

internationalist papers

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To the Reader • Brief Notes on the Palestinian Elections • The Blazing Banlieues in Paris Loudly Proclaim the Need for the Revolutionary Party • The Attacks That Cause Bloodshed Throughout the World Are the Rotten and Poisonous Fruit of Capitalism in Its Imperialist Phase • Capitalist Disasters, Not "Natural Disasters" • "United Europe"? Myths and Realities • Marxism and the National Issue • Chicago, 1905: The Birth of the Industrial Workers of the World • Back to Basics: Theses on Tactics of the Communist Party of Italy ("Rome Theses", 1922)

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S U M M A R Y

To the Reader.....	3
Brief Notes on the Palestinian Elections	
The Blazing Banlieues in Paris Loudly Proclaim the Need for the Revolutionary Party	
The Attacks That Cause Bloodshed Throughout the World Are the Rotten and Poisonous Fruit of Capitalism in Its Imperialist Phase	
Capitalist Disasters, Not "Natural Disasters":	
- Spelled "Katrina", Pronounced "Capitalism"	
- From the New Orleans Disaster: More Basic Truths for the Proletariat	
"United Europe"? Myths and Realities:	
- The Illusions of Power Behind the Myth of a United Europe	
- EU Contradictions Put Union Under Pressure	
Marxism and the National Issue	
Chicago, 1905: The Birth of the Industrial Workers of the World	
Back to Basics: Theses on Tactics of the Communist Party of Italy ("Rome Theses", 1922)	

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The working class is revolutionary or it is nothing

(Karl Marx)

TO THE READER...

The turmoil, destruction, and instability created by the capitalist mode of production in its agonic efforts to survive is under everybody's eyes. The economic recession – which started in the mid-1970s, and since then has been deepening amidst ups and downs – is producing short- and long-term effects. The working class is under attack in all countries: lay-offs, unemployment, longer working hours, flexibility, lower wages, factory discipline, uncertainty about the future. Imperialist competition and confrontations have become more diffuse, leading to an intensification of war efforts, mainly in certain areas which are strategically and economically of the greatest importance on the world checker-board – a foreshadowing of the distant but inevitable outcome: a new imperialist slaughter. Chauvinistic reactions follow everywhere, be they armed ones or political and economic ones – the expressions of national bourgeoisies (or of factions of national bourgeoisies) which so react to the imperialist disorder, to the economic, social and political putrefaction typical of imperialism: and in so doing, they often enlist in their ranks (and thus further strangle) impoverished masses, led to massacre each other for aims and perspectives which are not theirs. Last but not least, the destruction of the environment and glamorous examples of ineptitude on part of capital to face its more and more deathly side-effects are only too apparent.

This issue of *Internationalist Papers* – which due to technical reasons comes out with some delay, and regrettably without the usual Spanish Supplement – is devoted to all this, and to other issues as well: the 2005 London and Sharm-El-Sheik bombings, the recent Palestinian elections, the riots in the French *banlieues*, the paling myth of a united Europe. And they are accompanied by a long-due text on “Marxism and the National Issue”, which gives a final treatment to a difficult and thorny subject, too often, in this

eighty year's counterrevolutionary phase, resulting in dramatic mistakes; by a critical recollection of the Industrial Workers of the World, the *wobblies*, who were born a century ago, led vigorous class struggles, but never realized (and even opposed) the primary necessity of the revolutionary party; and by such an important document as the "Rome Theses" prepared in 1922 by the Communist Party of Italy, then still led by our current – a pivotal text especially as far as communist tactics are concerned.

The economic recession is deepening everywhere. Signs of social unrest are becoming more visible, here and there, while the capitalist world is heading towards a new world bloodshed. It is important and urgent to rally around the Communist Party world wide.

"Socialists have always condemned wars between nations as barbarous and brutal. Our attitude towards war, however, is fundamentally different from that of the bourgeois pacifists (supporters and advocates of peace) and of the anarchists. We differ from the former in that we understand the inevitable connection between wars and the class struggle within a country; we understand that wars cannot be abolished unless classes are abolished and socialism created; we also differ in that we regard civil wars, i.e. wars waged by an oppressed class against the oppressor class, by slaves against slave-holders, by serfs against landowners, and by wage-workers against the bourgeoisie, as fully legitimate, progressive and necessary. We Marxists differ from both pacifists and anarchists in that we deem it necessary to study each war historically (from the standpoint of Marx's dialectical materialism) and separately."

Lenin, *Socialism and War* (1915)

BRIEF NOTES ON THE PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS

The victory of Hamas in the Palestinian elections is certainly not as surprising as the bourgeois press makes it out to be. A few immediate considerations can already be made:

1. Al Fatah, the movement which historically guided the process of forming the Palestinian State, had for some time been going through a crisis and had been generally discredited for a series of different reasons. To the exploited and deprived masses it increasingly appeared as a corrupt, compromised and compromising organisation, even though it was impossible for them to see that this was not the result of dishonesty or betrayal by one leader or another, but actually the effect of the national, bourgeois framework Al Fatah was operating in and, above all, that their own rebellion was unfortunately being suffocated in. It was therefore inevitable that sooner or later there would be the question of political alternation within the same nationalist-bourgeois framework. That Hamas (with its “extremist” practices and dubious origins) should be best suited to take over is totally unsurprising.

2. The objective pressure exerted by the worsening world economic crisis on the disaster-struck middle-eastern area brings with it an inevitable aggravation of the contradictions between bourgeois states: both between the various bour-

geoisies in the area (Israeli and Arab) and between the bourgeoisies that have their eye on the area for economic and strategic reasons (the USA with their Israeli appendix, Germany, France, Italy, Russia, China etc.). Most of all, the worsening crisis brings with it rising social tensions throughout the Middle East, with the real prospect of more radical struggles, albeit confined – due to the delay in the recovery of class struggles worldwide, and in particular in the European and American imperialist strongholds – to a national-bourgeois context of “national liberation”. Precisely to prevent the aggravation of conditions and the increasingly radical nature of the struggles from affecting this framework and opening up dangerous spaces for class prospects, the local bourgeoisies are obliged to step on the “maximalist” and “extremist” accelerator, in an attempt to contain and channel the pressure of the masses in less critical directions. This is the origin of the “cases” (anything but surprising from the point of view of a Marxist analysis) of Ahmadinedjan’s Iran and, today, of Hamas, as well as, more generally, of all “Islamic fundamentalism”.

3. Once again, and independently of the ideological forms assumed (religious rather than secular), it is a question of the historical function of social democracy, the final card thrown down by the

bourgeoisie in answer to the rising tide of a mass movement (irrespective of how confused this is). More will have to be said about this aspect; however, with its widespread and dense network of structures for the relief of impoverished masses (hospitals, places of worship, schools, funds and financial help), Islamic fundamentalism flawlessly performs the role that it has always been historically assigned to social democracy, somewhere between reformism and extremism, between the machine gun and the ballot paper, and always within a solidly bourgeois framework.

4. It comes as no surprise, then, that an “extremist” movement like Hamas should take part in the elections, win

them and position itself “to govern”: precisely in a national-bourgeois context. There is no contradiction here; only a fool could fail to realise this. From armed resistance to a government for national unity: doesn’t this remind us of something?

So it is not from Hamas, from a government constituted by them with other groups and movements or – in the future – some other “maximalist” and “extremist” national-bourgeois force, that the Palestinian masses can expect real help, but only from a resumed class struggle at the heart of the capitalist world and from the worldwide extension of the Marxist revolutionary party. There is no other way.

The blazing banlieues in Paris loudly proclaim the need for the revolutionary party

What we wrote in 1977 about the riots that broke out one summer's night in New York following a power cut (and this is taken up again in this same issue of *Internationalist Papers*, in the article regarding the New Orleans disaster) applies perfectly to what happened between the end of October and beginning of November in the Parisian *banlieues*. Whole communities in the proletarian outskirts poured onto the streets to protest against the umpteenth episodes of police brutality, evening after evening cars were set fire to and the most visible symbols of class oppression and social inequality were attacked – from police stations to banks. Recently the social thermometer has not ceased to rise, in a France which, at the end of September, had already experienced the fierce fight of the seamen and dockers in Bastia and Marseilles, too hurriedly hemmed in (on several sides) within the confines, perfectly acceptable to capital, of a “nationalist protest”. Now the anger of the young suburban proletariat – exploited, confined in ghettos, in the stranglehold of an economy experiencing an ever-deepening crisis, persecuted by a police force that is well known for its unrelenting harshness and obtuse cynicism – has exploded suddenly and definitively: giving further proof of the *ever-increasing ill-being* that capitalist society harbours within itself, the *violence* that it exudes from every pore, its *total and organic inability* to solve any one of the problems that it itself provokes. It is a whole mode of production that gives a practical demonstration of its own bankruptcy and that the young proletarians of the squalid and suffocating suburbs have brought to trial, instinctively and directly – with anger and rebellion.

But – we wrote then and repeat today – it is not enough to state this, nor is it sufficient to feel oneself instinctively on the side of the exploited rebels. What is needed is the lucidity to add something more. In other words, to say that these outbreaks – of extreme importance as signs of the fever growing within capitalist society and the limits beyond which “endurance” cannot go – explode and will increasingly continue to explode but, *left to their own resources*, are destined to pass without a trace (except, unfortunately, that of more dead proletarians), to recede into frustration or – worse still – to be channelled into the *cul de sac* of anarchist rebellion as an end in itself or into eth-

nic or religious fundamentalism, *both of which deny any revolutionary class prospects.*

This is why communists must forcefully affirm that the rebels of the *banlieues* are *proletarians*, contrary to all the manoeuvres going on to present them simply as "immigrants" or as belonging to one or the other ethnic, national or religious group. But they should also confirm that these proletarians do not automatically become the "avant-garde of their class" just because they rebel against social and police oppression. In all this the revolutionary party is lacking – and this is the most dramatic lack of all: in other words of the only organ or tool capable, after a *long period of work in contact with the working class* and thus *recognised by them as being a true and reliable guide*, of taking up the impulse from below, gathering the anger and energy bursting from the depths of a *foul and rotten society* and directing it at the real bastion of capitalist power – the State – in order to take possession of it and overthrow it, in order to build its own dictatorship on the ruins as a bridge towards a *definitively class-free society*. In the presence of class struggles, which will become more and more widespread, and increasingly acute and violent clashes with all the forces that wish to keep them in check, the revolutionary Party is the only link in the chain that can weld together the proletarian movement and the spontaneous response that the latter can advance both in the economic and in the social fields, *into a political class struggle, directed towards uprising and the seizing of power*. This is the only way which, under ripe objective and subjective conditions (including – we must not forget, to the shame of all volunteer efforts – the inability of the bourgeois class to deal with the social crisis) will make it possible for the proletariat to find a way out of the dead ends and ghettos in which they spend their daily life, even when rebelling with virulence.

