are compelled to "steal"

the truths discovered by Marx; but having found it impossible to destroy these truths when stated clearly (we revolutionaries have no such fears about *their* classical theses) they join the second group, the *falsifiers*, or (why not?) the *modernizers*.

The *falsifiers* are those who have been historically defined as "opportunists", revisionists or reformists, i.e. those who have eliminated from the integrated whole of Marx's theories—as though it were possible without destroying it in its entirety—the prospect of revolutionary catastrophe and the use of armed violence. However there are also many falsifiers among those who claim to accept violent rebellion: they are just as bad, and just as prone to the *superstition* of activism. What both of them share is an aversion to the identifying, discriminating feature of Marx's theory: armed force, no longer in the hands of particular oppressed individuals or groups, but in the hands of the liberated and victorious class, the class *dictatorship*, bugbear of social democrats and anarchists alike. We might have entertained the false hope in 1917 that this second group, rotten to the core, had been laid out by Lenin's blows; however, although we considered this victory as definitive in the realm of doctrine, we were also among the first to warn that the right conditions existed for the re-emergence of that infamous breed. Nowadays we can see it both in Stalinism, and in the Russian post-Stalinism which has been current since the 20th Congress of the Russian Communist Party.

Finally in the third category, the *modernizers*, we put those groups which, despite considering Stalinism to be a new form of the classical opportunism defeated by Lenin, attribute this dreadful reverse in the fortunes of the revolutionary labour movement to defects and inadequacies within Marx's original doctrine; which they claim to be able to rectify on the basis of evidence which historical evolution has provided subsequent to the theory's formation; an evolution, according to them, which contradicts it.

In Italy, France, and elsewhere there are many of these groups which have totally dissipated the first proletarian reactions against the terrible sense of disillusionment arising from the distortions and decompositions of Stalinism; from the opportunist plague which killed off Lenin's Third International. One of these groups is linked to Trotskyism, but in fact fails to appreciate that Trotsky always condemned Stalin for deviating from Marx. Admittedly, Trot-

sky also indulged rather too much in personal and moral judgements; a barren method as evidenced by the shameless way in which the 20th Congress has used precisely such methods to prostitute the revolutionary tradition much more than even Stalin himself.

Every one of these groups has succumbed to the disease of *activism*, but their enormous critical distance from Marxism means they have failed to see that they are making the same mistakes as the German Bernsteins; who wished to build socialism within parliamentary democracy by opposing their everyday practice to what they saw as the “coldness” of theory. The activism of these groups is likewise akin to that of Stalin’s heirs, who have smashed to pieces Marx, Lenin and Trotsky’s positions on the *internationality* of the socialist economic transformation in an indecent display of armed might, with which, whilst exacerbating their hunger for power, they claim to have *built* this new economy already.

Stalin is the theoretical father of this method of “enrichment” and “modernization” of Marxism, a method which, whenever and wherever it appears, destroys the vision of world-wide proletarian revolutionary strength.

Thus, whilst we adopt a standpoint which opposes all three groups simultaneously, it is the misleading distortions and arrogant neo-constructions of the third group which most urgently need to be addressed and set to rights. Being contemporary they are better known, but it is still difficult for today’s workers, following the ravages of Stalinism, to relate them to the old historical traps; against which we propose one stance and one alone: a return to the fundamental communist positions of the 1848 *Manifesto*, which contains, in potential, our entire social and historical criticism, and which likewise demonstrates that everything which has happened since, all the bloody struggles and defeats experienced by the proletariat during the course of the last century, only serve to confirm the validity of what some people foolishly wish to abandon.

I

The Party and Class State as Essential Forms of the Communist Revolution

The Central Question of Power

In spite of the preventive counter-measures taken by the 20th Congress of the Russian Communist Party, the number of critics of the Moscow degeneration has continued to grow after the events in Hungary, Poland and Eastern Germany, and they are even to be found on the margins of the official Stalinist parties in the West, and include people like Sartre and Picasso who are highly dubious and petty-bourgeois in our opinion. Their not entirely unsuccessful condemnation of Moscow sounds something like this: abuse of dictatorship, abuse of the centrally-disciplined political party, abuse of the State power in its dictatorial form. All of them put forward similar remedies: more liberty, more democracy, socialism to be brought into the ideological and political atmosphere of liberal and electoral legality, and the use of State power in relation to different political proposals and opinions should be renounced. As usual, the main targets of our criticism are not those who hold this point of view because they openly advocate the bourgeois mode of production (sanctified by just such an ideological, juridical and political framework), but those who wish to graft such nonsense onto the trunk of Marxist doctrine.

We hold exactly the opposite point of view, so let’s set the record straight immediately. The revolutionary movement, freed from servile admiration of the American “free world”, freed from subjection to a corrupt Moscow and immune from the syphilitic putridity of opportunism, can only reemerge by recovering its original radical Marxist platform, and by declaring that the content of socialism surpasses and negates such concepts as Liberty, Democracy, and Parliamentarism and reveals them to be means of defending and propping up capitalism. But perhaps the supreme lie and main plank of counter-revolutionary thought is the notion of the State as neutral arbiter of class and party interests, and therefore also of a farcical *freedom of opinion*. Such a State, and such a freedom, are monstrous inventions that history has never known nor ever shall know.

Not only is it indisputable that Marxism established and declared all this right from its inception, but it must

also be emphasised that the concept of the use of physical force against an enemy minority—or majority—presupposes the intervention of two essential forms contained within the Marxist historical scheme: *Party and State*.

A “Marxist historical scheme” exists, in other words, insofar as the Marxist doctrine is based upon the possibility of mapping out a pattern within history. If that pattern cannot be found, or is wrong, then Marxism will fall apart and its *deniers* will be right. As for the falsifiers and “modernisers” of Marxism, they would be highly unlikely to capitulate even if provided with evidence that their views were mistaken!

Those who oppose our thesis that *party and State* are *main*, rather than merely *accessory*, elements within the Marxist scheme, and who prefer to insist that class is the principal element, with party and State as *accessory* features of class history and class struggles (and as easy to change as the tyres on a car) are directly contradicted by Marx himself. In a letter to Weydemeyer (March 5, 1852) quoted by Lenin in *State and Revolution*, Marx wrote that the existence of *classes* wasn’t discovered by him but by bourgeois economists and historians. It was other people who discovered *class struggles* as well, which doesn’t mean they were communist or revolutionary. The content of his doctrine, he said, resides in the historical concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a necessary stage in the transition from capitalism to socialism. Thus speaks Marx, and it is one of the rare times when he speaks about himself.

We are, therefore, not particularly interested in a working class which is statistically defined, and neither are we particularly interested in attempts to work out where the interests of the working class diverge from other classes (there are always more than two). What interests us is the class which has set up its dictatorship, i.e. which has taken power, destroyed the bourgeois State, and set up its own State: that is how Lenin put it, shaming those in the Second International who had “forgotten” Marxism. How is it that *class* can form the basis of a dictatorial and totalitarian State power, of a new State machine opposed to the old, like a victorious army occupying the positions of the defeated enemy? Through what organ? The philistine’s immediate answer is: *a man*, and in Russia Lenin was that man (whom they have the nerve to lump together with the

wretched Stalin, denied today and maybe murdered yesterday by his worshippers). *Our* answer is quite different.

The organ of the dictatorship and operator of the *State-weapon* is the political class *party*; the party which, through its doctrine and its continuous historical action, has been potentially granted the task, proper to the proletarian class, of transforming society. We not only say that the struggle and the historical task of the class cannot be achieved without the two forms: dictatorial State, (i.e. the exclusion, as long as they exist, of the other classes which are henceforth defeated and subdued) and political party, we also say—in our customary dialectical and revolutionary language—that one can only begin to speak of *class*—of establishing a dynamic link between a repressed class in today’s society and a future revolutionised social form, and taking into consideration the struggle between the class which holds the State and the class which is to overthrow it—only when the class is no longer a cold statistical term at the miserable level of bourgeois thought, but a reality, made manifest in its organ, the party, without which it has neither life nor the strength to fight.

One cannot therefore detach party from class as though class were the main element and the party merely accessory to it. By putting forward the idea of a proletariat without a party, a party which is sterilized and impotent party, or by looking for substitutes for it, the latest corrupters of Marxism have actually annihilated *the class* by depriving it of any possibility of fighting for socialism, or even, come to that, fighting for a miserable crust of bread.

An Error Unmasked 100 Years Ago

As a result of their confused critique, today’s “enrichers” of Marxism have made similar blunders, and have inadvertently ended up adopting the same bourgeois and petty-bourgeois insinuations which were made when the Russian Revolution was still following the classic Marxist line—admired even by the “enrichers”—in which Class, State, Party and Party members stood together on the same revolutionary plane, precisely because on these essential points there were no hesitations of any kind.

They fail to realize that in diluting the party and its function as the main revolutionary organ they *declass* the proletariat; which having been deprived of the ability to overthrow the ruling class, or even to mitigate its effects in restricted fields of activity, ends up helplessly shackled to

it. They really think they have *improved* Marxism by having learnt from history a banal commonplace of the “don’t push things too far!” variety, worthy of the pettiest shopkeeper. What they don’t see is that it isn’t a correction we’re dealing with here but a liquidation; or rather, an inferiority complex born out of an impotent lack of understanding.

The party form and the State form are key elements in the earliest Marxist texts; and are two fundamental stages in the epic development which the *Communist Manifesto* describes.

There are two revolutionary stages referred to in the chapter “Proletarians and Communists”. The first stage (already touched on before in the first chapter “Bourgeois and Proletarians”) is the *organisation of the proletariat into a political party*. This follows on from another very famous statement: *every class struggle is a political struggle*, but it is much clearer, and tallies with our thesis which states: the proletariat is a class in a historical sense when it has started to struggle politically as a party. In fact, the *Manifesto* states: “This organisation of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party.”

The second revolutionary stage is *the organisation of the proletariat into a ruling class*. Here the question of power and the State arises. “As we have seen above, the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of the ruling class.”

A little further on we find Marx’s blunt definition of the Class State: “The proletariat organised as the ruling class.”

Perhaps we needn’t point out here that another of the essential theses reinstated by Lenin, the eventual disappearance of the State, is also included in this famous early text. The general definition: “Political power, properly so called, is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another” underscores the classic assertions: *the public power will lose its political character*, classes and all class domination will disappear, even that of the proletariat.

Therefore Party and State are at the heart of the Marxist viewpoint. You either accept or reject it. Searching for the class outside of its Party and its State is a waste of energy, and depriving the class of them means turning your back on communism and the revolution.

But this foolish attempt, which the “modernizers” consider an original discovery of the post-Second World War, had already been made before the *Manifesto*, when it had been routed by Marx in his formidable polemical pamphlet against Proudhon: *The Poverty of Philosophy*. This pivotal work destroyed the notion (which in fact was very ahead of its time) that the social transformation and abolition of private property might be achieved without the need to engage in a struggle for political power. Finally there is the famous sentence: “*Do not say that the social movement excludes the political movement*”, which leads on to our unequivocal thesis: by *politics* we don’t mean a peaceful ideological contest, or worse still, a constitutional debate; we mean “hand to hand conflict”, “total revolution”, and finally, as the poetess George Sand put it: “*Le Combat où la mort*”.

Proudhon rejects the idea of political conflict because his view of the way societies change is fundamentally flawed: it doesn’t involve the complete overthrow of capitalist relations of production; it is competition orientated, localised and co-operativist, and is trapped within a bourgeois vision of business enterprise and market. He might have proclaimed that property was theft, but his system, remaining a mercantile system, remains one which is property orientated and bourgeois. Proudhon’s myopia about economic revolution is the same as today’s “factory socialists”, who duplicate in less vigorous form the old utopia of Robert Owen; who wanted to liberate the workers by handing over to them the management of the factories, right in the middle of bourgeois society. Whether these people label themselves *Ordinovists* in Italy, or *Barbarists* in France, they are in the end, all of them, chips off the same Proudhonian block and deserve the same invective as Stalin: Oh Poverty of the *Enrichers!*

Resurrected and Tenacious Proudhonism

In Proudhon’s system we find individual exchange, the market, and the *free will* of the buyer and seller exalted above all else. It is asserted that in order to eliminate social injustice, all that is required is to relate every commodity’s exchange value to the value of the labour contained within it. Marx shows—and will show later, pitting himself against Bakunin, against Lassalle, against Dühring, against Sorel and against all the latter-day pygmies mentioned above—that what lies beneath all this is nothing other than the apologetics, and the preservation, of bourgeois economy;

incidentally, there is nothing different in the Stalinist claim that in a socialist society, which Russia claims to be, the law of exchange of equivalent values will continue to exist.

In *The Poverty of Philosophy*, in a few succinct lines, Marx points out the abyss which lies between these by-products of the capitalist system and the tremendous vision of the communist society of the future. It is his reply to the society “built” by Proudhon, where unlimited competition and a balance of supply and demand achieve the miracle of ensuring that everyone gets the most useful and essential goods at “minimum cost”, eternal petty-bourgeois dream of the idiotic servants of capital. Marx easily disposes of such sophistry and ridicules it by comparing it to the claim, given that when the weather is fine everybody goes for a walk, Proudhonian people go out for a walk to ensure fine weather.

“In a future society, in which class antagonism would have ceased, in which there will no longer be any classes, use will no longer be determined by the *minimum* time of production; but the social time of production devoted to different articles will be determined by the degree of their social utility.”

This extract, one of the many gems that can be found in the classic writings of our great school, shows how shallow it is to maintain that Marx loved to describe capitalism and its laws, but never described socialist society for fear of lapsing into... utopianism. A view shared by Stalin and second-rate anti-Stalinists alike.