The *banlieues* in flames, today in Paris and tomorrow in some other place, must constitute the umpteenth exhortation to communists to devote the best of their efforts and passion, courage and determination to *strengthening, extending, establishing the world revolutionary Party, the only possible guide for allowing the proletariat to draw all the lessons from the flames of today's isolated struggles, so that they will be able in the future to channel them victoriously into the battle for a new, classless society.*

The attacks that cause bloodshed throughout the world are the rotten and poisonous fruit of capitalism in its imperialist phase

This summer's attacks in London and Sharm el Sheikh (and those that are likely to follow, as the loudspeakers of the middle classes never cease to predict in a sensationalist and equally interested manner) lead us to make some necessary reflections.

The evident increase in the barbarism of every aspect of communal living, which we have been witnessing for some time, is directly related to the putrefaction typical of the imperialist age. The agony of the capitalist mode of production expresses its destructive tendencies to the utmost: far from yielding gently in a general downward curve, instead it rears up in a succession of peaks of aggression and destruction on a military, political and, most of all, social plane, in the same way as the development of its production forces rears abruptly, with increasingly severe and profound tugs and crises, preparing the culmination that will only be defeated by war or revolution.

As Lenin wrote in *Imperialism* (1916): "Monopolies, oligarchies, the tendency towards domination instead of freedom, the exploitation of a growing number of small, weak nations by an increasing number of richer and more powerful na-

tions: these are the characteristics of imperialism, which create a parasitical and decaying capitalism. The tendency of imperialism to form the *rentier* State, the loan sharks whose bourgeoisie makes a living by exporting capital and 'detaching coupons' becomes increasingly clear. It would be a mistake to think that this tendency towards decay excludes the rapid increase of capitalism: on the contrary. In the age of imperialism the individual branches of industry, the individual strata of the bourgeoisie, the individual countries reflect one or the other of these tendencies to a greater or lesser extent. In overall terms capitalism grows far more rapidly than before, except that this growth not only becomes generally more unequal but the inequality manifests itself especially in the decay of the stronger capitalist countries [...]"¹. All the destructive elements in capitalism, as a society divided into classes and founded on the "war of all against all", are thus enhanced, multiplied and exasperated until – unless the proletarian revolution interrupts this infernal progress – they end up in the supreme battle, a new imperialist war: as has already happened twice during the course of the previous century (without counting the hundreds of "minor wars" that accompanied the two world wars, preparing them and following in their wake, thus preparing new ones). Onto this very scenario come the series

1. In connection with the "putrefaction of the stronger capitalist countries," Lenin gives the example of England: today this position is clearly held by the United States.

of attacks and massacres of the last few years, the most recent of which were, in fact, the bombs in London and Sharm el Sheikh.

As communists, used to interpreting reality scientifically without getting lost in pipe dreams, we guard against any crass “conspiracy theory”. We are not concerned with trying to discover the mind behind the action, if Al Qaeda really does exist and is not, instead, an invention of the secret services, or which of them in particular it is: these are all questions to which there will never be answers and which, in fact, are of relative interest to us, since – for the reasons outlined above – we consider imperialist putrefaction as the breeding ground for similar acts, within an irresistible tendency of the capitalist production mode towards the *interimperialist clash*, the impact *between opposing bourgeois interests, at times within the same national bourgeoisies*. Our considerations are different and regard the *openly anti-proletarian nature of these acts, from whatever side they come or are inspired*.

In the first place, they inevitably produce panic and disorientation, a sense of vulnerability and impotence, diffidence and division – and this is what the ruling class in all countries (united, in this case, however much they may be divided on other planes) desires more than anything else at a time when the economic crisis is worsening worldwide and social peace risks being compromised in the, perhaps, not too distant future. The suffocating burden of counter revolution, which has been weighing on the proletariat for eight decades now, and preventing it from rediscovering its class re-

sponse, is now joined by a further disorienting and paralysing element, which also causes splits at the heart of the world proletariat, setting national segments and “ethnic groups” against one another. In the second place, these acts offer the ruling class the opportunity to make their structures of rulership and control more severe and to strengthen, centralise and improve their repressive apparatus, to drill their military and police “in the field”, to make the presence of the state felt more and more strongly as the cudgel of the class in power and to induce in “public opinion” a sort of generalised consensus for it, even in its most cynical and brutal aspects (let us consider, in particular, the case of America and the Patriot Act, the recent plan to use the army for internal policing, and the case of England). The democrats and reformists raise their voices to lament the “increasing erosion of democracy”: we know, and declare, that this is an irreversible trend of the bourgeois state, certainly not set in motion yesterday but inherited entirely from Fascism – in the “triumph of those directives that went under the name of *fascismo* and which, according to the real dialectics of history, the defeated left as a heritage to the victors,” as we wrote towards the end of 1945, when the wretched post-war period prepared by the Second World War began (emblematically inaugurated – it is as well to remember – by Hiroshima and Nagasaki) – a war whose blood and mud still clings to us and which, in turn, is preparing a new world slaughter ².

In the third place, what is always “blown up” to be a “clash of civilisations” (and is really already an underground war between bourgeoisies, complete with disloyal moves and mutual warning signs) is of excellent use as an outlet for situations of extreme social tension, which, even in the advanced West, are capable of setting off uncontrollable explosions,

2. From “The Prospects of the Post-war Period in relation to the Party’s Platform”, published in what was then our theoretical review, *Prometeo*, and now in *Per l’organica sistemazione dei principi comunisti*, Edizioni Il programma comunista, 1973, p.144.

joining with a return of working-class struggles under the influence of the crisis. In the days following the London attacks, it emerged that unemployment in Leeds' Islamic community (where the "material perpetrators" of the attack seem to have come from) stands at over 20%: a stack of dynamite, which is only prevented from exploding by deviating the anger and desperation *from the historically necessary class clash and channelling it, instead, into the blind alley of national, "ethnic" and "religious" conflict*. Whilst pouring out tons of disgusting, tear-jerking rhetoric, the bourgeoisie rejoices at the first, excellent result achieved: unity amongst the different sectors of the world proletariat (with or without guarantees, "native" and "immigrant", etc.) is delayed and obstructed and the elements of division and opposition are aggravated. In fact, all the rhetoric on the "clash of civilisations" has no other aim than to cause internal splits in the world proletariat, at a time of particular weakness and dispersion: and all this becomes even more "effective" when the rhetoric (of little importance whether in the words of Bush or...Oriana Fallaci!) alternates with cruel and devastating acts. What we are experiencing is really *a further phase in the anti-imperialist clash which is proceeding towards the outcome of a third world war*. As for any process linked to the very nature of the capitalist mode of production, it is not a gentle, linear process but full of convulsive leaps and bounds, fluid and contradictory: and therefore increasingly violent and destructive. It is murky: the opposing blocks cannot yet be distinguished, because the contradictions have not yet reached the limit, level or "moment" (in a physical sense), that will produce the necessary polarisations in the capitalist universe, around which blocks and alliances can be formed (and by the way,

as history and theory teach us, these can never be considered stable and definite). Therefore it is a process that will prove to take a long time yet and whose "barbaric acts" will be directly related to the progressive imperialist decay on the one hand and to the delay in a return of a combative world proletariat, with the revolutionary party reborn on solid, monolithic theoretical, political and organisational bases rooted in it, on the other.

This is a process that thus requires more attention from revolutionaries, in order to interpret its developments and trends and, from this interpretation and condemnation, to move on and consolidate those initial, meagre responses from the proletariat that will inevitably be sparked off by the worsening crisis. The points that it will be necessary to insist on are the following:

- the *purely capitalist* nature of the process taking place, linked to the contradictions inherent in the capitalist mode of production now in its imperialist phase, particularly at times of acute economic crisis;
- the *ever-approaching, though distant* prospect of ending up in a new world war, of which these acts (and all the others that will be counted, for example, in the bloodbath of the middle eastern situation) are merely the harbingers;
- the dynamics of *a clash between bourgeoisies* (and even, in some cases, *between different sectors of the same national bourgeoisie*, as the case of Saudi Arabia, the situation in Iraq and the case of the ex-Soviet area itself demonstrate, amongst other examples), which develops both within the western area and within the emerging bourgeoisies (eastern or middle-eastern), and *between all of them*, and which aims at participation

in the world share-out, securing increasing incomes (it will therefore be necessary to fight all the *ideological constructions* regarding the “clash of civilisations” and “war on terrorism”, but also those regarding “good and evil types of capitalism”, regarding “Arab anti-imperialist radicalism” and the nature of the “Islamic masses as an avant-garde in the fight against imperialism”, etc.);

- the anti-proletarian nature of all that is happening and will continue to happen with growing frequency (it will therefore be necessary to combat any chauvinistic, racist or ethnic temptations within the proletariat);
- the need for the first, timid proletarian responses to emerge against direct and indirect attack from the national and international bourgeoisie and for them to place at the centre of their

own immediate prospects the rebirth of organisms to defend their living and working conditions;

- the need (*made all the more evident and dramatically urgent by all this*) of consolidating and extending the revolutionary party internationally, since without its guidance (consisting in science and organisation) the world proletariat is destined to succumb to the blows that first prepare the way for the imperialist war and then spark it off.

These are the bare but essential bases on which to rebuild and reorganise a proletarian force capable of resisting the attack by capital, in the perspective (neither immediate nor simple) of guiding it to an assault on bourgeois power, putting an end to a mode of production which, *even in daily life*, is proving increasingly barbaric and violent.

Capitalist Disasters, Not “Natural Disasters”

Spelled “Katrina”, Pronounced “Capitalism”

When, some months ago, the *tsunami* wrecked the coasts of the Indian Ocean, we wrote that it was not a story of destiny and of the backwardness of the Third or Fourth World, but a *story of capitalism* – capitalism that, on the one hand, is incapable of predicting and containing the forces of nature (towards which it finds itself an antagonist) and, on the other - being interested solely in the extraction of profit - exasperates the destructive effects on the material and social plane (the “greenhouse effect”, which is supposed to be behind the recent, particularly virulent hurricanes is purely a “capitalistic effect”!).

We have seen the proof in the hurricane Katrina which, at the end of August (a summer marked as never before by “natural” and social disasters) devastated whole areas in the south of the United States, the most advanced capitalist country from a technological point of view and a model for so many boobies who believe that “progress” (this obscene modern divinity) can be measured by quotations in Wall Street. And so devastation spread to fill New Orleans and its surroundings, areas amongst the poorest in the United States (still, ten years ago, in the “City of Jazz”, 46% of the children in the city lived “in poverty”, 7000-10000 persons were homeless, of whom 43% were young people under the age of eighteen...), caught up in the tremendous mechanisms of tourism, of the second most important merchant port in the country, of the great off-shore oilfields, and of a ruthless and aggressive form of profiteering, only possible in the imperialist phase of capitalism: and it hit, in particular, the black population, recent and less recent immigrants and the French-speaking communities of the marshlands, all of whom live from fishing and working on the oil rigs or the docksides. In all this, it was assisted by water from the skies and from the earth, from that same Mississippi that has such a long history of floods, during which (for the last time ten years ago), it has made mockery of all the technological inventions built to contain it.

In 1951, following the devastating floods in Italian Polesine (the area surrounding the delta of the River Po), whilst briefly summing up “the relationship that exists between the millennium-long process of hu-

mankind's work technology and the relationships with the natural environment", we wrote: "Ultra-modern high capitalism is showing serious signs of retreat in the fight to provide a defence against the attack on the human race by the forces of nature, and the reasons are purely social and class-based, so much so that they reverse the advantage deriving from the progress in theoretical and applied science. But let's continue to wait, before laying the blame to it, until we have aggravated the intensity of climatic precipitation due to atomic explosions, or 'made fun' of nature so far as to risk making the earth and its atmosphere uninhabitable tomorrow, perhaps blowing up the very skeleton of it by having set in motion 'chain reactions' in the nuclear patterns of all the elements. For now, let us establish an economic and social law of parallels between the greater efficiency in exploiting humankind's work and life and the increasingly lesser efficiency of a rational defence against the natural environment, interpreted in the broadest sense." Enough comment and food for thought for the time being, as the dead are once again counted and the "fleshpots of reconstruction" are opened up.

From the New Orleans Disaster: More Basic Truths for the Proletariat

In the previous, short article, we briefly touched upon the effects of Hurricane Katrina, then in the process of battering the southern coast of the United States. We reminded readers of the Marxist ABC as far as environmental issues are concerned: basically, the more capitalism proceeds through its phase of imperialist putrefaction (complete with the deployment of all that ultra-sophisticated technology which sends so many "dullard worshippers of progress" into ecstasy), the less it is able to cope with the might of nature. This is especially true when the destructive power of such might increases precisely as a consequence of the chaos and anarchy implicit in a capitalism obsessed with profit. In other words, the havoc wreaked by Hurricane Katrina (and, a few weeks later, by Hurricane Rita: this odd bourgeois attribution of names is mystifying to say the least) actually had much less to do with "natural catastrophe" than phenomena of an openly social and economic nature.¹

Inadequate dykes and dams, poorly constructed cities built in inappropriate locations, heavily cemented blots on the landscape; natural defences torn to pieces, neglected prevention and safety measures for evacuation, disorganized emergency services and assistance, the neediest and most poverty-stricken members of society abandoned to their own fates, etc., etc. It's been the same old story for over two hundred years. "How can things like this happen?" ask the dewy-eyed. "And even in the most economically and

1. In the meantime, another hurricane has caused 1500 deaths in Guatemala, and an earthquake has provoked some 40 thousand victims in Afghanistan: the same argument applies here too, of course.

technologically advanced country in the world?" Whether the question is in good faith or not, it matters little.

Capital goes where profits can be made in as short a time as possible. This is particularly true in prolonged and acute periods of crisis such as the one we are currently experiencing.² Indeed, under the present conditions, capital is in big hurry to *increase its own value* and lay its hands on surplus value, transforming it immediately into goods and money (or investing it in stocks in the idle hope of speeding up the process of self-valorization). This Dantesque inferno is of its own making. Capital doesn't want to know about slack time or unproductive costs: so the 14 billion dollars mentioned by *Coast 2050*, a document produced *several years ago* by a number of local authorities with a view to outlining a safety project for the coastal areas of Louisiana, are *unproductive* and useless, *come what may catastrophe-wise*.

And when catastrophe strikes, a) a fair amount of surplus product is destroyed, and this is not too bad (aren't wars fought for this very reason?); b) there is always the "big business" of reconstruction for private and public vulture enterprises alike (there is already mention of "big plans" on the part of Halliburton and company; but even the U.S. Administration has been dusting up their interventionist, welfare-state-oriented rhetoric typical of such moments – regardless of Neocon cum Neo-Liberalist "principles"); c) considerable numbers of the industrial reserve army (read: the unemployed, the marginalized and long term temps) are directly hit, and their conditions are only destined to worsen. The dewy-eyed may call it cynicism, but the truth is that this is *the law* upon which the capitalistic mode of production is founded, and a history of "natural catastrophes" confirms this with alarming evidence while openly declaring that, in reality, what we are staring in the face is nothing if not economic and social catastrophes.³ And as far as the issue "capitalism-nature" is concerned, this can suffice.

What we wish to talk about now is something different. First of all (and this is the first "basic truth"), the New Orleans disaster has once again lain bare (not that there were any doubts!) the essentially classist nature of American society. This classism is expressed (and often concealed) in different forms of "discrimination", be it racial, ethnic, sexist or whatever. At the time of the disaster – and in contrast to what was surely expected – the American "people of the abyss" were there to be seen by everyone: a great proletarian and sub-proletarian mass of blacks, immigrants from countries near and far and poor whites. These people never appear in those official statistics which are so openly and optimistically manipulated. They only manage to survive by selling – or *under-selling* – their labour and, day after day, in "normal" as well as "exceptional" times, they are the desig-

2. On the subject of the worldwide crisis afflicting the capitalist mode of production, see the detailed essay "*Il corso del capitalismo mondiale dal II dopoguerra verso il III conflitto imperialistico o verso la rivoluzione proletaria*", published in our journal in Italian language, *Il programma comunista* (no.4/2005), where it emerges that even the most powerful form of imperialism – that of the United States – has run out of steam.

3. Our party has already dedicated ample space to this issue. Cf the following articles which have appeared in our press: "*Piena e rotta della civiltà borghese*" (1951), "*Omicidio dei morti*" (1951), "*Politica e 'costruzione'*" (1952), "*Pubblica utilità, cuccagna privata*" (1952), "*Specie umana e crosta terrestre*" (1952), "*Spazio contro cemento*" (1953), "*Drammi gialli e sinistri della moderna decadenza sociale*" (1956), "*La leggenda del Piave*" (1963).

nated victims of the capitalistic machine – so much for the puerile rhetoric of “greater wealth for everyone”, “technological progress”, “democracy” and all the rest of it.

Secondly, (another “basic truth”), the disaster revealed *once and for all* how terrified the ruling class is of this *class*, thus giving the lie to idiot notions concerning its supposed disappearance or non-existence. No-one can seriously entertain the idea that the proletariat and sub-proletariat of the cities and swamps of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama seriously wanted to attack the stronghold of state power. And yet, even before the touch-and-go and much delayed emergency services got their act together, the police and army were sent in to occupy militarily... not a far-away territory militarily to be crushed under the iron heel of the world’s strongest imperial power, but entire regions of the nation, *potentially threatened with social disorder and assaults on the sacred divinity which goes by the name of “private property”*. The bourgeoisie has an experience in ruling for over three centuries, and during this time the ghost of class struggle, social conflict, proletarian revolution and assault on the state has never ceased to haunt it (and there have been several grandiose moments when its domination has faltered or even been toppled). The *bourgeoisie knows who its historical enemy is*, and so its primary concern was to make its iron fist-like presence felt, regardless of how genuine the threat to its stability really was: own up the imbeciles who spoke of a “lack of state intervention”! Protect private property, keep control of the territory, nip any sign of exasperation or revolt in the bud: these were the main concerns. Everything else could – and would have to – wait.

Thirdly, it may be true that social stability was never really under threat, but it is also true to say that in those days and weeks of chaos, the anger of America’s disinherited grew considerably: they got armed, shots were fired against helicopters, supermarkets were looted for essential items ... In reaction to the crisis and the breakdown of a decade-long social equilibrium and inertia, there was insubordination, unlawfulness, and a general abandonment of submission to the state and established norms, laws and hierarchies. *Let it be understood: we won’t allow ourselves to be taken in by any romantic exaltations of all this, and neither shall we fall into the trap of assuming that a massive class struggle is about to take place in the United States. We leave such naive illusions and delirious visions to others. Yet these nonetheless remain facts, and they do constitute another “basic truth”: that individuals, social groups and classes act when spurred on by material needs, anger and suffering – by the material impossibility of day-to-day survival. This is indeed fertile ground for the growth and development of that process which – through a generalised classist revival and the presence/intervention of the revolutionary party in that revival – may lead us in the direction of the communist revolution, the seizing of power and the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship. It matters little how far away such prospects seem today.*

At the same time, if anger and exasperation are not channelled in the

direction of political revolution (the organization and extension of the struggle, the overcoming of any kind of fragmentation, the identification of tactical and strategic targets and of the real class enemies, etc.), there is a real risk of action losing its focus and degeneration into a "war of everyone against everyone" – revealing yet another side to the social and economic putrefaction currently afflicting bourgeois society. If a revolutionary guide and class party are missing – in other words, if there is no fully conscious, leading organism endowed with steadfast principles and theories, an idea of the road to be taken and the strategies to be exploited along that road, a tough organization ready for the struggle, plenty of experience and tradition (even of a minority nature) – if there are no instruments of this kind, then all the anger, exasperation and radical ideas in the world are of no use whatsoever. And painful, sterile defeat is inevitable.

Nearly thirty years ago there was an energy blackout in New York City and a long night of chaos ensued. At the time, readers of our press were reminded of certain "basic truths for the proletariat": a) the vulnerability of the capitalistic mode of production, especially at a time of maximum centralisation; b) the violence and the revolt that oozes from all the pores of bourgeois society. And in conclusion we said:

"The two truths are – indeed, they must be – so for the exploited too, with the wholly dialectical difference that, rather than being a source of *terror*, they constitute a *certainty of victory*. But the reality of a third unshakable truth won't be lost on the exploited in the wake of New York's big night: the 'lightning flash' – or even a succession of lightning flashes – is not enough. A *necessary condition*, yes, but it is *not enough* to bring about the collapse of bourgeois society and the proletariat's seizure of power. The bourgeoisie, having wept over their inventory of 'social wealth' destroyed in one night's merry making by the innumerable *potential* revolutionaries it harbours in its bosom, can also *afford the luxury* of a recurring 'great celebration', provided the energy accumulated as a result of its contradictions (and released at an unpredictable moment in history) does not find, in turn, the organ not so much of its extension in space as its *concentration* and its *orientation* towards the decisive target [- that is, towards the destruction of the bourgeois state and all its political levers of centralised social and economic control], to replace them with even more powerful and centralised political levers which act in contrasting fashion to those of the defeated class [albeit today still dominant]. These levers are bound up with the transformation of society, not its conservation.