In fact, in their wish to emancipate the proletariat whilst preserving mercantile exchange, it is the Proudhons and Stalins who are the utopians; and the latest version of such attempts is Khrushchev’s reform of Russian industry.

The free, individual exchange, on which Proudhon’s metaphysics is based, leads to exchange between factories, workshops, and firms *managed* by workers, and results in the rancid banality which locates the content of socialism in the conquest of the factory by the local workers.

In his crusade to defend competition, old Proudhon was the precursor of that modern superstition—productive “emulation”. Back in his day, the orthodox thinkers (unaware of being less reactionary than today’s Khrushchevs) used to say that progress arises from healthy “emulation”. But Proudhon identifies productive “industrial” emulation with competition itself. Rivals for the same object, such as “the woman for the lover”, tend to emulate one another.

With a note of sarcasm, Marx observes: if the lover’s immediate *object* is the woman, then the immediate object of industrial rivalry should be the *product*, not the profit. But since in the bourgeois world profit is the name of the game (and this is true a hundred years on) the alleged productive emulation ends up as *commercial* competition. And beneath the seductive smiles the Americans and Muscovites are currently casting in each other’s direction, profit is still what they are both after.

Along with his defective view of the revolutionary society, Proudhon is the precursor of the worst aspects of today’s fashionable “factory socialists”: the rejection of *Party* and *State* because they create *leaders*, chiefs and power-brokers, who, due to *the weakness of human nature*, will *inevitably* be transformed into a privileged group; into a new dominant class (or caste?) to live off the backs of the proletariat.

These superstitions about “human nature” were ridiculed by Marx a long time ago when he wrote in a short, pithy sentence: *Monsieur Proudhon ignores that all history is nothing but a continuous transformation of human nature*. Under this massive tombstone can be laid to rest countless throngs of past, present and future anti-Marxist idiots.

In support of our declaration that not even the most minor restrictions can be placed on the *full and unqualified use* of the weapons of *Party* and *State* weapons in the workers’ revolution, and in order to get rid of these hypocritical scruples, we should add that in order to deal with the inevitable *individual* manifestations of the psychological pathology which proletarians and communists have inherited, not from human *nature*, but from capitalist society, with its horrible ideology and its individualistic mythology of the “dignity of the human person”, there is only one organisation capable of providing an effective and radical remedy. That organisation is specifically the communist political party, both during the revolutionary struggle, and after it, when it assumes its most definitive function—that of the wielding of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Other types of organisations which think they can replace it must be rejected not only because of their revolutionary impotence, but because they are a hundred times more susceptible to the degenerating influence of the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie. And yet the criticism of these organisations, which they have been subjected to

from all sides since time immemorial, should adopt a historical rather than a “philosophical” approach. And yet, it is still of prime importance to make a Marxist analysis of the justifications put forward by the proponents of these schemes, and clearly demonstrate that are influenced by an ideology which is essentially bourgeois in outlook, or even less than bourgeois, such as the views proposed by the pseudo-intellectuals who so dangerously infest the margins of the working-class movement.

The party, which at an organisational level sets the non-proletarian at the same level as the proletarian, is the *only* form of organisation which can allow non-proletarians to arrive at the theoretical and historical position which is based on the revolutionary interests of the labouring class; finally, though only after much anguish and torment, these renegades from other classes will serve as revolutionary mines rather than as bourgeois booby-traps in our own ranks.

The party’s superiority lies precisely in its overcoming of the disease of *labourism* and *workerism*. You join the party as a consequence of your own position in the hand-to-hand *struggle* between historical forces for a revolutionary social form; and your position as party member and militant is not merely a servile copy of your position “in respect to the productive mechanism”, i.e. that mechanism which is created by bourgeois society and related “physiologically” to that society and to its ruling class.

II

The Proletariats Economic Organisations: Pale Substitutes for the Revolutionary Party

A History of Impotent Systems

In our fight against the Stalinist betrayal, we have always considered its distortions of economic theory as a thousand times more serious than the “abuse of power” which so scandalised Trotskyists and Khrushchevians, or the famous “crimes” which world philistinism keeps on harking on about. In order to combat these distortions, we always have recourse to Marx’s classical thesis against Proudhon which appears in the first volume of *Capital*, chapter twenty-four, note: “We may well, therefore, be astonished at the cleverness of Proudhon, who would abolish capitalistic property by enforcing the eternal laws of property that are based on commodity production.”

Every criticism and “improved” programme put out by all the various so-called anti-Stalinist groups relies on the ridiculous notion that there needs to be a detoxification—sterilisation as far as the revolution is concerned—of the Party and the State, forms (according to the extremely hackneyed thesis of “the tyrant and his cronies”) which were supposedly abused by Stalin because of his “insatiable lust for power”. It is important show that all those who nurture this bigoted preoccupation (and who probably want to be leaders, and crave personal success, themselves) have succumbed, as far as economic and social matters are concerned, to the same reactionary illusion as Proudhon: they are blind to the fact that the historical opposition between communism and capitalism means that communism and socialism are opposed to mercantilism.

First of all we need to consider the historical evidence. This shows us that every interpretation which has attempted to repel the *monsters* of Party and political State, by putting forward new types of organisation to marshal the proletarian class in its struggle against capital and to establish a post-capitalist society, has been a miserable failure.

In the third part of this report, we will deal with economics, or rather we shall demonstrate that the goal, the programme, which all these “non-party” and “non-State” movements set themselves is not a socialist and communist

society, but rather a petty-bourgeois economic pipe-dream, which has resulted in them all ending up bogged down in modern capitalism's game of parties and States.

First of all, it must be recognised that all these attempts based on formulas or "recipes" for organisational miracle cures are clearly not Marxist. They echo the stale banalities of the political hucksters of fifty years ago, who used to treat the events of historical struggle as though they'd been selected from a trendy fashion magazine. According to these gossiping pedants the political *club* was the motive force of the French Revolution (Girondins, Jacobins), then along came the electoral parties, followed by the locally based organisations advocated by the anarchists. Then (let's say, around 1900) the fashionable thing becomes workers' occupational trade unions, with an inherent tendency to replace all the other organisational forms and use their revolutionary potential to set themselves up in opposition to Party and State (Georges Sorel). A very hackneyed refrain. Today (1957), another "self-sufficient" form—the factory council—is given pride of place under various guises by the Dutch "tribunists", Italian Gramscists, Yugoslavian Titoists, the so-called Trotskyists, and a number of other batrachomyomachian "left-wing" groups.

Just one of Marx, Engels and Lenin's theses is enough to bury all this empty talk: "*Revolution is not a question of forms of organisation.*"

The real issue is the clash of historical forces and the new social programme which will replace capitalism when its long cycle is over. Instead of discovering the goal scientifically, in determining factors of past and present, the old pre-Marxist utopianism invented it instead. The new post-Marxist utopianism eliminates the goal, and replaces it with the frantically active organisation (or in the words of Bernstein, chief social-democratic revisionist: "*The aim is nothing: the movement is everything*").

We shall briefly record the "proposals" of these fashion designers, who want to parade the battle-weary proletariat up the political catwalk with a new set of chains yoking it to capital.

The Superstition of the Local "Commune"

Anarchist doctrines are the expression of the following thesis: centralised power is evil; and they assume that the entire question of the liberation of the oppressed class can be resolved by getting rid of it. But for the anarchist, class

is only an accessory concept. He wishes to liberate the individual, the person, and thereby conforms with the programme of the liberal and bourgeois revolution. He only reproaches the latter for having installed a new form of power, failing to see that this is merely the necessary consequence of the fact that it didn't have as its content and motive-force the liberation of the person or the citizen, but the achieving of dominion of a new social class over the means of production. Anarchism, libertarianism—and even Stalinism, in its Westernised guise—is nothing other than classical revolutionary bourgeois liberalism *plus something else* (which they call local autonomy, administrative State, and entry of the working class into the constitutional powers). When such petty-bourgeois peccadilloes are grafted on to it, bourgeois liberalism, which in its time was a real and serious matter, becomes just an illusion with which to castrate the workers' revolution.

Marxism, on the other hand, is the dialectic negation of capitalist liberalism. It doesn't wish to keep part of capitalism in order to improve it here and there, but to crush it with the *class* institutions it has produced at the local, and especially centralised, level. Such a task can't be achieved by encouraging complete autonomy and independence, but only by the formation of a centralised and destructivist power, whose essential and specific forms are the Party and the State, and these forms alone.

The idea of freeing the individual, the person, and making him autonomous, boils down to the ridiculous formula of the subjective *refractory* individual, who shuts his eyes to society and its oppressive structure because he is convinced that he can't change it, or else he dreams about one day planting a bomb somewhere; the end result is contemporary existentialism which is unable to effect society in the slightest.

This petty-bourgeois demand, which arises out of the anger of the small autonomous producer expropriated by big capital and therefore from the defence of property (which Stirner and other individualists consider an inviolable "extension of the individual") adapted itself to the great historic advance of the working masses, and over the course of time acknowledged some forms of organisation. At the time of the crisis in the First International (after 1870) there was a split between the Marxists and anarchists over the latter's refusal to recognise economic organisations, or even strikes. Engels established that economic

trade-unions and strikes weren't enough to resolve the question of revolution, but that the revolutionary party should support them, inasmuch as their value (as already stated in the *Communist Manifesto*) lies in the extension of proletarian organisation towards a single, centralised form, which is political.

During this phase, the libertarians would propose an ill-defined local, revolutionary "commune", sometimes described as a force which struggles against the constituted power and asserts its autonomy by breaking all links with the central State, and sometimes as a form which manages a new economy. This idea wasn't new but harked back to the first capitalist forms which appeared at the end of the Middle-Ages: the autonomous communes, which existed in Italy and in German Flanders where a young bourgeoisie was fighting against the Empire. As always in such cases, events which were then revolutionary, in terms of economic development, have today become an empty repetition disguised as false extremism.

For the anarchists, during over fifty years of commemorations, the model for this local organ was the Paris Commune of 1871. In Marx and Lenin's far more powerful and irrevocable analysis it is, on the contrary, history's first great example of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, of a centralised, though here only territorial, proletarian State.

The French capitalist State, as embodied in Thier's Third Republic, moved to crush proletarian Paris and eject it from its capital city, having prepared its assault from behind the Prussian army lines. After the desperate resistance and horrifying massacre, Marx was able to write that from that day onwards all the bourgeois national armies were in league against the proletariat.

It wasn't a question of reducing the historical conflict from a national to the communal level (just think of the inanity of a poor defenceless provincial town!) but of extending it onto an international scale. At the time of the Second International there even emerged a new version of socialism (impressing the restless mind of the young Mussolini) called "communalism", which aimed to create cells of the future society by conquering municipal administrations: not—alas—with dynamite like the anarchists, but by winning local elections. Since then, the relentless forces of economic development, well known to Marxists, have ensured that every local structure has become tangled in an ever more inextricable web of economic, administrative,

and political ties with the central government: just think of the ridiculousness of each little rebel town council setting up its own radio and TV stations to annoy the hated central State!

The idea of organisations forming confederations of workers in each town, and each town declaring itself politically independent, is therefore now defunct. Bourgeois illusions about self-government still survive, however, and will continue to befuddle the minds, and paralyse the hands, of working-class militants for a long time to come.

The other forms of workers' "immediate" organisation would have a longer and more complex history, with a tendency to get caught up in the craft and professional trade unions, industrial unions, and the factory councils. Insofar as such forms are proposed as alternatives to the revolutionary political party, the history of these movements and the doctrines which are more or less confusedly based upon them, coincide with the history of opportunism during the Second and Third Internationals. As we have covered the subject on numerous occasions elsewhere, we will give only a brief summary here, but we will remark that the European masses are still largely ignorant of their class's history, and they will really need to learn from the immense sacrifices which have been made one day, and treasure them,

The history of localism, and of so-called anarchist and libertarian communism, is the story of opportunism within the First International. Marx fought to free the International of these tendencies by means of both theoretical criticism, and hard organisational struggle against Bakunin and his intractable supporters in France, Switzerland, Spain and Italy.

Despite being able to draw on the rich historical experience of the Russian Revolution, many "left-wingers", and declared enemies of Stalinism, nevertheless still look to the anarchists for potential support. We therefore need to reiterate that libertarianism was the first of the diseases to infect the proletarian movement, and was the precursor to all later opportunisms (including Stalinism) in that it falsified politics and history in order to attract the petty and middle bourgeois strata of society onto the proletarian side—despite the fact that these classes have always ruined everything, and been the source of every kind of calamity and error. What resulted from this approach wasn't proletarian leadership over the "popular masses", but destruction of

any proletarian features of the general movement, and a reinforced enslavement of the proletariat to capital.

This danger has been denounced by Marxism since its earliest days, and it is extremely sad to hear people say that it can be dealt with more effectively now than in Marx's day because there are more facts available, whilst they meanwhile misinterpret what was already clear over a century ago. The "popular" version of working-class revolution used to horrify Engels, and he condemned it often. In the preface to *The Class Struggles in France*, for instance, he wrote: "After the defeats of 1849 we in no way shared the illusions of the vulgar democracy (...) This vulgar democracy reckoned on a speedy and finally decisive victory of the 'people' over the 'tyrants'; we looked to a long struggle after the removal of the 'tyrants', among the antagonistic elements concealed within this 'people' itself."

As far as Marxist doctrine is concerned, from that time on it was equipped with the basic concepts and principles needed to criticise all of today's *popular* variants of opportunism; including the models put forward by groups such as the *Barbarists* who in their lengthy palinodes dedicated to the Hungarian events have presented a "popular" movement as a class movement.

Those who substitute "people" for class, by prioritising the proletarian class above the party, believe they are rendering it a supreme homage whilst in fact they are declassing it, drowning it in "popular" confusion, and sacrificing it on the altar of counter-revolution.

The Myth of the Revolutionary Trade Union

By the end of the nineteenth century, the political parties of the proletarian class in Europe had become large and powerful organisations. Their role model was the German "Sozialdemokratie", which after a long struggle had forced the bourgeois Kaiserist State to repeal Bismark's special anti-socialist laws, and had also steadily increased its share of the votes and the parliamentary seats at each successive general election. This party was supposed to be the depository of Marx and Engel's tradition, and to this fact was due the prestige it enjoyed within the new Second International when it was set up in 1889.

But in this party a new current, *Revisionism*, had been growing with Eduard Bernstein as its main theoretician. This tendency openly stated that bourgeois society, during the relatively peaceful international and social period

which followed the Franco-Prussian War, had developed *new* aspects which were pointing to "new ways to socialism", different from Marx's.

Be it no wonder to today's young militants that it was this very same phrase which was used to launch the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956: exactly the same words, but with everybody thinking they were brand new and hot off the press! The Italian revisionist Bonomi, expelled from the party in 1912 and later appointed as Secretary of State for War in Giolitti's cabinet, would end up shooting not fascists, but the proletarians who were fighting against them. Later on he would even become one of the leaders of the anti-fascist Republic. Before his expulsion he wrote a book which boasted the title: *The New Ways to Socialism*. Giolitti drew the fine sentence that socialists *had relegated Marx to the attic* from this same book. Today's international communist left movement is directly derived from the left fraction groups who, all those years ago, replied to this provocation by naming their journal *The Attic*.

The revisionists maintained that given the new developments within European, and world capitalism, neither insurrectional struggles nor the use of armed violence and the revolutionary conquest of power, were needed to achieve the passage to socialism and to achieve working-class emancipation; they therefore totally excluded Marx's central thesis: the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

Instead of Marx's "catastrophic vision" there would be legal and electoral activity and legislative changes in Parliament. It even got to the stage where socialist MPs were participating in bourgeois cabinets (Possibilism, Millerandism) in order to pass laws favourable to the working class, despite the fact that every international congress up to the First World War had consistently condemned such tactics, and despite the expulsion from the parties of collaborationists like Bonomi (though not the Bernsteins, nor the Turatis in Italy).

This political and theoretical degeneracy of the socialist parties, which we won't go into detail about here, led to a wave of distrust towards the organisational *form* of the party amongst large sections of the proletariat, and provided a favourable atmosphere for a range of anarchist and anti-Marxist critics. To begin with, only a few currents of minor importance fought the revisionists on the grounds of strict conformity to Marx's original doctrine (radicals in

Germany, intransigent revolutionaries in Italy; and groups elsewhere dubbed “hard”, “strict”, “orthodox” etc.).

These currents, which in Russia were represented by the Bolshevism of Plekhanov and Lenin (although during the war Plekhanov turned out to be just as bad as the German Kautsky) never ceased for an instant to defend the Party-form (though only Lenin would clearly defend the State-form, that is to say, the dictatorship-form). But for about ten years or so, there had been another current fighting against social-democratic revisionism, namely *revolutionary syndicalism*. Georges Sorel was their main theoretician and leader, even if earlier antecedents certainly existed. It was a movement which was particularly strong in the Latin countries: to begin with they fought inside the socialist parties, but later split off, both because of the vicissitudes of the struggle and in order to be consistent with a doctrine which rejected the necessity of the party as a revolutionary class organ.

The primary form of proletarian organisation for the syndicalists was the economic *trade union*, whose main task was supposed to be not only leading the class struggle to defend the immediate interests of the working class, but also preparing, without being subject to any political party, to lead the final revolutionary war against the capitalist system.

Sorelians and Marxism

A complete analysis of the origins and evolution of this doctrine, both as we find it in Sorel’s work, and in the multifarious groups which in various countries subscribed to it, would take us too far off our track; at this point we shall therefore just discuss its historical balance sheet, and its very questionable view of a future non-capitalist society.

Sorel and many of his followers, in Italy as well, started off by declaring that they were the true successors of Marx in fighting against legalitarian revisionism in its pacifist and evolutionist guise. Eventually they were forced to admit that their tendency represented a new revisionism; left rather than right-wing in appearance but actually issuing from the same source, and containing the same dangers.

The part of Marx’s doctrine which Sorel reckoned to have retained was the use of violence and the struggle of the proletarian class against bourgeois institutions and authority, especially the State. Thus he appeared to be in strict conformity with the Marxist historical critique according to

which the contemporary State which emerged from the bourgeois revolution, in its democratic and parliamentary forms, remains an organisation perfectly adapted for the defence of the dominant class, whose power cannot be removed by legal means. The Sorelians defended the use of illegal action, violence, and the revolutionary general strike, and raised the latter to the rank of the supreme ideal, precisely at a time when in most socialist parties such slogans were being fiercely repudiated.

The culmination of the Sorelian theory of “direct action”—that is, without legally elected intermediaries between proletarians and the bourgeoisie—is the general strike. But in spite of it being conceived of as occurring simultaneously in all trades, in all cities of a particular country, or even on an international scale, in reality the insurrection of the syndicalists is still restricted, insofar as it takes the form of actions by individuals, or at most, actions by isolated groups; in neither case does it attain the level of class action. This was due to Sorel’s horror of a revolutionary political organisation necessarily taking on a military form, and after victory, a State form (proletarian State, Dictatorship); and since Sorelians don’t agree with Party, State, and Dictatorship they would end up treading the same path as Bakunin had thirty years before. The national general strike, assuming it to be victorious, would supposedly coincide (on the same day?) with a general expropriation (the “expropriating strike”), but such a vision of the passage from one social form to another is as nebulous and weak as it is disappointing and ephemeral.

In Italy in 1920—in an atmosphere of general enthusiasm for Lenin, for the party, for taking power, and for the “expropriating dictatorship”—this superficially extreme slogan of the “expropriating strike” was adopted by both maximalists and *Ordinovists*; this was one of many occasions when we had to defend Marxist positions strenuously and pitilessly, even at risk of being accused of *bridling* the movement.

Sorel and his followers are actually far removed from Marxist determinism, and the interaction which occurs between the economic and political spheres is a dead letter to them. Since they are individualist and voluntarist, they see revolution as an act of force which can only take place after an impossible act of consciousness. As Lenin demonstrated in *What is To Be Done?*, they turn Marxism on its head. They treat consciousness and will as though they came

from the inner-self, from the “person”, and thus, in one deft movement, they sweep away bourgeois State, class divisions, and class psychology. Since they are unable to understand the inevitable alternative—capitalist dictatorship or communist dictatorship—they evade the dilemma in the only way that is historically possible: by re-establishing the former. And whether this is done consciously or not may be a burning issue for them but, frankly, we are not that interested.

We are not really interested in following the logical evolution of Georges Sorel’s thinking after that: idealism, spiritualism, and then a return to the womb of the Catholic Church.

The Test of the First World War

As already stated above, we certainly can’t provide here an in-depth analysis of the crisis of socialism which occurred in August 1914 at the outbreak of the First World War. We just need to see if the crisis affected only the political parties, or the trade unions, and indeed the syndicalist ideologists, as well. And the latter, although never thinking of themselves as a party, were in fact precisely that; indeed their members were drawn mainly from the petty-bourgeois class, despite their superstitious attachment to notions of working-class purity. At that time, in typical anarchist fashion, the syndicalists consisted of a variety of ill-defined “groups” which declared themselves to be *non-political, non-electoral, non-parliamentary, and non-party* etc, etc. And we have plenty of contemporary examples to show that this show of chaste reserve with regard to political parties and revolutionary politics doesn’t stop these free and easy “groupists” from joining bourgeois and opportunist parties, or even fighting in electoral campaigns for filthy class traitors. Autonomy rules!

There is no doubt—indeed it would form the basis for the restoration of revolutionary Marxism in Lenin’s time—that the biggest European socialist parties had displayed a shameless bankruptcy. We need hardly recall that Lenin, unable to accept the news, would crush the newspapers underfoot as he furiously paced about his small Swiss room like a caged wild animal, unapproachable even to his incomparable wife for three whole weeks.

We retract not a single word we have ever said, or action we have taken, against these betrayers of socialism, who voted for war credits, and who entered the “*union*

sacrée” cabinets. However in Italy, facilitated by a nine-month delay (Italy entered the war on May 24, 1915) the struggle to prevent the party leaders from deserting proletarian positions lasted until just days before the mobilisation order was issued. The leadership of the socialist party held firm, and although the reformist current predominated in the parliamentary group and was opposed to calling a general strike, it nevertheless pledged to vote against the government and its war credits and actually did so, and unanimously at that. In fact it was the leaders of the General Confederation of Labour (CGL—broadly the Italian equivalent of the English Trades Union Congress, or TUC) who took up the most defeatist position, and it was they we had to unmask in their sabotage of the strike proposal: although they said they feared the strike’s failure, in fact they feared its success, and purely for bourgeois patriotic reasons.

In all countries it was the big trade unions which dragged the political parties down this road of incommensurable shame. Such it was in France, in Germany, and in Austria. In England, the Labour Party, that perennial bugbear and champion of counter-revolution to which the trade unions are affiliated, stepped bodily into the ranks of the war-mongers whilst Britain’s small Socialist Party took up a firm opposition stand.

Sorelian critics of parliamentarism had quite rightly denounced the disgraceful manoeuvrings of worker MPs, but they failed to realise that these gentlemen, as they roamed around the bourgeois government lobbies, were being forcibly petitioned by trade union organisers to obtain material concessions for their members. Lenin warned that the betrayal and cowardice of the revolutionary leaders was not a *cause* of opportunism, which was at its most virulent during the 1914 crisis, but rather an *inseparable manifestation* of opportunism, and indeed this had been the view of Marx and Engel ever since their letters about the German counter-revolution in 1850. Opportunism is a social fact, a deeply entrenched compromise between classes, and it would be sheer madness to ignore it. Capitalism would later offer a pact of mutual collaboration to certain sections of industrial workers who were exempted from military service. The Railway Workers Union in Italy would oppose the CGL’s repudiation of the general strike (and in doing so put their members’ exemption from military service at stake) and were only able to do so because

of their political strength, and the close ties which this combative workers' organisation had forged with the radical wing of the Marxist party.

During the crisis in 1914, and during many other analogous though less sensational ones, the trade unions (we refer to their leadership, who the workers can only get rid of after years of struggle, ditto, party militants their leaders, and socialist electors their MPs) were veritable shackles on the class parties. The Sorelians, obviously not having seen this impressive array of evidence, proposed to remedy revisionism by boycotting parties and seeking refuge in the workers' unions.

The situation was worst in France and Italy, where there were even anarcho-sindicalist trade-union confederations. In France they were in the majority and led by Jouhaux, Sorelian to the marrow, and sworn enemy of the party and the socialist MPs group. But, as the First World War broke out, Jouhaux would subscribe to the jingoist politics of the socialist parliamentary deputies, and drag his organisation and its mass membership along behind him, barring a few, negligible exceptions. But he was not the only one. He would be joined by the famous anarchist scholar Elisée Reclus, and by the even more famous (total idiot) Gustave Hervé, leader of the European anti-militarists, editor of *La Guerre Sociale*, and organiser of the "citoyen Browning" (revolver-citizen), who had earlier felt obliged to stick the *drapeau tricolore dans le fumier*, the French flag into the dungheap. Hervé would change the title of his journal to "Victoire", start an incredibly venomous campaign against the "boches", and finally end up joining *le fumier* himself; the best place for him.

Nothing better emerged from the Sorelian ranks than from the French Socialist Party (S.F.I.O) which, even then, was not worth a brass farthing as far as Marxism was concerned. The "anti-party" syndicalists ended up like messieurs Guesde and Cachin; who came to buy Mussolini's newspaper with the Francs of the French State (Cachin later became a communist, and then a Hitler supporter, and then a staunch anti-fascist).

In Italy, the Confederation of Labour was confronted with the Italian Syndicalist Union. Although thoroughly imbued with a shallow reformism, the former had never complied with war politics. But the anarcho-sindicalist union had split into two currents, one against the war, the other with De Ambris and Corridoni openly interventionist.

The Socialist Party acquitted itself rather better: when Mussolini walked out in October 1914, at the Milan section's expulsion meeting not one voice was raised on his behalf.

The Factory Organisation

In the first place, the idea that the proletarian political party should be sacrificed in order to shift the centre of revolutionary gravity towards the trade unions involves a complete abandonment of the basic tenets of Marxist theory. It is thus a view which only receives support from those who have abjured Marxism's philosophical and economic creed (as did the Sorelians eventually, and the Bakunians right from the start); it is a view, moreover, which history has shown to be totally baseless. The argument that political parties allow non-working-class elements to join, and that these elements end up in the executive posts, whilst this never occurs (simply not true) in the trade unions, flies in the face of the most resounding historical evidence to the contrary.

The narrowness of the trade-unionist perspective, when compared to the political, resides in the fact it is restricted within a trade, rather than a class, context, and is affected by a rigid, mediaeval separation of crafts. Neither should the recent transformation of trade—or professional—trade-unions into *industrial* unions be regarded as a significant step forward. In this latter form, for instance, a carpenter operative who works in an automobile plant has to join the metal-workers union rather than the carpenters' union. But both forms are equally characterised by the fact that amongst the *rank-and-file*, contact between the union members is restricted to dealing with the problems of just one narrow sector of production rather than that of society as a whole. Bringing about a synthesis of the various interests of local, professional and industrial proletarian groups, can only be accomplished by an apparatus which includes officials from the various organisations.