"That organ is the class Party, centralised and centralising; that target is revolutionary conquest and the maintenance and dictatorial exercise of power. Without these two inseparable terms the lightning flash of the 'big day' – or, rather, to stick to the point, the 'big night' – comes and flits across the surface of the social and economic bourgeois set up, alarming those who dominate and filling with joy those who are dominated, but – to the relief of the former and the dis-

may of the latter – ultimately leaving nothing behind but the ashes and scraps of just another early dawn morning, no different from the rest. “The bourgeoisie knows this: for a century now, either directly or through its lackey opportunists, it has worked hard to arouse or keep alive in the exploited a sense of superstitious respect for *its* order and a sense of revulsion – more superstitious still – for both ‘*the organization of the proletariat into a class*’, which for Marx means: ‘and so, into a party’ [*The Communist Manifesto*, 1848]; and their ‘*organization into ruling class*’, which for Marx means: ‘and so, into revolutionary and dictatorial power’. Knowing this, and in obtaining, propagandising and applying conclusions from this which are opposite to those of the bourgeoisie, is at once the *raison d’être* of revolutionary communism and the certainty that the great emancipation movement of the working class will be victorious”⁴.

4 “Dalla grande notte di New York, tre verità semplici per il proletario”, *Il programma comunista*, no. 15/1977.

“New York’s big night” came and went, like so many other “big nights” or “big days” have come and gone, and the desperate anger of the disinherited in and around New Orleans will pass (or become milder, or be channelled) too. There will be other “big nights” and “big days”, and some will elude themselves that a percentage of the surplus value produced – the mythical “social riches” – can be grabbed back in a “big collective party” of some kind. And there will be other disasters, social and not natural, in the wake of which the desperation of entire masses anywhere in the world will become rage, disobedience and revolt. What is also certain is that none of this will help bring about the collapse of a villainous mode of production if that organ indispensable for the organization and direction of the proletarian movement – the class party – will still be absent from history and the world stage. Proletarians from countries everywhere will be forced to realize this as a result of the self-same material facts, and they will have to dedicate their energies (delivered from the insatiable hunger of vampire-like capital) to the divulgation and implanting of the party’s programme, its theories and its organization – the only conditions by which the proletarian can emerge victorious from its century-old battle against the domination of the bourgeoisie.

“UNITED EUROPE”? MYTHS AND REALITIES

The Illusion of Power Behind the Myth of a United Europe

The enlargement of the European Union to include 25 member states in May 2004, and the signing of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe in October 2004, led to no end of analysis and comment concerning the exceptional nature of the event and the apparent strengthening of the “new” European power. After the monetary union of twelve of these countries and the subsequent creation of the Euro zone did not the event mark, after all, the end of the line for European nation-states as they slowly but very surely sacrificed their sovereignty on the supranational community altar of the European Union? In this regard it comes as some surprise to see how close the official positions of the established bourgeois chancery-sponsored news-making machine are to those of certain self-proclaimed communist or internationalist groups and organizations. Ever since the birth of the euro, the latter have never missed a chance to disorient still further the proletariat with pompous dissertations whose deceitful starting point is none other than the “end” of the nation-state. So (the argument runs), the “new facts” proved that Lenin and the Left’s classic analysis concerning the *impossibility of a pacific creation of a United States of Europe*, and the *reactionary nature of these states in a capitalist context*, could no longer hold water.

Marxism has always defined the bourgeois state as an “essentially capitalistic machine” bent on maintaining the current means of production (complete with its oppression of the exploited class) through its monopolistic hold on organized state power. The existence of the national State, wielding centralized political power in whatever size or shape, be it democratic or dictatorial, and characterized by a common system of law within determined borders, is the norm in a capitalistic mode of production. And, under capitalism, state rivalry is irrepressible in the same way as the rivalry (and the existence) of companies is in business: both are expressions of a society divided into classes and based upon the private appropriation of the social product and monetary and commercial exchange. A society of this kind is anarchic (insofar as it cannot guarantee a plan for the development of the species because it is founded upon autonomous, individual and competitive production decisions aimed at the extraction and appropriation of greater shares of surplus value strictly bound up with the private ownership of the conditions and means of production) and contradictory (insofar as it inevitably brings with it an imbalance between production and consumption, between classes and also between states; this imbalance can only be remedied by means of crises and wars, at an increasingly de-

structive cost in terms of resources and human lives).

The kind of alliances and agreements established between states – like those within single states – necessarily come across as transitory (and by no means irreversible) configurations that the political superstructure of rule exercised by the dominating class attributes to itself, in accordance with its own contingent objectives at home and on the world market, and depending also on the internal and external conditions relating to the struggle between classes and states, or rather, on the existing equilibrium between classes and states. State sovereignty is a question first and foremost of political and military strength (political autonomy at home and abroad); after that it is a question of economic autonomy (sovereignty of a monetary nature, and involving fiscal and budgetary policies). Historically speaking, only with the cessation of political autonomy does the nation-state cease to exist, and we shall in fact demonstrate that neither the introduction of the euro nor the possible ratification of the European constitution can alter such a fundamental characteristic of capitalism. Neither is little more than an instrument employed by diverse bourgeois classes within European states during this phase (which may last decades) to counteract what rival powers have imposed on the world markets, each with a view to defending their own national interests.

During the imperialist era of capital, monopoly supplanted the system of competition from which it took its origins, and competition was transformed into an increasingly ruthless and intense struggle for the division of worldwide spoils. Even the “bulk” of a State (its demography, its domestic market and its capacity to manage and channel financial flows) and the search for a “continental tonnage” more in line with

the latest competition worldwide thus became important factors in this struggle. Failing to recognize this means understanding nothing of the dynamics governing capitalist growth and running the risk of getting bogged down in the mire of the most baleful bourgeois demagogy (be it that of the glossy middle class magazines or that of the woolly analytical contortions of would-be revolutionary journals, it matters little). By confounding the appearance and outer layer of phenomena with the reality and essence of capitalism and its trends, one necessarily drifts in the direction of the bourgeoisie and away from the historical interests of the proletariat. The invariance of Marxism accompanies that of opportunism, and it is for this reason that the rigorous struggle against the latter must be invariant and incessant (especially in terms of the “revaluations” of Marxism), whatever the strengths of the Party are in this long and corruption-ridden phase of counter-revolution and stagnant class struggle. We have always maintained, and shall continue to maintain, in accordance with the entire unexpurgated Marxist doctrine on the State and on imperialist wars (difficult concepts to understand, and equally difficult to digest because of the rough and ready lucubrations of left wing opportunists), that it is impossible to achieve the centralized political unification of European countries by means of the euro. We also hold (and the facts never cease to bear us out) that it is illusory to imagine the linear action of presumed long term trends which, by bringing about the creation of a unified European economic-political pole in the shape of a continental state, and starting with the creation of the single currency, will lead instead to an imperialist battle (and mutually opposing war fronts) between the European Union

bloc and that of the United States. In other words, the birth of the euro (and its preservation) does not imply a corresponding birth of a united political subject, the EU, destined to complete on a political level what is instead destined to remain an economic and financial alliance.

Neither should it be forgotten that the number of countries abiding by the Maastricht Treaty and the euro, and those belonging to the political European Union, does not coincide. This may well be of significance in terms of the mysterious process of integration, a process which seems destined to remain piecemeal and, therefore, out of keeping with the myths and illusions of Europe the “Great Power” cherished by the petite bourgeoisie (more than by the big money) and opportunists. The nationalism of the European bourgeoisies will never be cancelled out by the creation of a new supranational body which, according to those who sing its praises and various “European” social-chauvinists, represents the latest big new thing in the development of contemporary capitalism. War fronts will emerge among states united *ad hoc* according to the specific requirements of national capitalism. This will occur as soon as the crisis enters its critical phase and war is understood to be the only necessary and possible prolongation on a political level for the safeguarding of capitalism. The process of European “integration” began in the aftermath of the Second World War, starting off with the coal and steel sectors and culminating in the Common Market and the European Economic Community. The post-war process of accumulation in major European countries like France, Germany and Italy certainly received a boost as a result of this integration, but the process never went beyond the “confederative” stage. If, on the one hand,

this meant certain countries were given an incentive to intervene more decisively and autonomously in world markets (in accordance with their own national interests), on the other it brought about a web of contradictions deriving from the absence of an integrated political front (up until the Nice Treaty decisions were taken on a unanimous basis) and an increase in these contradictions inherent in all processes of enlargement. This was especially true after the admission of Great Britain, which regarded – and shall continue to do so – Europe as being synonymous with a continental market. Measures to control currency fluctuations – right up to the proposal for monetary union – were then taken with a view to exercising greater and more direct control over internal demand; and, following the expansion of the financial markets, efforts were made to have a greater and more direct say in the way financial flows – which decreed the whys and wherefores of the new race to divide up the planet and all its resources – were governed.

The driving force behind these processes had always been the needs of French and German capital. These needs were by no means univocal: German priorities were expansion in the east and the recovery of a legitimate international policy, while the French went about maintaining their agricultural production and African colonies at a reduced cost, and sought to re-establish something of the “grandeur” which had been lost in the wake of wartime defeats. However, these needs came together in a post-war world dominated by the supremacy of American finance and production and, later, in reply to the international crisis of the mid-seventies and the new Asian competitiveness on world markets. The Maastricht Treaty and the introduction of the euro effectively made for a Franco-German alliance in anti-American terms, and the

times and conditions governing the introduction of monetary union were dictated by the requirements of commercial and financial rivalry, especially as regards the creation of a single capital market and the development of direct foreign investment. Yet this too was a contradictory process: in exchange for French backing for reunification, Germany (whose GDP made it the real powerhouse of Europe, as well as the third most powerful economic power worldwide and the second in terms of its trade) was forced to give up the mark, thus depriving itself of full sovereignty in monetary policy (even if the new European Central Bank models itself on the Bundesbank and shares its aims) and weakening its own industrial and commercial power as a result of “community” requirements which must necessarily take into consideration other members and the conditions they impose.

The policy of “enlargement” – usually preceded by massive investment of capital and the delocalization of non-strategic segments of manufacturing – has allowed for territorial expansion towards the east, albeit in the absence of a precise strategy in new European geopolitics as far as the fixing of eastern borders is concerned. What is more, by advancing the process of “integration” in the east (a familiar German objective involving the consolidation of the central-European industrial ring around Germany, and subordinating the interests of the south, the Mediterranean and Africa to this priority) a clear signal is being sent out as to where the real power lies within the European Union. It is the guiding principle of expanding German capital which emerges triumphant from this process, and it comes as no surprise that America is seeking to thwart such a principle by admitting ex-Soviet bloc countries into NATO and through the creation of new *ad hoc* alliances under its personal super-

vision (like GUUAM, which includes Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldavia), all in an effort to strengthen its own position in Eurasia.

Other contradictory aspects of this process of enlargement (at present the EU counts 25 members, but, controversially, it is shortly due to include Turkey, and Ukraine has made a request for entry which is certain to ignite relations with Russia) are the continuing lack of certainty which characterizes EU politics, and the two tier level which has resulted from countries belonging to the ‘Euro Zone’ and those which are excluded. The case of Turkey is especially significant here: firstly, in terms of American political interference (Turkish membership would mean that her allies within the EU would be further strengthened and would gain more direct control over the all-important Caspian-Caucasian-Middle Eastern area, an area close to the heart of stars and stripes imperialism); secondly, because any ambitions cherished by EU members in relation to foreign policy and security (the much acclaimed ESDP) would be nipped in the bud, hostage to American vetoes and, at most, employable in operations subject to American and Nato decisions and authorisation. That this is, indeed, true is evident from the fact that those in charge of the European ESDP (ex-ESCP) are always ex-Secretaries of NATO: despite the creation of a readily mobile Rapid Reaction Force, a single European army and a united military policy remains very much a pipe dream, a victim of Anglo-German tensions. What is more, the famous “separable but not separate capacities” contained in NATO doctrine, a phrase referring to the deployment of European armed forces, is an encoding of how the European confederate order confirms its subordinate status to the USA and hence its limited autonomy.

Further proof of this subordination came

with the so-called “colour revolutions” in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan (and also with the current policy towards Belarus), where the real need for a European foreign policy (geared towards creating a closer relationship with a Russia whose position has not been overly weakened) had to give way to the American insistence on the export of democracy, thus favouring a further extension of Yankee imperialism in Central Asia. Although it may seem paradoxical, the more the European Union opens its doors to new members, the more the power of its community policy is watered down, and this can only lead to a recoil back to the beginning: the interests of each country’s capitalism and its alliances according to its own imperialistic requirements. For this reason our Party has always asserted that European unification in the imperialist era could only come about under the iron heel of German political militarism and, therefore, *always in war, never in peace, and always against the interests of the European and world proletariat.*

One of the characteristics of the imperialist phase of capitalism is the increasingly fierce struggle, at all levels, between states bent on securing better positions for themselves in the carve up of the world and the allocation of surplus value extorted from the planet by world capital. The idea that this struggle required the formation of “blocs” or alliances in certain phases is by no means new, for the process of capital concentration is reflected – at a political level – in the need for greater demographic, economic and military weight than in the past, in conformity with the conditions which the struggle imposes. The creation of such alliances is nothing new in the power politics of imperialist plunderers, and the reasoning behind this process – as well as the more or less violent breaking-up of alliances – is always to be

sought in the relations of capitalist production. And, as politics in China and Japan have demonstrated (witness their attempts to create a common financial and commercial area in Pacific Asia – also including South Korea – through ASEAN, or the Association of Southeast Asian Countries), such alliances among states are certainly not the exclusive right of America and continental Europe. It would, however, be a mistake to consider these alliances (or blocs, or poles of attraction) as irreversible elements in contemporary inter-imperialistic conflict. This would only seem to confirm the existence of a confrontational trend between what might be termed “European capital” and “American capital” behind the very real battle between the euro and the dollar: a hypothesis of this kind necessarily leads to an over-simplification of reality, and reduces the entire development of historical processes to a mechanistic cause-effect relation and to what Engels (tongue firmly in cheek) abruptly called the reduction of history to a first degree linear equation. The creation of an economic bloc or an alliance is an effect of the growing socialization of production and the intensification of competition in the world market: in this way, bourgeois states seek to safeguard those interests of theirs which are threatened by other nations whose influence has grown in the wake of the uneven development of capitalism and the changing shifts in power that necessarily follow. The mistake, serious enough in itself, takes on a more deceptive air (and thus becomes part and parcel of the attempt to disorient and disarm the proletariat) when, in the name of a so called “anti-Americanism”, the virtues of an unreal European unification are praised to the skies as an area of peace and development and as a “moderating” element in an increasingly unstable international order writhing under the lash of eternal

crises.

Adopted by the twenty-five member countries on 18th June 2004 and signed on the following 29th October, the new “Constitution” inspired people to speak of an act that officially ratified the “historical” birth of the political Union. In actual fact (as some less accommodating observers hastened to point out), this was not the birth of a Constitution but, rather, the signing of an international treaty (both in terms of the content and the aims of the agreement) between states which retain and maintain their national sovereignty (including the right to stipulate agreements and other international treaties – even of a bilateral nature – outside of the commercial arena). As we emphasized earlier, the existence of the euro as the common currency of certain EU member countries in no way belies this scenario. Indeed, if anything it serves to amplify its contradictory nature: fiscal policy will, for some countries, be the only available instrument of economic policy (since monetary and interest rate policies have been delegated to the Fed), together with that of labour costs (more hard times ahead for the proletariat in the name of competition!); while other countries (like Great Britain) will retain possession of *all* their powers in terms of economic policy and intervention. The euro was the financial answer on the part of certain European countries to the decline in European industry and commerce in the wake of fierce Asian competition, especially that of China and India.

Obviously, this solution – in an imperialist era, when financial capital prevails – was based upon the more representative grounds of American monopolistic rent: the role of reserve currency (still 70% for the dollar as opposed to 13% for the euro) and international currency of exchange which, up until now, had served to protect the United States (in addition

to its significant military machine) from those selfsame pressures. The truth of the matter will soon out when the costs of the adjustments that the crisis will impose on diverse European bourgeoisies have to be quantified (and shared out). Take the case of Italy, for example: the heartsick pleas for revival of “Made in Italy” industry on the part of the selfsame President of the Republic (who never fails to remind Italians that they should “feel European”); the bungles of the agricultural sector (where production surpluses combine with price support policies to demonstrate, at one and the same time, the degree of sheer waste which capitalism in its mature years involves, and the extent of the catastrophe for those European countries forced to find somewhere to place these surpluses to safeguard their profitability); and the cries to defend the “national” banks (and, therefore, the national industries, given that mixed bank and bank-company cross shareholding models have emerged anew all over Europe) from takeover bids on the part of financial groups in Spain and Holland, of countries in the EU that is ...

Precisely the banking and insurance sector (when, typically, financial capital calls the shots) exposes the weaknesses and wishful thinking which lie behind projects of unification: despite the directives and recommendations of the Brussels bureaucracy, this sector has witnessed virtually no mergers between institutions and companies from different countries. The reason for this may be attributed mainly to the firm opposition of the central banks within each country. Given what is at stake, this comes as no surprise, and the exception represented by British banks (with their predilection for foreign – especially American – capital) is hardly representative: partly as a result of sterling’s survival, it is precisely Great Britain that is challenging Ger-

many to become the main financial marketplace in Europe (complete with all the profits to be had from a monopoly on currency and share transactions). The heart of this hefty and highly articulated “Treaty” which goes under the name of “European Constitution” is its Third Part, which concerns “The Policies and Functioning of the Union”. Here we find what the present day European alliance is really all about: firstly, it is a union pre-occupied with supporting the process of accumulation and concentration of capital during a period when overproduction and the drop in profit margins have led to ever fiercer competition in all walks of life. Above all, however, it is a clear legal framework whose aim is to establish the conditions for new and ever more serious attacks on the proletariat and society in terms of pensions, wages, security and labour conditions: the existence of European “populaces” will be sacrificed on the altar of the market, freedom of settlement and the free circulation of capital and goods, all rounded off with sermons on “common destinies”, “permanent peace” and “economic development”. In these propagandistic campaigns, the official left and the right are perfectly in agreement and express identical positions – like all the good little puppets of capitalist impersonal action. Just as clear is the swindle (with a view to supporting election campaigns for ratification on the part of those countries backing the Treaty, and which have to express their wishes after a referendum) perpetrated by means of the “official information” contained in booklets distributed by the hundreds of thousands: the imaginary “rights” of “European citizens” and the astonishing virtues of integration are all nattered on about at length while (no coincidence, this) Part III is almost completely ignored. Still, that’s only the part containing more than 70% of the Treaty’s articles (322 out of 448). Demo-

cratic information indeed!

At the time of the creation of the European Common Market, and in direct reference to the anti-proletarian sirens of the “myth of a United Europe”, we held that “Europe, a jungle of nationalisms and a battlefield for world wars, expects to bury its past and pacifically build up a vast economic unit able to compensate for the loss of imperial colonies and to reach – if not supersede – the great powers.”¹ At that particular moment in history, this necessity to rebuild an industrial system (outside of rival American influence) which would re-launch the imperialist ambitions of the European bourgeoisie was primarily an expression of the needs of French and German capital, clinging firmly to the alliance with the *petite bourgeoisie* of the services industry and agriculture and the aristocracy of the working class and white collar workers. “Theoretically,” as we wrote in the aforementioned article, “the building of a United Europe is based upon the assumption that production can be regulated by monetary means. But the mere uttering of such an assumption is enough to understand its flimsiness: how can a superior unit of production (Europe) be created through the construction of a market only?” The question has hardly lost any of its eloquence over time: the selfsame characteristics of capitalistic production relations have, in fact, determined the tendency towards the socialization of the means of production, thus requiring the bourgeois classes to reply (in the absence of the historical solution consisting of the proletarian revolution which bases itself on that tendency) to this contradiction with the national base of accumulation, by means of inter-state cartels, currency and free exchange areas and commercial unions. And this (disre-

1. Cf. “Il mito dell’Europa Unita” (The Myth of a United Europe) in *Il programma comunista*, nos. 11 and 12/1962

garding all the rhetoric and the diverse abbreviations – including the latest one with its more openly “political” character) is precisely the pit into which capitalist Europe has fallen. And it will never be able to crawl out again. According to Marxism, the bourgeoisie can never free itself of its national base, even if the conditions and dynamics of capitalist development are destined to become increasingly international and the creation of the world market was the last “mission” of capitalism (by no means a recent phenomenon, no matter what the advocates of globalization say). The disunited Europe will, in reality, be a product of inter-imperialistic contradictions, of the powerful and impersonal forces expressed by the objective nature of capitalism which, at a certain level of systemic contradictions will impose anew “national” solutions (and alliances subordinated to “national interests”) to ensure that the carving up of the world market, areas of influence and the surplus value extorted from the world’s working classes, will be to its own advantage. The rhythms and duration of the economic crisis will determine the character of this evolution and, more importantly (in accordance with the chang-

ing power relations among states as well as the equilibrium among the classes) its mutation into imperialist warfare. For capitalism the latter is the final extreme act of its parasitical conservation and its political and military defence against a superior mode of production and the international class which represents it, besides being a way of “regulating” the carve up and establishing new relations between states.

Indeed, the worsening of the crisis further intensifies nationalism and antagonises the bourgeois classes because it continually gives rise, on an ever wider scale, to all the contradictions inherent in the valorisation of capital which many had believed had been overcome following the creation of the commercial bloc or the currency area. Only when nation states have been defeated by means of the proletarian revolution and the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship, which will lead to the disappearance of a class divided society and result in a superior form of economic organization, will we finally be able to speak of genuine European unity. But this will be part of a worldwide process, so the idea of “Europe” as such will be nothing more than a geographical expression.

EU Contradictions Put Union Under Pressure

The outcome of recently held referendums in France and Holland concerning the treaty establishing a so called Constitution for Europe has inevitably led to a series of chain reactions. Any wishful thinking unification-wise has been put very firmly on the ropes and Community bodies have been forced to put the skids on the process already underway. And the procrastination of the British government over the whys and wherefores of its possible adhesion to the Treaty itself has

been readily imitated by other member States intent upon suspending their own planned referendums.