The different sectional interests of the proletarian class can therefore only be overcome in the party organisation, which avoids dividing its members according to trade or profession.

Not long after the First World War, with the large trade unions and confederations clearly co-responsible with the socialist MPs and parties for the betrayal of the socialist cause, there was a widespread tendency to overestimate a

new form of immediatist organisation which had arisen amongst the industrial proletariat: *the factory council*.

The theorizers of this system maintained that it expressed, better than any other, the historical function of the modern working class. The defence of the workers' interests would pass out of the hands of the trade union and be entrusted to the local factory council, with the latter connected to other councils via a "councils system", operating at the local, regional and national levels as well as within the different sectors of industry. There was, however, a new demand which arose: the *control*, and eventually *management*, of production. Factory councils would demand a say not only in setting wages, hours, and everything else to do with management-labour relations, but also a say in the technical-economic operations decided hitherto by management, i.e., production quotas, acquisition of raw materials, and disposal of the products. A whole range of "conquests" of this nature would lead to total *management by the workers*, that is to say the effective elimination and expropriation of the employers.

In Italy at least, this enticing mirage was immediately described by revolutionary Marxists as extremely deceptive. It was a view which ignored the question of centralised power, insofar as the bourgeois State was supposed to co-exist (an early example of *coexistence* between wolf and lambs!) with an advanced degree of *workers' control*; or even with a network of *workers' management* spread over a number of industrial concerns.

All this was nothing other than a new revisionism, a worse version of reformism. This hypothetical scheme, insofar as it involved a *network of locally managed operations*, was even worse than that of the classical revisionists, who at least accepted the need for *socially planned production*, even though they entrusted it to a political State which was supposed to be conquered by the working class through peaceful means.

From a doctrinal perspective it is easy to establish that such a system is just as anti-Marxist as Sorelian syndicalism. In a very similar way we see those two suspect characters—class *party* and class *State*—totally banished from the political stage; at least the classical revisionists just confined themselves to just open sabotage of class violence and class dictatorship! In essence, though, it is revolution and socialism which are eliminated in both cases.

This banal suspicion of the *party* and *State* forms continued to gain ground over the decades that followed, and the "content of socialism" came to be confused with these two postulates: workers' control of production, and workers' management of production. And all this stuff was supposedly the "new Marxism".

Did Marx ever say what "the content of socialism" was? No. Marx never replied to such a metaphysical question. The content of a receptacle can just as well be water as wine, or indeed a rather more unpleasant liquid. As Marxists, it is appropriate to ask: what is the historical process which leads to socialism? What relations will exist between individuals "under socialism", i.e. within a society which is no longer capitalist?

To such questions it would be a nonsense to reply: control of production, management of the factory, or as is so often said: *autonomy of the working class*.

For over a century now, we have defined the historical process which leads from fully industrialised capitalist society to socialism as follows: formation of the proletarian class, organisation of the proletariat into a class political party, organisation of the proletariat into the ruling class. The control and management of production can only start after reaching the latter stage. This will occur not in *individual factories* managed by *staff councils*, but within *society as a whole*, managed by the *class State* with the class party at its helm.

If the ridiculous search for "content" is applied to a fully socialist society, we have all the more reason for saying that the formulae "*workers' control*" and "*workers' management*" are lacking in any content. Under socialism, society isn't divided into producers and non-producers any more because society is no longer divided into classes. The "content" (if we have to use such an insipid expression) won't be proletarian autonomy, control, and management of production, but the *disappearance of the proletarian class*; of the wage system; of exchange—even in its last surviving form as the exchange of money for labour-power; and, finally, the *individual enterprise* will disappear as well. There will be nothing to control and manage, and nobody to demand *autonomy* from.

Those who have taken up these ideologies have shown their total inability, both theoretically and in practice, to struggle for anything beyond a pale imitation of bourgeois society. What they really want is *their own autonomy* from

the power of the class party and the revolutionary dictatorship. When Marx was still very young, and imbued with Hegelian ideas (ideas which these people still believe in even now) he would have answered that those who seek proletarian autonomy find instead bourgeois autonomy, raised up as an eternal model of mankind (see *On the Jewish Question*).

History of "Factory Socialism"

The ancestors of the Italian *Ordinivist* factory councils are the old Anglo-Saxon *craft-guilds*, which were formed not to fight against bourgeois employers but against feudal lords and rival guilds.

As soon as the Russian Revolution came to no longer be considered as an initial phase of the European proletarian revolution, but as a struggle of the peasantry to "seize the land" instead, this wretched distortion would give rise to the superficial parallel of "seizing the factories". In such ways as this does one end up wandering off the *via maestra* which leads to the conquest of power and the conquest of society.

Elsewhere in our press we have examined how Lenin settled the Russian agrarian and industrial questions, and we won't go into it here. Syndicalists and anarchists everywhere would withdraw their support from the Russian Revolution when they realised that Lenin saw "workers' and peasants' control" as subsidiary to the main aim of gaining control of central power; as a slogan to invoke in enterprises which the Russian State had not yet managed to expropriate. Attempts at achieving autonomous management of the factories by their operatives had to be repressed, sometimes by force, in order to avoid pointless economic damage; damage which was anti-socialist insofar as it adversely effected the military and political direction of the civil war.

Confusion between the *State* of the workers' councils, with the councils functioning as political and territorial organs, and the fictitious *Ordinivist* factory Council State, with each council managing itself independently, was rapidly dispelled. On this subject we need only read the *Theses of the Second Congress of the Communist International on Trade Unions and Factory Councils* which define the tasks of such bodies before and after the revolution. The Marxist solution to the problem is the penetration of these organisms by the revolutionary party, and their

subordination to (rather than autonomy from!) the revolutionary State.

We shall now briefly refer to the Italian experience. In 1920, the famous episode of the factory occupations took place. The workers, openly dissatisfied with the cowardly attitude of the big unions federations, and forced into action by the economic situation and the injurious demands imposed by the industrialists after the initial post-war euphoria, barricaded themselves inside the factories, set about organising their defence and expelled the management. In some places they tried to keep the factories running and even to dispose of the products they had manufactured through regular sale.

This movement might have gone on to achieve great things at this crucial time if the Italian proletariat had had a strong and resolute revolutionary party. Instead, following the 1919 unitary congress in Bologna and the sensational election victory with 150 Socialist deputies elected to parliament, the Socialist Party was going through a profound crisis as the false extremism of Serrati's "Maximalists" took hold. It was a crisis which wouldn't be resolved until January 1921, when the communist current seceded to form a new party at Livorno.

In the P.S.I (Italian Socialist Party) of the time, the procedure was always to refer decisions to various hybrid committees. These would include representatives of the party leadership (along with some of its peripheral organisations, contested by the various currents), Socialist MPs, and the leaders of the Confederation of Labour. In vain did the Left declare that it was the party alone which was authorised to deal with problems relating to the political struggle of the working class. The Socialist MPs and the trade-union leaders should be bound by its instructions since they were members of the party. It was a case of needing to take action on a nationwide scale, action which was about as political as you can get.

Moreover, as a veritable orgy of false extremist positions swept the country, we had proof of how damaging it was to the party to be lacking a solid doctrinal platform. The great factory occupation movement of the time led to the mistaken notion that the Soviet, or workers' council, system as established in Russia, could be immediately extended to Italy; indeed even open adversaries of the revolutionary conquest of power talked about proclaiming it. But Lenin and the World Congresses had taken a very clear

stand on the issue, and stated that Soviets are not bodies which can coexist with the traditional State. On the contrary, they arise when an open struggle for power is taking place, when their function becomes that of replacing the executive and legislative organs of a bourgeois State teetering on the verge of collapse. But all this would be forgotten, and in the midst of general confusion and an absurd alliance between pacifists and revolutionaries, the movement would collapse into impotence.

The bourgeois leader Giolitti was much more clear-headed though. Despite the law allowing him to deploy troops to expel the workers occupying the industrial plants, and despite being spurred on to do so by the forces of the right and of nascent fascism, he purposely refrained from issuing such orders. The workers and their organisations, occupying factories which had come to a virtual standstill, didn't look as though they were about to burst out of the factories with arms in hand, attack the bourgeois forces, and occupy the State and police headquarters; hunger alone would be enough to undermine their untenable position. With Giolitti hardly needing to fire a single shot, the movement collapsed of its own accord. After a few isolated incidents, the bourgeois managers and bosses were soon back in charge of the factories and running them in exactly the same way as before. The storm had abated, and bourgeois power and privilege had escaped relatively unscathed.

The whole history of post-war Italy clearly shows that the proletarian struggle, even under favourable conditions, is doomed to failure unless it is led by a revolutionary party capable of settling the question of power in a radical way; a fact equally borne out by fascism's history.

It was the final bankruptcy of that system of ideas which rejects revolution as a means to gain political control of society; which rejects launching the attack on the bourgeois State and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat; which wishes to replace these measures with the petty delusion that workers will conquer and control the factories, and supposedly organise themselves into factory-councils which embrace the entire workforce, with no heed taken of political positions or party stand.

The Italian *Ordinovist* current had not yet gone so far as declaring the political party unnecessary since it broadly agreed with the Third International tactic of establishing contacts with other proletarian parties, even reformist and

opportunist ones, since it supported the idea of a class-front composed of manual workers, industrialists and the petty-bourgeoisie. But future events, and the triumph of opportunism within Italy and the Communist International, would show that the doctrine of self-sufficient factory councils (with their own little self-contained revolutions), was a very dangerous starting point; as indeed was the illusion that communist victory was assured as soon as individual enterprises had passed from the hands of the management into those of their employees. In fact, communism involves the reorganisation of the whole of human life, and the old productive model—to which the spontaneously arisen networks of trade-union and factory-based organisations subscribe—needs to be denounced, and then totally destroyed from top to bottom.

A Futile Return to Vacuous Formulas

The great Russian tragedy has been accompanied at every stage of its involution by attempts to breathe life into new forms of proletarian organisation. And this in despite of the fact that *political party and dictatorship of the proletariat* were considered central factors by the great pioneers of the October Revolution; central to their immense organisational effort which carried them to the forefront of the proletarian, anti-capitalist, advance which menaced capitalism at the end of the First World War.

No useful contribution towards a theoretical and practical revival of the class movement will ever emerge from an anxious mistrust about the Party- and State-forms of organisation. These are forms which are absolutely indispensable if the relations of class domination are to be overturned once and for all. The childish objection to these forms boils down to the idea that man is doomed by his very nature to resort to the exercise of power, whether defending the cause of forces within society (as part of a "hierarchical" system authorised to protect it), whether to defend the interests of individuals, or simply in order to satisfy an insatiable lust for power on the part of those who are invested with power within the party and the State.

Marxism demonstrates the non-existence of such a ridiculous fate; moreover, it states that the actions of individuals depend on forces developed by general, wider interests, and this is just as much when individuals react as single molecules of the mass acting in concert with others, as—and above all—when they are brought together into

groups, at crucial junctures in the historic struggle, by the general dynamics of society.

Either we read history as Marxists, or we relapse into scholastic masturbations which explain great events as due to monarchical maneuverings over hereditary claims and the transmission of the crown to heirs, or as the exploits of dashing buccaneers, urged on to perform great exploits in the quest for personal glory and posthumous immortality!

For us, and for Marx, it is just not possible for the lone individual, taking conscious foresight as his starting point, to go out and “mould” society and history in conformity with his motive will. And this goes not only for the poor devil of a molecule floundering about in the social magma, but even more so for kings and the queens, for those invested with high office and honours, for those with dozens of titles and initials after their names. It is indeed particularly these people who don’t know what they want, don’t achieve what they thought they would, and to whom, if you’ll excuse the noble expression, historical determinism reserves its biggest kick up the backside. In fact, if you accept our doctrine, leaders are more puppets of history than anyone else.

When viewed in the context of a succession of productive forms, each one replacing the one before, it will be seen that all revolutions go through a particularly dynamic stage in which the combatants, who at this point appear as the expression of socially determined forces pushing them towards a greater good, will as a general rule put up with any number of sacrifices and privations: there will be those, both in the ranks and in the higher profile roles, who will give up their lives, and their “hunger for power”, whilst obeying the still undeciphered forces which accompany the birth of every new social form.

In the final phase of each form, this social dynamism evaporates due to the fact that a new, opposed, social form is arising within the old. At this point there appears a conservative defence of the traditional form which tends to manifest itself as an underwriting of personal egoisms, individual belly-stuffing, and open corruption; bribe-takers, praetorians, feudal courtiers, debauched clerics, and the shady speculators and corrupt accountants of today’s bourgeois regime are some examples.

But even though capitalism’s hired thugs and scullery maids may be bogged down in a social mire of cynicism and existential arrogance, the work of defending capitalism

and preventing its collapse continues as before. The organised State and political party networks are strongly committed to this task, and at key historical junctures they have demonstrated that they are quite capable of welding themselves into a unified, centralised, counter-revolutionary force (and if you can see beyond all the bogus intellectual hypocrisy, this is clearly also the case in contemporary Britain, America and Russia, and not just in fascist Germany and Italy). And since they are aware that the source of our power is the knowledge we have of the “geological stratification” of the historical underground, they even try and steal that from us as well!

Us, of all people, should we really be so unwarlike as to dishonour the power and the form which this unstoppable energy of ours will have to assume, namely: the revolutionary party and the iron State of the dictatorship? Within these organisational structures particular individuals will hold certainly key positions, of course, but their duty, far from engaging in personal manoeuvring and secret intrigues and conspiracies, will be to rigorously abide by the tasks which the historical process has set these organs of irreversibly revolutionising the economic and social forms.