In the last years we have frequently emphasized the point that, notwithstanding the establishment of the euro, the process of supranational European unification is destined to be a pipe dream. How could it be otherwise in a capitalistic world whose production processes are ultimately bound up with the accumulation

of capital, and where the battle among rival companies and States to secure a healthy slice of world production (and a position whereby they may have a greater say in what happens to that production) is waged without limits? Capitalism fosters crises and wars as regulatory elements of an unequal process of development. Since this brings about changes in the balance of power between states, alliances (among states, as among rival companies) become all-important. These alliances are always based upon the privatistic economic and social relationships of capitalism and cannot be anything but transitory in nature. The surmounting of national limits (which is also an unavoidable consequence of world market development) cannot be legitimized by forms of political expression which are the product of a class society. Any attempt to do so cannot be understood in terms of “peace” (the surmounting of national egoisms, the union of peoples and similar baloney) but, rather, as another instrument of “war” and the representation, on a political level, of the process of centralization and concentration which goes hand in hand with the accumulation of capital. The European Union cannot escape from this dynamic, and any vain attempt to transform what is, to all intents and purposes, an inter-state alliance (run by inter-governmental committees) into political union is doomed to fail under the burden of systemic contradictions which – as history will confirm – refuse to acknowledge voluntarist answers.

The failure of the June 2005 European summit over the question of the 2007-2013 budget confirmed for the umpteenth time the existence of resistant latent nationalisms in the bosom of the present-day EU, now 25 members strong. The community budget, of which 75% is destined for agriculture and so-called structural funds (i.e., funds aimed

at shoring up the less wealthy economies of certain regions within the EU), failed to gain approval as a result of eternal squabbling among EU member states over who should give and who should receive. Germany, France and Great Britain were particularly inflexible, digging their heels in when it came to discussing budget contributions and the destination of the funds. If the truth were told, behind the oh-so-careful weighing of each single word on the part of these three states lie contradictory visions as to what Europe should actually be, and these contradictions have inevitably become more acute with the process of enlargement in the east. Add to this unwelcome brew a robust economic crisis and it is easy to see why it has become increasingly hard (not to mention expensive, as far as the defence of national interests is concerned) for title contenders to get on. The oft-quoted day of reckoning is nigh: during the war against Iraq the various sides (for and against American unilateral policy) had already demonstrated how Germany – despite years of heavy foreign investment in ex-Soviet satellite countries – was unable to maintain even political sway over Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Rumania. In the meantime, Great Britain managed to find allies (Spain and Italy this time round) to support its own pro-American position, neatly acting as a bridgehead for Yankee imperialism at the centre of the European Union – also for purely self-interested national reasons which include the monetary and financial autonomy of Sterling. The absence of an autonomous arms industry and army has proven to be the final nail in the coffin of a common foreign policy: the lack of the latter is an objective fact which corresponds to the impossibility of establishing a united policy which is something more than mere mediation or co-ordination. For Germany –

effectively the major EU contributor and its minor beneficiary – this was a point of no return, and it won't be long before the current equilibrium within the EU is undermined (irrespective of all the politely phrased declarations and official reshufflings). Germany's efforts to pursue an extension of its own power politics by counting on community representation (and on the fact that such representation afforded a safe guarantee that there would be no rebirth of the "German monster" after reunification and the collapse of Soviet imperialism) have now come to a close. In the last decade of the twentieth century, the German economy averaged a 1.7% annual growth rate (less than the rest of the EU and only half that of the USA), losing positions especially in the fields of high-tech and industry. Over very recent years, the growth rate has dropped to an average of 0.5-0.7%, contrasting with an EU average of 1.5%. The unemployment rate has risen dramatically too, panning out at about 10% of the active workforce today, and the German percentage of world trade has plunged from 11-12% to 8-9%. The introduction of the euro may initially have been conceived of as representing a re-dimensioning of the area of the Deutschmark, with countries adhering to monetary union being required to pay for the costs of budget adjustments by means of higher interest rates and the loss of exchange mechanism procedures geared to attaining more competitive prices on the international market. Today, however, Germany is the very power which finds itself prisoner of the parameters and limits imposed on national accounts by Community policy. Ironically perhaps, this has been brought about in concomitance with Germany's efforts to restructure its armed forces (a policy initiated in 1994 following the Karlsruhe constitutional court sentence which allowed the Bun-

deswehr to operate outside of its area, and speeded up with interventions in Kosovo in 1999 and the Horn of Africa in 2002), an increasingly expensive process undertaken to satisfy the German bourgeoisie's desire to establish anew that freedom of political action geared to defending national interests.

The proletariat – buttered up and weakened by its official trade unions – has paid a very steep price for the privilege of supping at the table of "European unification". The euro – above all the policies which established its central character and the timing of its final introduction, especially the Maastricht Treaty – has so far turned out to be the means by which the European bourgeoisie has been able to launch its almost unhoped-for – and unchallenged – attack on the material conditions of European workers. In the name of flexibility, workers now find themselves in an extremely precarious situation: the workplace has become more despotic and the workload heavier, but there is always unemployment or other forms of sub-employment as an alternative. Health and pensions are continually under attack. All this has worsened considerably the conditions of the proletariat (not to mention white collar workers), and insecurity about employment and the future in general (especially for entire generations of younger workers) has become the general norm in the European "labour market". Sycophantic newspapers sympathetic to the regime allude to this norm as an icon of modernity, then cry crocodile tears following reports of a collapse in consumer purchases. Everything points strongly in the direction of Marx's theory of "growing poverty" which hoards of opportunists and hacks of the adverse class have sought hopelessly to measure by means of high or low salary levels.

Official unemployment figures for the entire Union have grown from 7.4% to

8.1% in the period 2001-2004, reaching high points in Germany (see above) and, especially, in recently admitted eastern European states. The mass salary percentage as a proportion of total product (as far as such statistics have any meaning) has dropped from 70% prior to the Single European Act in Maastricht to little less than 68% today, the lowest point since the 1960s. A somewhat trite answer to the question: "Who is Europe for?" The dynamics behind the establishment of a European economic bloc (successful insofar as it has maintained the competitiveness of European capital) and a political bloc (unsuccessful due to the irrepressible antagonism of rival capital) have been characterized by the need for European capital to become more instrumental and of greater importance on the competitive world imperialist stage. Inevitably, then, these dynamics could never have been anything but reactionary when it came to the historical interests

of class and the proletariat, European and non. The whole set up is destined to collapse under the impact of particularisms encoded in the DNA of bourgeois classes in each nation and which, under the lash of the crisis, will become accentuated to the point of open opposition in the defence of individual interests in the world market. There can be no about-turn based on the same premises, and the proletariat must resist the siren calls for a "Social Europe", a "Europe of nations", a "Legal Europe", etc. The conciliatory gestures of the bourgeoisie and the calls for sacrifices on behalf of Europe or the nation (and thus on behalf of the national economy and profits) must be spurned. Instead there must be an intransigent defence of material conditions which must ultimately lead to a class reorganization on the economic as well as social field, under the guidance of the Party and Marxist doctrine. This is the only way to achieve a classless and nation-less society.

Marxism and the national issue

The aim of this work

A series of articles was published in *Il Programma Comunista* from no.1/1998 onwards with the intention of sketching out the coordinates that should regulate and direct the Party's action concerning the "national issue". From the beginning of the Nineties onwards, this "issue" seemed to have re-emerged emphatically on the international chessboard, particularly with respect to an inter-imperialist dispute (accelerated by the crisis of capitalism), which had been taking shape since the collapse of the balance of powers emerging from the bloodbath of the second world war (and consolidated over more than forty years in the shadow of combined Russian-American dominion).

In fact, the "national issue" re-emerged, and still continues to survive, basically as a *powerful tool for the manipulation of the masses*: for precisely this reason it was important to insist once again on fixing some fundamental points of doctrine, at a moment in history when the cry of "self-determination of peoples" was once more becoming a tool in the hands of various imperialist brigands in the context of the new conflicts opening up from the Balkans to Central Asia. A basic function of the Party's work is, in fact, to *constantly guide the international movement, regardless of contingent circumstances and the Party's real influence*, so that the lessons of yesterday and today can take concrete shape in the genetic inheritance of a working class that is still disarmed and disoriented by a bourgeois and inter-class ideology and by the counter-revolutionary action of false workers' organisations – a working class that will not be able to fight again at a historical level, as a class in itself, until it is decisively influenced by Marxist theory and organised quite independently of the parties and trade unions responding to the necessity of maintaining bourgeois class supremacy and of a now rotten mode of production.

In proposing once more the extensive summary of a report given at the General Party Meeting in 1995, we attempted to retrace the various battles (and the resulting, successive, adjustments to doctrine) that the Party had had to deal with since its very beginnings. And after emphasising how, ever since the position assumed by Marx and Engels on "democratic pan-Slavism", the correct approach to the "national issue" had been considered a *testing ground for militant revolutionaries* (since it reduced the correct assimilation of the materialistic method and revolutionary theory to its essence), these adjustments of doctrine and these battles had allowed us to examine certain situations that the Par-

ty's work regarded or might regard, with a view to resolving them correctly. Unfortunately there were too many imprecisions and ambiguities in this text - of no help in pursuing the aim - so that it has now become necessary to return to the issue, to avoid the happy illusion that everything has already been said and written and that it is therefore sufficient to open this or that little book at the right page in order to find a miraculous solution to the problems that the workers' Party will find itself up against in practice during its work.

The reference points

Marxism has always evaluated the "national issue" not in an abstract manner or according to moral judgements or statements of principle, but strictly in connection to all the other aspects of the revolutionary Party's programme and strategy. It has grounded the "issue" on its theory of the State and defined *the national settlement as being linked to the formation of a territorial market characterised by one and the same positive right*. Our own formulation of the national issue is centred on *the identification of distinctive characteristics of national unity in determined historical-geographical situations* and not on abstract biological criteria: Marxism has always affirmed and highlighted the political nature of the self-determination formula and that its nature is subject to conditions, always pointing out that its historical value should be understood *in relation to the development process of the international communist revolution and the unification of the international proletariat*: this means that self-determination in the revolutionary programme of the proletariat has always been conceived of as *subordinate to and aiming at* the promotion of conditions for favouring the development of international revolution. Consequently, the refusal of any concession to so-called "practical" (and equally metaphysical) claims, which in practice make the proletariat subordinate to bourgeois politics; consequently, too, a full awareness that the problem of self determination is not one of tactical alliances, but of the dialectical realisation of international working-class unity in the struggle – *the unity of the proletariat, pursued by means of opposite tasks (for the proletariat of the oppressors and that of the oppressed countries), linked as tools for the superior unity of the international movement*.