The assertion by certain organisations, different from the party, that they can *guarantee* against the degeneration of leaders, or other official appointees, is tantamount to a repudiation of our entire doctrinal edifice.

In fact the network of “leaders” and “hierarchs” in these organisations is the same as in the party, and in general it isn’t even solely composed of workers. And even if they were, history has taught us the unhappy truth that the ex-worker who leaves his job to work in the trade-union bureaucracy is generally more likely to betray his class than somebody originating from the non-proletarian classes. Examples? We could provide thousands of them.

This entire palinode is generally presented as a move towards, an establishing of tighter bonds, of closer links, with the “masses”. But who are the masses? They are the working class when deprived of historic energy, i.e. without a party to set them on the historic revolutionary path; a class, therefore, tied to and *resigned to its state of subjection* and tied to the way it happens to be distributed throughout the bourgeois social organism. And in certain historic situations, the masses may include also the *semi-proletarian* layers which have overflowed from the labouring “class”.

Our approach to this issue, in total conformity with the dictates of the Marxist school, is to show that a dual historical moment occurs in such situations, and by making the proper distinction between the two aspects we can synthesise everything we have said before.

In the period before the bourgeois revolution proper breaks out, when feudal forms still need to be brought crashing down, as for example in Russia in 1917, elements amongst these still un-proletarianized “people” confront the power of the State and contest society’s leadership. At certain decisive moments these strata tend to side with the proletarian class, adding not only a numerical advantage, but also contributing a potentially revolutionary factor which can be used during the transitional phase; on condition, that is, that the party of the workers’ dictatorship has a clear historical vision, a powerful and autonomous organisation, and has guaranteed its hegemony by retaining close links with the proletarian class throughout the world. The situation changes when the revolutionary anti-feudal pressure subsides: the popular “framework” which encased the revolutionary and classist proletariat now becomes not only reactionary, but even more reactionary than the bourgeoisie itself. Now any steps to retain links with it lead to opportunism, to destruction of the revolutionary power, and to solidarity with capitalist conservatism. Today, throughout the whole of the “white world”, this principle is still valid.

The present Russian opportunists, in their mad dash towards a total repudiation of anything that smacks of revolution, have not—yet—dumped the party-form, but they still seek to justify each successive stage of their involution with an *Appeal to the Masses*, and every now and again to proclaim their solidarity with them.

No further *a posteriori* or historical evidence is required to show the sheer inconsistency of this hackneyed, insidious and irritating slogan, and the essential part it has played in the liquidation of the revolutionary party.

III

The Petty-Bourgeois Distortion of the Features of Communist Society in the “Syndicalist” and “Enterprise Socialist” Conceptions of the Proletarian Organisation

The Political Party is Irreplaceable

The view that the organisations formed by workers to conduct their struggles should be entirely structured around the production network of the bourgeois industrial economy—a view taken to its furthest extreme in Gramsci’s system and revived today by various anti-Stalinist groups—has proved to be entirely ineffectual in practice and invariably goes hand-in-hand with a failure to identify the fundamental differences between the economic structure of today and tomorrow: between the present capitalist society and the communist society which will take its place after the victory of the proletarian class. Any such theory therefore falls far short of the Marxist critique of the present capitalist economic system.

The anti-Stalinists, Stalinists, and 20th Congress post-Stalinists all make the same error. All of them share the illusion of a society in which the workers have defeated their employers at a local level, within their trade, or within their firm, but have remained trapped in the web of a surviving market economy. They don’t seem to realize that this market economy is the same thing as capitalism.

The features of a non-capitalist and non-mercantile society which emerge from a genuine Marxist analysis, resulting from a critical and scientific forecast which is free of any trace of utopianism, are only thoroughly understood and shaped into a programme by the political party of the working class. This is precisely because the party *doesn’t* slavishly adhere to the system of organisation which the capitalist world imposes on the producing class. Any hesitation about the necessity for the party and State forms leads to a complete loss of the Marxist movement’s programmatic conquests concerning the complete antithesis of the communist and capitalist forms; conquests thoroughly mastered by the party of the Marxist school. If we consider some key Marxist postulates, such as the abolition of the social and technical division of labour, meaning the break-

ing down of barriers between separate enterprises; the abolition of the conflict between town and country; and the social synthesis between science and practical human activity, we can immediately see that any “concrete” plan to organise proletarian action which sets out to mirror the structure of the present-day economic world is doomed to remain trapped within the characteristic limitations of today’s capitalist forms, and to be counter-revolutionary without even realising it.

The way to overcome this short-coming—which will involve many battles along the way—is through forming organisations which avoid modeling themselves on those drawn from the bourgeois world. These organisations are the proletarian party and the proletarian State, within which the society of tomorrow crystallizes in advance of its existence in a historical sense. Within those organisations which we define as “immediatist”, which copy and bear the physiological imprint of present-day society, all they can do is crystallize and perpetuate *this* society.

The “Commune” Form

It is a very strange fact that the libertarians, who around 1870 or so engaged in their polemics against Marx in the First International, and whose short-sightedness we have already referred to, are still widely considered to be “to the Left” of Marx. Actually, in spite of their verbal opposition to militarism and patriotism, they never grasped the importance of going beyond the purely national level when criticising bourgeois economy and studying how it spreads onto the global scale.

Marx described the formation of the international market as the ultimate and crowning historical task of the modern bourgeoisie; after that it only remained to fight to establish the proletarian dictatorship in the countries which were most advanced, and, after the destruction of the national states which arose alongside capitalism, an expansion onto an ever vaster scale of the power of the international proletarian class. The anarchist proposal, when not actually advocating unlimited autonomy for all individuals, whatever their class, was to destroy the capitalist State so as to replace it with small social units, the famous *communities of producers*, which after the collapse of the central government would supposedly be totally autonomous, even with respect to each other.

The rather abstract form of future society based on local “communes” doesn’t seem that different from today’s bourgeois society, and its economic procedures don’t seem that different either. Those who set out to describe this future society, such as Bakunin and Kropotkin, thought it enough merely to link it to a set of philosophical ideologies, rather than to an analysis of historically verified laws of social production. When they did take up Marx’s critique, it was only in the most minimal and selective way since they were unable to infer the conclusions implied by the theory: they were impressed by the concept of surplus-value (which is an economic theorem) but used it merely to support their moral condemnation of exploitation, which they saw as arising from human beings exerting “power” over each other. Unable to attain the theoretical level of dialectics, they were debarred from understanding, for instance, that in the transition from the appropriation of the physical product of the serf’s labour by the landowning lord to the production of surplus-value in the capitalist system, an actual “liberation” from more crushing forms of servitude and oppression has taken place; for even if the division into classes, and the existence of a State power, still remained a historical necessity, and benefited the bourgeois class, in that period it also *benefited the whole of the rest of society as well*.

One of the principal causes of the greater output of labour as a whole, and of the higher average remuneration for the same amount of labour, was the creation of the nationwide market and the division of productive labour into different branches of industry, with the latter enabled to exchange their fully and semi-worked products within a zone of free circulation of commodities, and increasingly impelled to extend this zone beyond the State boundaries.

This increase (fully condoning the Marxist view) in the wealth of the bourgeoisie and in the power of each of each of its states, and along with this the production of surplus-value, does not immediately mean that an absolute increase in the gross revenue extracted is at the expense of the lower classes. To a certain extent, it is still compatible with a lessening of the hours of labour and with a general improvement in the satisfaction of needs. Therefore, the idea of dismantling capitalism by breaking up the national State into little islands of power, characteristic of the pre-bourgeois Middle Ages, makes no sense at all. It would clearly be a retrograde step to force the economy back into these

limited confines, even if the sole aim were to prevent a few lazy, non-workers from appropriating any of the resources from each of the little communes.

In this system of egalitarian communes, it is certain that the cost of the daily food supply, calculated in terms of the hours of labour of *all* the adult members of the community (leaving aside the niggling question of those who didn't want to work, and who would compel them to do so!) would be more than if production was organised at the level of the nation, take modern France for instance, where there is a continuous and regular economic traffic between the different communes, and a given manufactured article is obtained from the places where it is produced with least difficulty; even if the "hundred families" still gobble everything up for free.

In fact, these various communes would have no option but to trade amongst each other on the basis of free exchange. And even if we admitted that a "universal consciousness" would suffice to peacefully regulate these relations between the different locally-based economic nuclei, there would still be nothing to prevent one commune extracting surplus-value from another due to a fluctuating equivalence between one commodity and another.

This imaginary system of little economic communes is nothing more than a philosophical caricature of that age-old petty-bourgeois dream *self-government*. It can easily be seen that this system is just as mercantile as the one which existed in Stalin's Russia or in the increasingly anti-proletarian post-Stalinist Russia, and it is equally clear that it involves a totally bourgeois system of monetary equivalents (without a State mint?!) which is bound to weigh down the average productive labourer far more than a system of national or imperialist, large-scale industries.

The "Trade Union" Form

So far, we have been elaborating the historico-political part of our criticism of the trade-unionist (or syndicalist) conception of the proletarian struggle. Using the bitter proof of past experience, we have highlighted the doctrinal insufficiency and the ineptitude of the formula "Trade unions versus the bourgeois State": a formula put forward with the intention of getting rid of not only the organ of political struggle, the party, but also the organ of social direction—as indispensable as it is historically transitory—represented by the revolutionary State which Marx envisaged.

According to the thinking of Sorel and his followers, the trade union is sufficient, on its own, to both lead the struggle, and to organise and manage the no-longer-capitalist proletarian economy. In this part, we will show that such a position makes sense only on the basis of an unhistorical and distorted vision of the characteristic features of the opposed form of production which will succeed bourgeois capitalism. Such a distorted vision, which will never be realized and nor can it be, survives only in the semi-bourgeois imagination; nourished by a certain hatred against the big bosses, it fails to see the depth of the antithesis which exists between today's society, and the one which will emerge from the proletarian victory.

A lot of confusion has always been caused by opportunism on the subject of what form the future society will take: we need only think of those political parties which, though considering themselves Marxist, would go so far as to declare that the formulation of such a historically final programme—which they called "maximal", not to contrast it with a programme which was immediate and "minimum", but rather to deride the necessity of attaining it—was entirely superfluous. For a long time we have fought to prove that the decisive features of such a programme have been known to us since the Marxist current first appeared, and we will need to continue to fight to prove it. But the vision of the imaginary socialism which will supposedly result from the victory of the trade union organisations over the capitalist bosses, and from the supposedly ensuing destruction and collapse of the bourgeois political State, is much more indefinite and vague than ours.

Throughout the history of the various socialist currents there has been—even in important texts—a great deal of confusing of co-operative forms—which are nothing but a derivation from pre-Marxist utopianism—with the socialist economic form. But this view of a society based on a network of co-operative producers we will examine later on when we describe the *factory council* current of socialism. As for the Sorelian syndicalist vision of the society subsequent to the collapse of capitalism, the first question we must ask ourselves is whether the fundamental unit of this society will be the small, locally based trade union, or the national, potentially international, trade union.

We should not forget that, within the framework of the organisations of economic defence which the working class formed at the end of the and beginning of the twentieth

centuries, there was one institution, chiefly in the Latin countries, which would excel in terms of dynamism and energy. In Italy, it was known as the *Camera del Lavoro* (tr. Trade Union Offices) and in France, less appropriately, it was called the *Bourse du Travail* (tr. Labour Exchange). Whilst the Italian denomination certainly reeks of bourgeois parliamentarism, the latter is worse in that it conveys the idea of a labour *market*, a place where workers are on sale to the highest bidder amongst the employers; it therefore gives the impression of being even further removed from the struggle to root out capitalist ideology.

Whereas individual trade unions and leagues, and even their national federations, being much less unitary and centralised, suffer the limitations of particular trade interests, which concern themselves with short-term, restricted demands, the chambers of labour of city and country, by developing solidarity amongst workers from different trades and workplaces, were more inclined to consider class problems at a deeper level. Even though the locally based nature of these organisations meant they couldn't completely free themselves of those defects which we examined earlier on (in our criticism of localist and "communalist" forms), real political problems were discussed there, not in the trite electoral sense, but in terms of revolutionary activity.

The Vigour of Inter-Syndical Forms

We could mention many episodes, which occurred in those post-world war Red Years, in which the specific and highly active organ of the chambers of labour, the *General Council of the Leagues*, rallied the Italian workers to mass movements and uprisings, often entirely bypassing the trade-union officials by openly issuing their appeals in the name of socialist and then communist groups.

In France during the first part of this century, the *Sûreté* was shivering in its boots at the wave of movements emanating from the *Bourses du Travail*. Without knowing it, the *Bourses'* were political organs of the struggle for power, but the reformist and sometimes even anarchist trade-union "bonzes" would take advantage of their local isolation and prevent the movement spreading to the national level (or, as in the case of the aborted strike called in defence of Red Russia, which was under attack from the bourgeois armies of the Entente, an international level).

In September, 1920, during the occupation of the factories, terror stricken bourgeois shopkeepers unrolled their

shutters allowing stocks of their consumer goods to be taken and pooled at the Chambers of Labour, who distributed them to the unemployed: involving the Chambers going well beyond a narrow trade-unionist concern with wages; under these circumstances, the supreme guardian of the established order, Prime Minister Giolitti, kept his cool and was clever enough not to indict us for larceny, as a rigorous observance of the law would have required.

In the subsequent fascist phase, it was not Mussolini's squads, which at that time were suffering a series of bloody defeats, but the regular armed forces of the State which were deployed to attack the workers (in Empoli, Prato, Sarzana, Parma and Ancona, artillery was used, in Bari, even the navy) and only after repeated assaults did they defeat the armed workers holding out in heavily fortified Chambers of Labour.

The August 1922 strike failed because this defence wasn't co-ordinated at a nationwide level, which only the newly formed Communist Party would attempt: once again the trade-union leaders and the Maximalist-reformist controlled Socialist Party managed to curb the movement in the main cities, where the fascist movement counted for nothing, having gained control only of Florence and Bologna; in Milan, Rome, Genoa, Turin, Venice, and Palermo, the workers would be brought, peacefully and legally, under their paralysing leadership. Therefore it is from August 1922, and not October, 1922, the date of the ridiculous "March on Rome", that we can really date the victory of Italian capitalism over the proletarian revolution, killed by the infamous opportunist plague—but enough about Italy.

Within the trade-union organisation network, therefore, we can see how each trade is totally impotent at both the local and national levels, and how the national leadership is controlled almost everywhere by the opportunist parties, whereas the only real centres of class activity are the old regional and city based inter-trade centres.

During the present phase of Stalinist opportunism, even this one, last, precious resource has been destroyed. And since the Chambers of Labour, as main venues for the hectic meetings of the most combative workers, no longer exist (traditionally, *thousands* of workers used to attend every evening, making it easy for decisions to reach the whole area by the next morning) today's horrible, rose-tinted union officials have replaced it with corridors full of

rows of bureaucratic counter windows, where each isolated, intimidated worker goes to ask what is due to him; or to accept orders from on high about some stupid, little action, so that he may later whisper around the orders, and bewail the latest castrated strike.

The Economic Function

Let us suppose the working class had defeated the established order by trade-union action alone, and that a new economic and productive activity had started to unfold after bourgeois control was eliminated. In the case of a city with a strong, centralised and closely linked trade-union organisation, such a hypothesis is perhaps least far from reality, but we are still left with the objections we made about the “communal” form; as to the possibility of attaining a definitive victory in a particular city or region without having achieved it in the neighbouring areas of the same country too.

In order, therefore, to understand what the Sorelians mean by trade-union management of the “future” economy (without repeating what we have already said about the illusion of a system of locally managed communes) we have to imagine a system of economic management which, in any given country (with our usual reservations about the negative prospects of a victory over capitalism limited to one country) assigns responsibility for the different branches of the economy to the leading bodies of the various national trade unions.

To clarify our point, let us imagine that the organisation of bread production, and of all other wheat-based products, is entrusted to the “Bakers’ Union”, with analogous arrangements for all other trades and industries. In other words, we have to imagine that all the products of a given branch of production have been placed at the disposal of large organisations resembling national trusts. Since all the capitalist managers would long since have been removed, these organisations would need to make decisions about how to utilise the entire product (in our example: bread, pasta etc.) in such a way as to receive, from other parallel organisations, not only what their members require for their personal consumption, but new raw materials, instruments of labour, etc, as well. Such an economy is an exchange economy, and it continues to be so whether or not the exchanges take place at the “higher”, or the “lower”, levels of the organisation. In the first case, exchange takes

place at the apex of the various sectors of production, each of which distributes the various products required for production and consumption down through its hierarchical structure. Here the system of exchange remains, *at its upper levels*, a mercantile one, that is, it requires some law of equivalence in order to equate the value of the *stocks* of one syndicate with another; and we can easily suppose that these syndicates would be very numerous, and just as easily suppose that each of them would need to separately negotiate with all the others. Let us not even ask *who* is to establish this system of equivalent values, or *what* would guarantee the “social atmosphere” within which all this fantastical independence and “equality” of the various producers’ unions, would take place. But let us be so “liberal” as to think it possible that the various equivalent values could be peacefully determined through a spontaneously arrived at equilibrium. A measuring system of such complexity couldn’t operate without the age-old expedient of a *general equivalent*, in other words, *money*, the logical measure of every exchange.

It is no less easy to conclude that the “higher” system would eventually break down into the “lower”, since it would be impossible to restrict the handling of money in such a society just to those top people entrusted with arranging the exchanges between one production trust and another (and here the word *syndicate* is entirely appropriate); inevitably this right would be extended to all trust members, to all trust workers, who would thus be empowered to “buy” whatever they wanted after receiving their quota of money from their particular trade syndicate: in other words, their wages, just like today, the only alleged difference being that it would be “undiminished” (as in Duhring, Lassalle et al.) by the bosses profit margin.

The bourgeois, liberal, illusion of a system of trade unions existing independently from one another, and free to negotiate the terms under which they part with their stock of (monopolised) products, is connected with the idea that each producer, having been remunerated with the “undiminished proceeds of his labour” (a nonsense ridiculed by Marx) would then be able to do whatever he liked with it in terms of the consumer goods he acquired. And here is the rub: that these “free producers’ economies” are shown to be just as far removed from the social economy, which Marx called socialism and communism, as capitalism, if not further.

In the socialist economy, it is *not* the individual who makes decisions about production (what is to be produced, and how much) or about consumption, but society, the *human species* as a whole. Here is the essential point. The independence of the producer is just another of those vacuous, democratic stock-phrases which achieve precisely nothing. In the present society, the wage-earning worker, the slave of capital, may not be an independent producer, but he is independent as a consumer, insofar as (within a certain quantitative limit which *isn't* determined by sheer hunger as Lassalle's "iron law of wages" maintains, but which increases to a certain extent as bourgeois society expands) he can spend his wage-packet on whatever he wants.

In bourgeois society, the proletariat produces whatever the capitalist requires (or put in a more generalised and scientific way whatever the general laws of the capitalist mode of production require; whatever the inhuman monstrosity of capital requires) but as far as his own consumption is concerned, although restricted in terms of quantity, the proletariat can consume whatever, and however, he likes. In socialist society, individuals will *not* be free to make "independent" choices regarding what productive activities they take part in, and what they consume, as both these spheres will be dictated by society, and in the interests of society. By whom? is the inevitable stupid question. To which we unhesitatingly reply: in the initial phase it will be the "dictatorship" of the revolutionary proletariat class, whose only organ capable of arriving at a *prior understanding* of the forces which will then come into play is the revolutionary party; in a second historical phase, society as a whole will exert its will spontaneously through a diffused economy, which will have abolished both the *independence* of classes and of individual persons, in all fields of human activity.

The Same Old Controversy

At each step of the way our discussion has turned up formulas which appear rather strange. As a result, we feel obliged to stop every now and again, and patiently explain that our clearly defined school of Marxism has abided by these formulas for more than a century. But we are also keen to explain that it is not only the Stalinists and the rickety semi-Stalinists currently in power who make us sick, but also the anti-Stalinists, currently swarming around like

a plague of locusts who simply echo the corrected and "enriched" *old-fashioned* Marxism of their alleged opponents, and who are content instead to break their lances on the violators of "autonomy", attributing to such violations the constant succession of revolutionary defeats.

And what have these restless inventors of *the latest* formula come up with now? In one of the periodicals of the highly eclectic *quadrifoglio* (a federation of small groups claiming allegiance to the communist left) we see nothing other than the republished writings (from 1880—1890) of Francesco Saverio Merlino, the "libertarian socialist": early propagator of an ultra-rancid recipe which is still being cooked up today, in an eclectic variety of sauces, by a whole brood of little newspapers who have perched outside Palmiro Togliatti's window to provoke him with their naughty twitterings; but what they have failed to understand, when it comes to this particular recipe, is that good old Palmiro is a *masterchef*! Compared to him they are just a bunch of scullery boys. And here is the recipe: salvation lies in grafting the values of Socialism onto those of Liberty!

Today we are told that the weird ideas of old Merlino, the valiant saviour from Marxism and revolutionary science, were triumphantly applied not only in Russia in 1905, and 1917 (!), but in the 1956 Polish and Hungarian uprisings, and even during the so-called Yugoslavian "experience".

Merlino's formulas are mainly drawn from an article he wrote about the 1891 "Erfurt Programme". Not bad as an example for modernizers, these old formulas simply revive the notorious confusion—dispelled by the Marxist school in the post-World War I years—of the nonsensical "popular free State" which the German Social Democrats proposed with Marx's powerful central tenet of the proletariat *dictatorship*; having failed to take into account that it was on this very issue, after 1875, that Marx and Engels were on the verge of disowning the German socialists. We will come onto that later. Meanwhile, here are a few excerpts from Merlino's article: "The power to direct, to manage, and to administrate the socialist society must belong not to a mythical 'People's and Workers' State', but to the *mutually confederated workers associations* themselves." "Shall we commit everything to one central power, or allow the workers' associations the right to organise themselves *as they like*, taking possession of the instru-

ments of labour?” “We do not want a central government or administration, which would constitute the most exorbitant of autocracies, but properly and freely confederated workers’ organisations.”

These formulas suit us well insofar as we can show how perfectly they express the thinking of Togliatti, Khrushchev, and Tito and co., and how perfectly they express the exact opposite of what we are fighting for. Let all *associated* and *confederated* anti-Stalinist groups take up their places beside them.

For them, their ultimate heart-felt cry is always “bureaucratic centralism, or class autonomy?” If such indeed were the antithesis, instead of Marx and Lenin’s “capitalist dictatorship or proletarian dictatorship”, we would have no hesitation about opting for bureaucratic centralism (oh, horror of horrors!), which at certain key historical junctures may be a necessary evil, and which would be easily controllable by a party which didn’t “haggle over principles” (Marx), which was free from organisational slackness and tactical acrobatics, and which was immune to the plague of autonomism and federalism. As to “class autonomy”, all we can say is that it is complete and utter crap. The socialist society is one in which classes have been abolished. Even if we concede that under a regime of class domination the dominated class may advance the demand for independence as a form of protest, in a society without a capitalist class, ‘independence’ can only signify a struggle between one set of workers and another, between one confederation and another, between different trade unions, between different sets of “producers”. Under socialism, producers are no longer a distinct and separate part of society.

Each association in possession of “its own” instruments of labour, and producing in “its own” way, does not socialism make! Instead it substitutes class struggle, whose ultimate aim is dictatorship, with the absurd *bellum omnium contra omnes*: the war of all against all; a historical outcome which, fortunately, has proved to be as fruitless as it is absurd.

Slaves would be in a position of “class autonomy” if they were to declare “we are happy to remain slaves, but we want to decide what food to serve to our masters at table, and which of our daughters they can take to their beds!” Even the Christian position was thousands of times more revolutionary than that, for although it didn’t herald a

classless society, it did nevertheless clearly proclaim: “no difference between slaves and free men”.

The concepts expressed here are all to be found, word for word, in Marx’s writings as we will now proceed to demonstrate.

Unforgettable Words

The syndicalist and labourist currents—all of which we prefer to call “immediatist” because they confuse dialectically distinct moments of current organisation, historical development and revolutionary theory—would like to restrict the entire historic cycle of the proletarian class to a simple enrollment of the workers in particular factories, trades or other small isolated sectors, and they base everything on this cold, lifeless model. And therein lies their fundamental error. Marxist determinism, on the other hand, destroys the bourgeois fiction of “the individual”, “the person”, “the citizen”, and reveals that the philosophical attributes of this mythical entity are nothing but a universalization and eternalization of the relations which benefit the individual member of the modern ruling class, the bourgeois, the capitalist, the owners of land and money, the merchant. Having turned this wretched idol, the individual, on its head, Marxism replaces it with the economic *society*, which is “temporarily a national society”.

All immediatists—that is to say, all those who have travelled only a thousandth of the distance separating them from the level of communist thought—want to get rid of society and put in its place a particular group of workers. This group they choose from the confines of one of the various prisons which constitute the bourgeois society of “free men” i.e. the factory, the trade, the territorial or legal patch. Their entire miserable effort consists in telling the non-free, the non-citizens, the *non-individuals* (such is the great idea with which the bourgeois revolution unconsciously inspires them) to envy and imitate their oppressors: be independent! free! be citizens! people! In a word: be bourgeois!

For us, the objective is not simply to take one of the existing groups from the present social set-up and attribute to it functions which already exist under capitalism; our goal is a *non-capitalist society*. Such is the abyss which separates us from these petty little groups with their endless bickering. Confronted with the abortive results of their theories, they witter on about a new autocracy, a bureaucratic

centre, an oppressive leadership having been created, and that in order to avoid this, that all-powerful, impersonal entity—society—will have to be broken up into lots of “autonomous” fragments, free to ape the ignoble (and, furthermore, already obsolete) bourgeois models.

Go ahead and say it, but at least be open about it like Merlino. Go and place Karl Marx with the autocrats, the oppressors, the corrupters of the proletarian class; and with Lenin, it goes without saying, though Merlino didn't know him.

Antonio Labriola would agree with Merlino though when he protested against the idea of Lassalle (an immediatist *par excellence*) of “paving the way to the solution of the social question by establishing producers' co-operatives with the help of the State under the democratic control of the working people”. This ghastly sentence would actually find its way into the Gotha Programme (1875), and only didn't appear in the 1891 Erfurt Programme due to Engel's tough interventions.

In texts which were kept hidden away for fifteen years, Marx, and Engels as well, tore this despicable formulation into shreds, and in so doing they offered—in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*—the most classic dialectical construction of future society ever; in those pages they smashed to pieces not only the immediatist concept of the State as foster-mother to the working class, but every federalism and particularism, every distorted notion of “autonomous spheres of economic organisation.” Let us then look at these texts, complimented by Lenin's masterly commentary, and prove it once more.

Almost suffocated as we are today by all these damn “questions of structure”, “problems to be solved” and “ways to be paved”, let us breathe in some vital oxygen from those pages left to grow yellow in Bebel's desk drawer.

“The existing class struggle is discarded in favour of the hack phrase of a newspaper scribbler—‘*the social question*’, for the solution of which one ‘paves the way’. Instead of being the result of the revolutionary process of social transformation in society, the ‘socialist organisation of the total labour’ (in a previous passage, Marx had already pulverised another idiotic expression still much used today—“emancipation of labour”—whereas he always talks of *the working class*) ‘arises’ from ‘state aid.’”