In the Marxist view, the evaluation of support for national movements and for the fight for political independence always depends on the nature of these movements and struggles and their repercussions on the conditions for promoting the unification process of the international proletarian movement and the advance of overall conditions for the development of world revolution. In other words, when considering the issue in question, it is necessary to avoid relapsing into a meta-historical perspective, which is, in fact, quite foreign to the programme of the international working-class movement's objectives and incompatible with the need for its development and struggle to overthrow capi-

talism. In defining the existence, if any, of "national issues", reference has *always* been made to the birth of the "nations" as a gradual historical element (in relation to the end of feudal economy and society) and the repercussions of the "national struggles" on the fight to destroy the capitalist production mode, and *never* to the so-called "nationality principle" which capital itself has erased and which has always been a tool in the hands of the imperialist diplomatic circles with an interest in it and of the power politics of the bourgeois states. And so, as Lenin always repeated, working-class support for the bourgeois armed fight for independence and the "national issue" could *only take place in a certain direction and in certain, precise historical conditions* and without getting confused with bourgeois politics, *to ensure better conditions for the class struggle*. And support for national movements cannot derive from a-priori considerations (the national issue is not a basic premise of the working class programme, unlike that of the bourgeoisie), but only from evaluations strictly connected and subordinate to historical revolutionary facts and the outcomes of the proletarian revolution.

The nation state is a product of bourgeois development. In the progressive phase of capitalism, when the break with all the political forms of the feudal system becomes a vital condition for the victory and consolidation of the new mode of production, its needs impose a national State as the classical form of modern state. The characteristic of this state is that it is a true capitalist machine and the political organ, par excellence, of the ruling bourgeoisie; however, its classical form does not entail the existence of pure national states which include only certain specified nationalities (entire nations). Due to the extension of the capitalist mode of production, the national State – as well as extending its functions as a tool serving capitalist accumulation and its conservation – is destined to pursue its growth, *even to the detriment of other competing States*. Moreover, the modern national State cannot be considered "eternal" or "natural", as it is considered, instead, by dominant bourgeois ideology, since it is none other than a *political form of class domination*, an expression of the bases and economic necessities of the laws of capitalist development. By creating a world market, the development of capitalism in itself, together with the trend followed by national movements and the constitution of national States, lays the basis for overcoming national limits, which will only be fully possible in a communist society: the process of capitalist concentration, which imperialism exalts in all its aspects (such as the trend towards growth and the intensification of tension between nations), cannot, in fact, pacifically remove the national basis on which the existence and the development of capitalism rest. It becomes clear that capitalism or a régime dominated by capitalism is unable to provide a lasting solution to the controversies connected to the "national issues" and to the political oppression of national or ethnic minorities. The Marxist Party approaches and analyses the "national issue" from a class perspective: every national fight has thus always been supported in a *transitory* sense only, in so far as it was a matter of a progressive struggle, functional to developing the unity of the international working class movement, creating the objective

bases for its victory against the opposite class: as a *momentary phase in the permanent revolution* (see *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848 and the *Address of the Communist League* of 1850). This has always necessitated *the absolute organisational independence of the Party*, as is well demonstrated by the history of the international working-class movement up to the second imperialist conflict and the ceaseless fight of revolutionary currents to rebuild the entire monolithic structure of the programme for the emancipation of the proletariat in the face of all petit bourgeois and opportunist deviations: it is, indeed, a constant duty of the class Party to continue offering (or rather to recover) the class these principles and programmatic guidelines, even when their transfer into immediate action may appear to be a long way away.

The necessity for a proper method of work

A necessary premise – and one characteristic of the Marxist method – in order to approach the issue we are dealing with and to define the real area of certain national struggles, is to establish and limit the geographical area involved, on the basis of the action taken by the various bourgeoisies to complete the transformation of the socio-economic balance in a capitalist direction: an action which may prove more or less consequential according to the period and the historical conditions in which it takes place and which can, within certain limits, be measured by using the thermometer of the class struggle sparked off by the relations between all the classes (which Engels, in various articles and letters, closely links to the historical development and morphogenesis of peoples). In turn, these relations take shape not on the scale of individual countries photographed at a precise moment, but on the scale of *vast geographical areas considered in the long term* (and not only with reference to single events) *and in relation to the other areas interacting with them*.

This means that, rather than speaking of “geographical areas”, it is always better to speak of “*geo-historical fields*”. In any case, the “national issue” can *only* be posed as a specific issue related to the proletarian movement in the revolutionary phase of capitalism, when the bourgeoisie launches its assault on power, to conclude its work of social and economic transformation. Instead, in a phase of already mature capitalism, any “national programme” of a workers’ party that advocates a perfected representative system in the bourgeois state or its economic base, constitutes a programme of “class collaboration” and “defence of the homeland”. For these reasons Marxism has always marked out these two successive phases of capitalism by geographical areas.¹

Following this method in the analysis of the bourgeois revolutionary cycle in Europe between 1789 and 1871, for example, it has been possible to show that the phenomenon of the delimitation and unification of this area was determined by virtue of a general align-

1. See: “The confluence of the great contributions by revolutionary struggles in modern countries in a single internationalist historical doctrine. Reports linked to the Party Meetings in Marseille and Florence (July and November 1964)” in *Raccolta delle Riunioni Generali di Partito*, vol. 13, Ed. Il Programma Comunista, p. 23.

ment of the forces emerging from the impact between all classes in an international context which, at the time, saw in the Czars' Empire, to the east, the bulwark of feudal reaction and thus the natural antagonist of development in a modern, i.e. bourgeois, sense for the whole area under consideration. In this phase the need to overthrow the Russia of the Czars determined the Marxist evaluation of whether or not to support the national wars that were developing and the movements on which they were based. In the other three distinct areas with specific characteristics that can be defined by applying the same method of analysis of historical development (Latin America, Black Africa and the Asian Area, the latter including a geo-historical field ranging from Eastern Asia to the Middle East), the phenomenon of unification was determined historically in successive waves and always through enormous class clashes. The Russian revolution of 1905, which was victorious in 1917 and then lost momentum with the failure of revolution in the more advanced capitalist countries (with disastrous consequences for the revolutionary uprisings of the Chinese proletariat and peasants, in the bloody defeat of 1927), was accompanied by the reawakening of Asia and the simultaneous development of the imperialist policies of the great powers. The withdrawal of revolutionary positions, determined by the failure to unify with the struggles in capitalist Europe led the Communist International to submit to the Russian state and then to the theorising of "socialism in a single country", functional to young Russian capitalism's material need for power: and the latter was, consequently, very soon absorbed by the fight for inter-imperialist share-outs and the necessary power politics, by which every bourgeois State defended its own position on the world market.

This set off the process that has dragged on until the present, of *the most devastating wave of degeneration in the international workers' movement*, summed up by us in the term "Stalinist counter-revolution" – a counter-revolution that at the time was unable even to favour the movements that were then in the phase of gestation in the East and in Africa, thus completely upsetting the tactics of the *permanent revolution*, to the point of delivering up the Chinese Communist Party to the bourgeois Kuomintang *from a formal and organisational point of view, too*. After the defeat, the national-revolutionary movement in the Asian area will not, in fact, regain its vigour, always starting out from the epicentre in China, until the second post-war period, spreading from there to India, Indo-China and Indonesia, over the period that we have defined "phase of anti-colonial uprisings".

Geo-historical fields and development phases of national movements

Having established the notions of "historical cycle of capitalism" and "geo-historical areas", there remains the problem of the delimitation of the phases of this cycle in a determined area, which we solve by us-

ing the same method already described: i.e. taking into account the fact that the great historical processes following on one another in the areas under consideration can only be determined by the outbreak of events such as wars and revolutions. The national uprisings of 1848 which characterised the phase of the outbreak of bourgeois revolution in the heart of western Europe and, instead, closed once and for all the bourgeois revolutionary age in France, arose out of a serious economic crisis and out of the spread in France of *an authentic class war*. The saga of the Paris Commune of 1871, which sealed the closure of the democratic-bourgeois revolutionary cycle in western Europe, arose, in turn, out of another war: the Franco-Prussian war. German unification itself, which took place in the way least hoped for by Marx and Engels, and which was nonetheless a historically progressive event for the development of the entire area of Central Europe, was the result of the initiative of the German military spirit, which corresponded to the need for German capital to expand. In the same way, the Russian revolution of 1917, which closed the age of the "double revolutions" in eastern Europe and a part of Asia, followed the revolutionary events of 1905 and arose out of the severe crisis of the capitalist production system, which inevitably resulted in the First World War, and from the disintegration of the Zarist empire, accelerated by the military and social upheavals produced by the outcome of the war. It was in the years following the 1905 Russian revolution, with the revolts of the Asian peoples in India, Persia, China and the Middle East, that the "re-awakening of Asia" occurred and from this historical moment onwards that the "national issue" becomes closely connected and binds itself to the "colonial issue" and to the relationship between the working-class struggles in the imperialist cities and the battles of the people in colonial and semi-colonial countries.

Successive national settlements, including the Chinese national settlement of 1949, arose in connection with the enormous difficulties in which traditional English colonial imperialism found itself and, subordinate to this, that of the French after the end of the second imperial war, because of the radical modifications of inter-imperialist balance it had involved, raising the United States of America to the position of leading world power. The historical result of the national struggles that took place in Asia and Africa in the second post-war period should nevertheless be pointed to as a decisive factor for the final victory of the proletarian class war. Although in these areas the local bourgeoisies were reactionary from their very beginnings, and incapable of being consistent, often relying on the support of the strongest of the imperial powers, which had considerable interests in the areas, on several occasions they were obliged to turn to the help of the "masses" to destroy the semi-feudal structures that most hindered the work of "national" capital and to obtain a territorial arrangement that created better conditions for the process of accumulation to take place and for placing the national economy on the world market.

In such situations, mainly characteristic of the Asian area, despite having profited from the inter-imperialist contradictions and therefore en-

tered, at least in an initial phase, into the orbit of Russian imperialism in order to better resist the American variety, and despite having adhered immediately to the hypocrisy of bourgeois democracy duly decorated with socialist slogans, the local bourgeoisie nevertheless concluded a *true bourgeois revolution*. Elsewhere, for example in the African area, it was often the imperialist centres themselves that directly piloted national independence, in order to gain a better position in the increasingly keen competition between world imperialist powers. The national bourgeoisie then set itself the objective of throwing off the yolk of foreign domination to obtain a political independence that was certainly not – nor could be – the illusory economic independence it talked about (the exception being those states, like China and India, that could count on a vast domestic market and a numerous population that would allow for a place on the world market gained from a position of power), but served as a basis for the intensive development of production forces (first and foremost heavy industry, as appropriate for any capitalist society) and a solid and centralised state apparatus. But the progress of these national movements could not be truly consistent and, above all, could not respond to the basic demands of the peoples' movements that supported them (and whose peasant origins were clearly prevalent): in other words, to *agricultural reform*, sacrificed halfway down the path – or even earlier – due to the necessity of guaranteeing the goodwill of the remains of the old oligarchy for its anti-proletarian function. Moreover, the national movements of the second post-war period could not help but be subordinated to the world bourgeoisie's need to isolate the fires that might break out and end up by scorching the trigger points of imperialism, whilst the local bourgeoisies' extreme fear of relying on powerful mass action obliged the national movements to put themselves in the hands of the foreign imperialist centres, whether Russian, Chinese or American.