A few lines on, Marx derides the formula of democratic control of the working people, “a working people which in presenting the State with demands such as these is expressing full awareness of the fact that it neither rules nor is mature enough to rule!”

But the passage from the same text which shows what is, for us Marxists, the form of tomorrow's society is this: “The workers' desire to create the conditions for cooperative production on a social and, by beginning at home, at first on a national scale, means nothing beyond that they are working to revolutionise the present conditions of production; it has nothing in common with the foundation of cooperative societies with State aid!”

On the Scale of Society as a Whole

This passage, along with many similar ones, is enough to establish that anyone who sinks from the “level of society”, which at a certain historical point *prior* to the conquest of power coincides with the “national level”, down to federal/trade-union levels (municipal, individual enterprise level, or worse still), falls into immediatism, betrays Marxism, and lacks any conception of communist society: in other words, they are nothing to do with the revolutionary struggle.

As to the other cyclopean antithesis between the “revolutionary transformation of society” and the “socialist organisation of labour”, it could equally be addressed to Moscow's *builders of socialism*, just so we can look them in the eyes and say the transition to socialism is not something you contract out to a *building* firm. Marx, who weighed his words carefully (just as Lenin *re-weighed* them), would never have dreamed of using such a crassly bourgeois and vulgarly voluntaristic expression as “building socialism”.

We won't recall here Marx's famously pointed criticism of the *Popular Free State* which were later re-echoed by Lenin before millions of people, no longer from the confines of a study, but under the blazing skies of the greatest revolution in history! And how much more miserable are they who have ignored the lesson for the second time! The freer the State, the more it crushes the working class to protect capitalism! We don't want to free the State, we want to put it in chains, and then strangle it. And with words such as these the *anti-statism* of the various Bakunin's and the Merlino's is sent back where it belongs:

to take up its place among the clownish parodies of political thought. In place of the anti-State—and this is the height of dialectical thinking!—will be put the new State (Engels), whose *purpose will not be freedom, but repression*, but which will need to arise only to finally die once and for all, having attained the abolition of classes. The *Popular Free State* and *class autonomy* are well-suited and we hope they'll be very happy together! They are both nothing but forms of the *immediatist impotence*, and *immance* of bourgeois thought.

As to the fundamental concept of a “unitary” society in place of the antithesis between capitalists and proletarians—between producers and consumers too—it is worth tracing the evolution of this idea as it appeared in the various, highly criticised, programmes of the German party. It was the Lassalean programme (Leipzig, 1863) which contained the formula which Marx felt obliged to lash out at: elimination of class antagonisms, whereas Marx would say that *classes themselves* needed to be eliminated, and the *means* of achieving that was precisely through the antagonism which existed between them.

The programme of the “Marxists” (Eisenach, 1869), which Marx judged to have been drawn up without taking into account the theoretical conquests of the socialist movement, demanded the ending of class rule and the wages-system, but spoke still of the “undiminished proceeds of labour” to be given to each worker, and of an organisation of labour to be formed on the basis of cooperativism (but without State aid).

The Gotha programme, which was drawn up in 1875 after the highly disapproved of fusion between Eisenachians and Lassalleans, and which remained unaltered in spite of Marx's severe criticisms, talks about the instruments of labour becoming “the common property of the whole of society.” Marx's only criticism of this phrase was that the expression “promotion of the instruments of labour into the common property” ought obviously to read their “conversion into the common property.” We assume that Marx's correction here was intended to combat *activism*.

The Erfurt programme, influenced by Engel's suggestions, which had been largely accepted after the publication of the critique of the Gotha programme, is clear on this point: “Transformation of capitalist property into social property, and *transformation of the production of commodi-*

ties into socialist production, to be carried out *by society and for society.*”

We can therefore draw certain conclusions about the doctrine which prompted the vision of a “society in which production is managed by workers' trade-unions”: firstly, it doesn't constitute a historic foreshadowing of proletarian science; secondly, it won't ever come about in reality—unless socialist science itself springs a leak, and Marx, Engels, Lenin and all the rest of us sink without a trace—and thirdly, it doesn't have anything to do with the socialist and communist forms, not even as a transitory phase.

It is a scheme in which production and distribution do not attain the social, or even “national”, level, since it is the “freely confederated” or “confederately free” trades unions who have the instruments and products of labour at their disposal, and who are free to do with them whatever they like. And even if these sectional organisations did manage to shut themselves off within their respective “independent” spheres of production, a competitive struggle would inevitably follow and lead to physical confrontations, especially given the “absence” of any kind of State.

In this fictitious programme, not only production is not carried out *by society for society*, but by trade unions for trade unions, but *commodities* continue to be produced; meaning that production is still *non-socialist*, since each article of consumption transferred from one trade-union to another does so as a commodity, and since this cannot occur without the existence of a monetary equivalent, it is necessarily transferred, as such, to each individual producer. As is always the case in these utopias of undiminished labour, the wage-system still survives, and the accumulation of capital in the hands of the autonomous trades unions, and eventually into those of private individuals, also survives. If our critique has relied largely on a “*reductio ad absurdum*” approach, it is entirely the petty-bourgeois content of all these various utopias which is to blame!

We'll finish this doctrinal part by taking another passage from *Critique of the Gotha programme*, directing it at both the “immediatists” and, the “State capitalists” to remind them that the task of our indispensable proletarian dictatorial State is not to liberate capital, but to repress it, along with those who defend it whether they be bourgeois, petty-bourgeois, or even proletarian (that is those enslaved by bourgeois or lumpen-bourgeois tradition). It is a passage which Marx wrote to ridicule the “minimalist” proposal of

a “single progressive income tax” (as it exists today in Russia): “Income tax presupposes varied sources of income for varied social classes, and HENCE CAPITALIST SOCIETY.”

The Russian Experience and Lenin

In the period between the 1920 and the 1921 international communist congresses, a debate took place at the 10th congress of the Russian party (3–16 March, 1921) with the so-called “workers’ opposition” (we’ve covered this topic in greater depth elsewhere in our study of Russia). We should remark that the oppositional stance put up by the Italian Left in 1920-21 (see our publication *La Question Parlementaire dans L’Internationale Comuniste*) was very different from the line of this opposition, which was harshly defined by Lenin as a “syndicalist and anarchist deviation within our party.”

One of the many falsifications of Stalin’s *Brief History of the Communist Party* was lumping Trotsky in together with these “workerists” simply because he happened to be engaged in a debate regarding the tasks of the trade unions. In fact, Trotsky was completely on Lenin’s side at that stage, and the genuinely Marxist proposal he made was that the trade unions should be absolutely subordinated to the proletarian State and Party (a party which, back in 1921, he did not consider—and neither did we—as having degenerated).

The “workers’ opposition” based themselves on the *immediatist* conception of socialist economy and on the false and naïve opinion that socialism can be established in any place, at any time, as long as the workers are left alone and allowed to get on with managing the economy by themselves. Lenin reports the main “thesis” of the workers’ opposition as: “The organisation of the management of the national economy is the function of an All-Russia Congress of Producers organised in industrial unions which shall elect a central body to run the whole of the national economy of the Republic.”

You can bet that if Nikita Khrushchev pushes on with his *Sovnarkos* any further, it won’t be long before *he* revives this old idea but in an even worse form: but with regional unions instead of national unions of producers. Instead of considering the conquering and the gaining of control over a national territory as merely a springboard for the achievement of further international conquests (a cardinal

rule of Marxism) these people make a point of rushing off to set up organisations at the local and regional levels instead; persisting in their mad pursuit of *autonomy* when all they’ll end up with will be *autonomous capitalist enterprises*.

Although we don’t propose to undertake a detailed description of Russian economic management at this point (we have covered it in depth in other party texts) it is worth pointing out that it was at this same congress, in his classic speech *The Tax in Kind*, that Lenin showed that it was not the transition to socialism which was on the agenda, but the transition to State-capitalism or even, for those who can see these things in a Marxist way, from an atomised form of production to private capitalism. This was a powerful clarification of doctrinal matters which would set everything straight, whereas the vile opportunism which followed would throw everything into confusion again.

It is important to show that the arguments Lenin used against the proponents of a producer-managed economy are exactly the same as the ones used by Marx and Engels, which we continue to use today against the latest syndicalist and anarchist distortions—which are emerging even amongst groups who never supported Stalin, Togliatti or Thorez, or for that matter even Khrushchev (though they like Tito, considering him as one of their “forerunners”!).

The *Producers’ Unions* meet the same sorry fate in Lenin’s writings as Lassalle’s *cooperatives* do in Marx’s.

“Ideas which are completely false from the theoretical point of view... complete break with Marxism and communism... contradiction with the experience of all semi-proletarian revolutions (take note!) and the current proletarian revolution.” Those are a few of the things Lenin said about them, and here are some more quotes from the debates at the 10th Congress of the Russian Party.

“First, the concept ‘producer’ combines proletarians with semi-proletarians and small commodity producers, thus radically departing from the fundamental concept of the class struggle and from the fundamental demand that a precise distinction be drawn between classes” [take note again! and compare this with the blasphemies of Stalin, of the 20th congress, of the enthusiastic defenders of the latest movements in Hungary and Poland].

“flirting with, relying on the party-less masses [take note Barbarists! and other demagogues preaching to empty halls!] is an equally radical departure from Marxism.”

Can this be the same Lenin speaking who, according to certain diehard Stalinists, discovered the invaluable resource of “diving into the masses”!?

“Marxism teaches (here Lenin refers to statements issued at previous world congresses) that only the political party of the working class, i.e., the Communist Party, is capable of uniting, training, and organising a vanguard of the proletariat and of the whole mass of the working people that alone will be capable of withstanding the inevitable petty-bourgeois vacillations of this mass and the inevitable traditions and relapses of narrow craft unionism or craft prejudices among the proletariat.”

This passage emphasises the inferiority of all the immediate organizations with respect to the political party, as well as the serious risks which these organizations take due to their historically inevitable contact with the semi-proletarian and petty-bourgeois classes. Lenin once again concludes by saying: “*without the political direction of the party, the proletarian dictatorship is impossible*”

In this same text Lenin denies that the 1919 programme of the Russian party had ever conceded the function of economic management to the trade unions. Certainly a few sentences from that programme spoke about the management of the whole of the national economy as “a single economic entity”, and of the “indissoluble ties between the central State administration, the national economy and the broad masses of working people” as a target to be achieved, on condition that the trade unions “divest themselves of the narrow craft-union spirit, and embrace the majority and eventually all of the working people.”

Trade Unions and State Capitalism

The question of the trade unions and centralised State economic management would be back on the agenda in Russia, and indeed in the rest of the world, because it constitutes a modern, convenient expedient for the capitalism of every country, especially in the United States.

The “Leninist” criterion for dealing with this problem is that the trade unions lag far behind the revolutionary party, and if left to their own devices fall prey to petty-bourgeois weaknesses and collaboration with the bourgeois economy.

In Russian society between 1919 and 1921, with industrialisation at its lowest point, the first, faltering steps were being taken in managing of industry which had recently

been wrenched from the hands of private capitalism. At this stage it was clear that the Communist Party could establish a strong and reliable foothold in the industrial workers’ unions as long as these were not autonomous, but solidly influenced by the party itself, and, as Trotsky rightly maintained in 1926, as long as they were considered as parts and organs of the centralized State.

In order to understand this problem more clearly, we need to bear in mind that throughout this period we are witnessing not the creation of a socialist industry and economy, but rather a process of nationalisation. Industries, which have been taken from the private owners and trusts without awarding compensation, are managed by the State within an economic system which is still shaped by commercial transactions and individual enterprises. No matter how socialist this government may be in terms of its class base and its foreign policy, the industrial system of this society is still to be defined as State-capitalist, and not socialist. We do not need to rely on later developments in the Russian economy in order to define this economy as State-capitalist. The State loses its socialist-political, and class, content, when it is no longer dedicated to spreading revolution to other bourgeois States; because it contracts war alliances with them; because within the bourgeois States it establishes alliances with bourgeois and democratic parties, even to the extent of sharing political power; because it subordinates, within Russia, the interests of city and country proletarians to those of the petty-bourgeoisie and the peasant classes.

It is therefore worth asking ourselves what role do trade unions occupy during the State-capitalist stage. If the State is ruled by a party which not only doesn’t carry out the policies of the world proletarian revolution but opposes them, then labour power is obviously still being dealt with within the framework of a mercantile-commercial system based on money and wages, and the existence of trade unions as organized bodies for the defence of the conditions of labour (whose opponent—whose boss—is precisely the employer State) is therefore justified. But even in such circumstances as these, dividing up the centralised running of the State amongst the different trade unions is not a useful formula. What is required is that the trade unions accept the leadership of a proletarian political party capable of resolving the question of the conquest of central power. If such a party does not exist, or where it only exists

as an empty shell turned into an instrument in the hands of the capitalist State (as in Russia), then there must have been a relapse into the system of wage slavery; a situation which will never be resolved through the efforts of autonomous groups of workers aiming to seize control of separate sectors of production, and through the stupid scheme of “redoing” the *liberal* revolution (in fact precisely such an empty manoeuvre is currently being adopted in Russia by Khrushchev’s State). Moreover, if these sectors of production should break away and generally disintegrate, they would fall into the hands of private capitalism, or at any rate into the long, grasping hands of international capital.

In the contrary situation—the decidedly progressive stage of State capitalism, in which the central political power strives to carry out the historic work of spreading the international revolution—trade unions, unless they end up as defeatist organisations which have to be repressed, must be prepared to learn from the class party, the authentic party of the industrial wage-earners of the entire world, how to obtain from the class of factory workers (of whose courage and self-sacrifice history has given numerous inspiring examples) their contribution of labour, surplus-labour and surplus-value for the revolution, for the civil war, for the red armies of every country, for ammunition to be used in a social class conflict which overrides all borders and frontiers. Even in such historic circumstances as these, for the trade unions to claim the undiminished proceeds of labour would not only be anti-economic and anti-social, but defeatist too with regard to the terrible task which history has assigned to the class of pure wage-earners, and to that class alone: that of bring about the bloody delivery of the new society.

This task—the end point of centuries and centuries of tortured history—is exactly contrary to the dreams and superstitions of the “immediatist” school of book-keepers and second-hand dealers, each generation of which wants to get its stunted hands on the advantages it would reap from “*autonomously confederating*”.

The Factory-Based Form

After our detailed examination of the “immediatist” vision of a post-capitalist society managed by the trade unions, all the defects of the “factory council” form can be clearly seen.

The Italian Left current sounded the alarm when the first symptoms of faith in this revived myth took shape: at the time of the FIAT “shop-stewards” congresses held in Turin and of Antonio Gramsci’s review *Ordine Nuovo* (*New Order*). The latter we both admonished and welcomed at the same time insofar as it bravely and resolutely entered the field against the Menshevik opportunism of the traditional Italian trade unions and against the inconsistency of the Socialist Party which, back in 1919, was claiming to be pro-Bolshevik.

Gramsci was then at the beginning of his ideological evolution—an evolution which he never dissimulated as the peculiar clearness of this man required—having passing from idealistic philosopher and war-interventionist to the anti-defencist Marxism restored by Lenin, and he gave his journal an honest title. He didn’t talk of political rule by the new class, or the new class-State, and only slowly did he accept the Marxist principles concerning the dictatorship of the party, and those concerning the influence of the Marxist view on factual relations occurring in the human and natural world outside the narrow limits of mere factory-economics. He openly admitted this at the 1926 congress of the Italian Communist Party in Lyon. We will always prefer those who learn new chapters of Marxism to those who forget them. In 1919, Antonio Gramsci was just emerging from an evaluation of the October Revolution which detected in it a reversal of determinism; as the miracle of the human will violating adverse economic conditions. Later on, seeing Lenin—the *miracle maker*—defend Marxist determinism in its strictest form, didn’t fail to have an effect on him: both master and pupil were outstanding.

The factory system appealed to Gramsci’s nimble spirit and he became besotted with its ideal, quasi-literary, even artistic, construction. And he was right to call it the New Order insofar as it encompassed the idea of the factory proletariat setting up, on its immediate foundation, a New Order, resembling those which existed prior to the liberal revolution, such as the three estates of pre-1789 French society. This is not surprising: all the “immediatists” which we have reviewed so far have done nothing but translate the claim of a dictating class that *suppresses* classes, and which doesn’t even aspire to be the One Class, into a pedestrian request to be raised to the Fourth Estate. The immediatist can’t help but passively design the New on the template of the Old. Antonio would call his brand of immediatism

“concretism”, having derived this word from the attitudes of bourgeois-intellectual enemies of the revolution: he didn’t realise, and there wasn’t much we could do make him realise, that “concretism” equals counter-revolution.

If humanity had had to rely on the immediatists, it would never have known that the earth is round and that it moves, that air has weight, that Epicurus’s atoms exist, that the recently discovered subatomic particles exist; it would never have known about Galileo’s and Einstein’s theories of relativity.... And it could never have forecast any social revolution, past or future.

Antonio did not know (and not through any lack of reading ... he had the misfortune of being one of those people who read everything) that the concept of “Orders” had been left behind as early as 1847 when Marx wrote about it in his anti-Proudhonist book, *Poverty of Philosophy*: “Can it be supposed that after the collapse of ancient society there will be a new class rule, expressing itself in a new political power? NO.” (If only our many contradictors had just read this one monosyllable)

But why not?

Because “the redemption of the working class consists in the abolition of all classes, in the same way as the redemption of the Third Estate, of the bourgeois Order, consisted in the abolition of all estates, of all Orders.”

Many generations have come and gone, three Internationals have lived and died. We have seen hundreds of people shuffle off this mortal coil who thought they could go one better than Marx and Lenin, without even attaining the level of that incorruptible bourgeois, Maximilien Robespierre: who for 160 years has lain under the tombstone marking the death of all New Orders!

Marxism and “Council Economy”

Out text demonstrates the irreconcilable antithesis between Marxism and Gramscism. This is a subject which interests us not so much because of the history of the polemics between him and us, but because there are groups of confused anti-Stalinists and squalid epigones who still want to revive these positions.

The independent, local enterprise is the smallest social unit which we can think of, being limited both by the nature of its particular trade and the local area. Even if we concede, as we did earlier, that it was somehow possible to eliminate privilege and exploitation from within such an

enterprise by distributing to its workers that elusive “total value of the labour”, still, outside its own four walls, the tentacles of the market and exchange would continue to exist. And they would continue to exist in their worst form at that, with the plague of capitalistic economic anarchy infecting everything in its path. But this party-less and State-less system of councils prompts the question—who, before the elimination of classes is accomplished, is going to manage the functions which are not strictly concerned with the technical side of production? And, to consider only one point, who is going to take care of those who are not enrolled in one of these enterprises—what about the unemployed? In such a system, and much more so than in any other cell-based commune or trade union system, it would be possible for the cycle of accumulation to start all over again (supposing it had ever been stopped) in the form of accumulation of money or of huge stocks of raw materials or finished products. Within this hypothetical system, conditions are particularly fertile for shrewdly accumulated savings to grow into dominating capital.

The real danger lies in the individual enterprise itself, not in the fact it has a boss. How are you going to calculate economic equivalents between one enterprise and another, especially when the bigger ones will be stifling the smaller, when some will have more productive equipment than others, when some will be using “conventional” instruments of production and others nuclear powered ones? This system, whose starting point is a fetishism about equality and justice amongst individuals, as well as a comical dread of privilege, exploitation and oppression, would be an even worse breeding ground for all these horrors than the present society.

In fact, is it so difficult to believe that those big words, “privilege” and “exploitation”, are excluded from the Marxist lexicon? Let’s look at *Critique of the Gotha Programme* again. The passage which really makes Marx spit blood, containing as it does some Lassalleian rubbish about the “Free State” and the “iron law of wages”, ends with what Marx (and Engels in another passage) call “the indefinite concluding phrase of the paragraph”; here it is: “The party strives for the abolition of *exploitation* in every form and for the removal of all social and political equality.”

Here, according to Marx and Engels, is what they should have said instead: “With the abolition of class dis-

inctions, all forms of social and political inequality arising from them will disappear of their own accord.”

This scientific way of talking—not to mention the long critical note on the equal distribution formula, which is compared to the bourgeois insinuation that socialism cannot abolish poverty but only generalize it to everybody—is enough in itself to dispose of a whole gamut of reviews and articles which—alas!—are being written, in the years 1956–7, about the *content of socialism* as a *philosophy of exploitation*.

In the same passage Marx also deals with the limitations of Lassalle’s vision—which, significantly, he links to Malthusian theories, today restored to life by the American, anti-Marxist “welfarist” schools—according to which socialism is roused to action only inasmuch as the workers’ wages are frozen at too low a level; whereas in fact it is a matter of abolishing wage-labour because “it is a system of slavery—a slavery which becomes more severe in proportion as the social forces of labour productivity develop, *whether or not the worker is paid well, or badly.*”

Here Marx develops a historical parallel with the slave-economy (one we touched on earlier when discussing the idiotic demand for wage-earners’ autonomy): “it is as if, among slaves who have finally got behind the secret of slavery and broken out in rebellion, one slave, still in thrall to obsolete notions, were to inscribe on the programme of rebellion [an immediatist, *Ordinovist*, non-Marxist slave we should say]: slavery must be abolished because the feeding of slaves in the system of slavery cannot exceed a certain low maximum!”

To the “welfarist” gentlemen we say: even if capitalism could increase average living standards to the umpteenth degree, we reiterate to you our historic prediction: capitalism’s death!

The standards offered by the great FIAT industrial plants appeared to Gramsci as a noble order when compared to the sad and brutalised existence of the Sardinian shepherd, worse than the Fourth Estate even.

In the Five Year Plan—fashioned on the pattern of the economy of the Soviet Union—which we presented to the great FIAT, we forecast for 1956 a 15.7% increase in sales over 1955, up from 310 billion to 358 billion lira. Although only 340 billions have been announced, the nominal capital has been raised from 76 to 100 billions, which is to say, by 32% in two years.

Can it be that the *new order*, in Turin and Moscow, is already beginning to display less brilliant *curves*?

A Few Concluding Remarks

We have concentrated on comparing the socialist and Marxist vision of future society with the “vision” of the immediatists (i.e. those who distrust the State-form and the Party-form seen by Marx, Lenin and ourselves as the essential prerequisites of revolution), but we haven’t yet stopped, although we’ve flicked through the “Marginal Notes” part of the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, to examine the fundamental difference between the lower and higher stages of socialism, classically reinstated by Lenin.

The obvious superiority of the economic system in which production and distribution is not performed by “autonomous units” on the pattern of the present capitalist “concentration camps” (based around jobs, enterprises, and various jurisdictions including the nation—whose barbed wire fences we will forcibly remove one of these days) but *by society, for society, and on a social scale*, is already apparent in the lower of the two stages theorised by Marx.

In the *lower* stage of socialism class differences have still not been eliminated; the State can’t be abolished yet; still the pathological traditions of a society divided into Orders, up to the third and last, survive; the city and country are still separate; the social division of duties and tasks, the separation of hand and brain, of technical and manual labour, has not been abolished.

However on the economic level, the sectors of society which hitherto had a closeted, independent existence are thrown into the unitary, social melting pot. The small communes, trade confederations, and individual enterprises, which are not even allowed a transitory existence, are already done for.

From the moment a “communist society appears, emerging from the womb of capitalist society,” there is no longer a place for markets, for trading between the barbed-wire surrounded “autonomous sectors”. “Within the cooperative society based on common ownership of the means of production, *the producers do not exchange their products* anymore; similarly the labour spent on the products no longer appears as the value [underlined by Marx] of these products, as a material quality possessed by them, as a material characteristic, for now, in contrast to capitalist soci-

ety, individual pieces of labour are no longer merely indirectly [as would be the case in the commune, trade union and factory council schemes] but directly, a component part of the total labour.”

In the concluding pages of our study of Russia’s political and economic structure, we developed the point that even during the first, *lower* stage the mercantile limitations of commodity-production are overstepped. No longer can anything be acquired by an individual and bound to his person, or family, through money: instead he is entitled to a non-permanent, non-cumulative coupon which allows him a time-limited consumption, and which is awarded to him within still restricted, socially calculated limits.

Our conception of a dictatorship over consumption (i.e. the first stage, which will be followed by a social, species rationality) entails this: on each coupon there will not be written so many currency units, which can be converted into anything, say, just tobacco and alcohol and no bread and milk, but names of specific wares as in the famous wartime “ration cards”.

Bourgeois law will survive, however, insofar as the amount of consumption will correspond to the amount of labour given to society—after the well-known deductions to the common fund have been made—and this calculation will have to be based on availability, as well as on utility and need.

Instead of the products of human labour being bought and sold and subject to the law of equivalent value (as would be the case if they were to be exchanged between “autonomous” communes, trade unions or enterprises) they will instead form one, social mass. Finally only one commodity-exchange like connection will remain: that which exists between quantity of labour supplied and individual daily consumption.

A colossal blunder we chanced to hear offers us a wonderful opportunity to explain this concept. Somebody—an outstanding immediatist, no doubt about it!—has been going around saying that “in a socialist economy the market will remain, but it will of course be restricted to products. Labour will no longer be a commodity.”

Such people can sometimes help us express an idea correctly—as long we turn what they say upside-down. This is what they ought to have said: “In the socialist economy there will no longer be a market” or better still: “an economy is socialist when the market no longer exists.” In

the first stage, however, “one economic quantity will still be measured as a commodity: human labour.” In the higher stage, human labour will be nothing other than a way of life, it will become a pleasure. Marx puts it like this “*Labour will be the first of man’s vital needs.*”

In order to free man’s work from being a commodity it is necessary to destroy the whole market system! Wasn’t this the first of Marx’s objections to Proudhon?

We’ve mentioned one blunder that is doing the rounds, and here is another one which we will dismantle as soon as possible in a future study: “the productive forces need to be greatly increased before the market can be eliminated”. This is not true at all: according to Marxist theory, the productive forces are already too developed to be contained within the capitalist mode of production. Marx considers the development of the productive forces as the basis for the higher stage of socialism—that in which consumption is not socially limited by insufficient production—but *not* as a condition for the collapse of the commodity-producing society and of capitalist anarchy.

In the 1891 programme, in a passage which must have been dictated by Engels, it says: “Productive forces have already grown to such an extent that the regime of private property is no more compatible with the wise employment of them”.

The time is ripe for the monstrous productive forces of capitalism to be prostrated before the dictatorial control of production and consumption. It is merely a question of revolutionary force for that class which, even when its living standards are rising (which Marx, as we have shown above, never denied) is constantly weighed down by insecurity and *uncertainty about the future*. It is an uncertainty which looms over the whole of society as well, and a few decades from now it will manifest as an alternative between global crisis and war—or international communist revolution.

The proletarian class will need to equip itself with the necessary force to carry out their historic task. First, it will involve a reconstruction—a reinstating—of revolutionary theory, then it will be a matter of rebuilding a Communist Party on an international basis; a party without frontiers.

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