The current situation

Compared to the post-war phase of the national liberation struggles in the Asian and African areas ending before the last quarter of the XX century, the present-day situation is quite different, and is the result of *the conclusion of the cycle of bourgeois revolution throughout the planet*. Today, when so-called "national" struggles and wars occur in certain areas, even if they are sometimes based on real national conflicts and oppression, they must nevertheless be recognised and generally proclaimed a *reflection of the fight between the various imperialist powers for the division of the world's raw materials and for the conquest of strategic frontier posts in view of the generalised warfare to come*, as is happening, for example in the Horn of Africa but also in Central Asia and the Middle East. Imperialism naturally waves the banner of the "self-determination of peoples", whenever this is in its interests and thus even when the term "national oppression" is *pure mysti-*

fiction and any claim to self-determination merely a *trap* into which the proletariat is lured. This is what happens, for example, when nationalistic feelings flare up as a result of the *artificial re-kindling* by imperialism and local capitalist circles of old contrasts that have long died down; or when certain populations, although victims of real and historically-documented oppression by more economically developed nationalities, are not actually authentic nations but *pseudo-nations*.

These circumstances were fully evident in the case of the ex-Yugoslavia and the Balkan area in general. Here, in fact, on the one hand there is clearly a *close connection* between the new flare-up of nationalism amongst the various Slav populations and the pressure from various imperialist powers (German, French, Russian and US) for the commercial and strategic control of the region. The peoples that imperialism has hurled one against the other in the Balkans are anything but nations, i.e. human communities that share a common territory, speak the same language and have the same customs. The Serbs, Croats and Muslims of Bosnia do not each possess their own territory, in view of the fact that their villages are a "mimetic mixture"; moreover, the linguistic and cultural differences are almost inexistent or in any case insignificant (in Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro and Bosnia, etc. Serbo-Croat is spoken). In this case, with the exception of the Serbs, they are, indeed, what Engels defined "peoples without a history", that have taken shape more as a reserve of the counter-revolution than through any autonomous national and independence movement.

2. In fact, on this occasion, it was the United States that loudly proclaimed the "peoples' right to self-determination", in order to justify its own military intervention. Lastly, we must not forget the relationship that links these artificial nationalist "flare-ups" to *the local bourgeoisie's anti-proletarian strategy*: it is no coincidence that opposing ethnic cleansing operations were undertaken by Zagreb, as by Belgrade and Sarajevo and subsequently also by the Kosovos, whether Albanians or Serbs, *after the massive class explosion recorded in 1986 of the miners' and workers' fights of all the different Yugoslav peoples*. Nationalism, with all the show of atrocities and horror that delighted the opposing war propagandas, was actually also the *bourgeois response* to the risk of the great class conflict spreading on a broad scale: a response – we must understand – that the bourgeoisie does not "create" or "draw up around a table", but that is generated by the contradictions of bourgeois development and that can therefore be used by the bourgeoisies of this or that country, to their own advantage. Thus, when faced with the recent, orchestrated degeneration of the so-called "national" conflicts into open military clashes, our Party's slogan was (and necessarily so) that of *defeatism, the appeal for fraternity between the proletarian troops belonging to opposing military factions, the refusal of any involvement in the partisan fighting and, on both sides, of any dishonest and reactionary claim to "self-determination" and national independence*. The same applies to the irredentist attitudes that peri-

2. F. Engels, *What will happen in European Turkey* (1853) in Marx-Engels, Complete Works, Vol. XII, pp. 32-36. See also: *Letter to E. Bernstein* (22/2/1882) on the Slav national movement and the interests of the European proletariat, published in the volume *Les marxistes et la question nationale*, ed. Maspéro, p. 101.

odically and artificially recur in border territories, with their alternating national oppressions. Instead, it is clear that the bourgeois revolution always leaves behind it a *jumble of unresolved "national issues"*, which can survive in this form even in the most advanced capitalist areas.

Following this necessary premise, it appears quite evident that the national revolutions occurring in Asia and Africa in the second post-war period and directed in anything but a radical and coherent way by the national bourgeoisies, obliged to establish themselves as national states and then come to an agreement with imperialism to carve out a sphere of privileged influence in their own areas, not only bring with them a wake of unsolved national issues, but also end up by aggravating them.

It is the social mechanism of capitalism itself that creates the divisions between nations and nationalities which the various bourgeoisies, or fractions of them, are then able to utilise for their own ends when a crisis takes place in this mode of production (as a necessity for maintaining the bourgeoisie as the ruling class): the previously mentioned oppressed nationalities totally lack the necessary material bases for shaking off the double yolk of centralism from within and imperial pressure from outside. In these circumstances an interference arises between the aspirations of the oppressed nationalities and the demands of imperialism, or rather of the different, competing imperialisms: thus the unsolved and putrefying national issues are transformed and turn into open sores of an intercontinental nature which the inter-imperialist conflicts tend to keep raw, so that independence movements, if not entire peoples, can be manoeuvred for their own ends. A people, Engels reminded us, must be considered in terms of the analysis of its historical development and not in terms of a "snapshot" or contingent situation. Today we can say that history has pronounced judgements and defined the limits and constraints within which specific national aspirations can move.

The Communist Party is the only political force whose body of doctrine possesses the method for directing the proletariat on this ground, too, and therefore for solving these "issues" once and for all, *as they dissolve in the fight to overthrow the political dominion of the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois mode of production*. In this perspective the key lies in *the social struggles of the proletariat in the fortresses of the world bourgeoisie*, in other words where the decisive battles are fought for the overthrow of capitalism, because it is here that the bases for a superior mode of production are located, along with the main political barriers that defend capitalism. It is to these proletarian struggles in the Western strongholds of capitalism that the working classes of outlying places must link their own battles, avoiding entrapment in the nationalism of their respective bourgeoisies. The working class in the imperialist cities cannot and must not become an accomplice of its own bourgeoisie, slipping into a chauvinist position and perpetrating the national oppression (even at the level of the most elementary bourgeois rights) of their class brothers. In fact, this complicity or indifference would become a material obstacle on the path towards *the international unity of the proletariat* and, therefore, an actual hindrance to

the process of revolutionary development worldwide. Lenin reminded us that only "the proletariat is against all privilege, all exclusion" ³ of a national type. Thus the proletariat cannot be indifferent to national oppression, where this occurs. To sum up, it is necessary to repeat that the further away we move from the age of the first victorious affirmation of the bourgeoisie in the XVII and XVIII centuries, the more energy the particular national characteristics of that revolutionary stage lose and the more the radical nature of its origins necessarily tends to fade: with time, and progressively, the entire surrounding environment is determined by capitalist production relations and local capitalism no longer arises from a gradual process of transformation of the old ways of production but from the impulse and the dictatorial pressure exercised by masses of ultra-modern financial capital that needs to increase in value. All this whilst the bourgeoisie is increasingly terrorised by the growth of the working class and any move it makes towards independent organisation. It can be seen, then, that the capitalist development that took place in the ex-colonies during the second half of the XXth century, proceeded by *forced stages*, due to a process of proletarian transformation that was even more massive, brutal and violent than that experienced by the countries of old capitalism. All this in relation to the rapid and disastrous collapse of small-scale artisan production, replaced not only by medium-sized industries but also by large industrial complexes (chemicals, textiles, steel, engineering, as happened, for example, throughout the Middle East). Moreover, *agricultural reforms* introduced into the area, however timid they were with respect to the representatives of the old, semi-feudal caste (which the local bourgeoisie preferred to buy out, rather than openly combat), nevertheless managed in most cases, and in a short time, to do away with forms of agricultural production and ownership that no longer corresponded to the needs of world capitalism. In the ex-colonies, there was therefore a *brutal re-structuring of ownership* and large portions of agricultural terrain were taken from the big landowners and rented, sold or ceded according to the right of custom to the peasants, whether organised into co-operatives (as in Chiapas) or not.

The implications of these economic transformations have been enormous: thanks to them, these countries have seen the development of a *young, numerous and extremely concentrated proletariat*. The further development of national bourgeois revolutions after the "incandescent reawakening of the coloured peoples" witnessed just after the second imperial conflict was as sluggish on the political terrain as it was impetuous and violent on the economic one, preparing the best conditions for witnessing a second, incandescent reawakening in the future, no longer of peoples but of the *coloured proletariat*.

For all these reasons it is essential now to regain the correct Marxist orientation on the "national issue", both for the metropolitan and for the "outlying" proletariat. To climb back from the abyss into which it has

3. Lenin, *On the Right of Nations to Self-determination* (1914) in Lenin, *Complete Works*, Vol. 20, p. 390. See also Lenin, *On the Question of National Policy* (1914).

fallen and regain its historical task, the world proletariat will be obliged, both today and in the future, to scramble up the dangerous, winding paths of the endless unsolved national settlements scattered like landmines across the globe. In fact, despite basing its revolution historically on the premise of the fight for national independence, the bourgeoisie does not necessarily manage to achieve an organic settlement of national issues, both because of the irrepressible tendency of capital to expand, and because its very nationalist "practicalism" leads it to formulate its national claims unconditionally, with the result that new national oppressions arise or those that seemed to be neatly filed away by history are re-fuelled and crop up again, thus generating, in an apparently unending cycle, *a true wasps' nest of national controversies that are eternally open, unsolved and in a state of degradation*, from which other bourgeois classes will then draw new inspiration and new pretexts for setting off inter-class movements. All these problems constitute, in practice, a formidable material obstacle to the affirmation of working-class internationalism and to the unfolding of the unified struggle of the proletariat of all countries, against the world bourgeoisie, rallying to safeguard and maintain its own class domination. Moreover, these are certainly not problems that are destined to fade with the continuing pattern of capitalist development, which tends to unify the world's markets: it would indeed be an illusion and a fairytale to imagine that, because of the economic and political concentration it gives rise to, imperialism is capable of offering us the final substantial solution to these problems, smoothly presenting us with the unity of the working class beyond national boundaries! Imperialism aggravates clashes between states and thus coalitions of nations against other nations: thus *it also exasperates and does not alleviate*, through conflicts between states, issues linked to national oppression, especially in border areas: "The ideology of national European and general liberation is replaced by another, entailing the expansion of modern civilisation [which] finally takes on the form of the claims in one or another imperialist state of frontier provinces, disputed in key points: Alsace-Lorraine, Venezia-Giulia, the Danzig region, Sudetenland, the Balkans" 4. Only during the actual course of its fight against capitalism will the proletariat directly experience the insubstantial and reactionary nature of the principle of nationality, increasingly confirmed by material facts.

4. *Struttura economica e sociale della Russia d'oggi*, Ed. Il Programma Comunista, p. 160

Today the party's directive to the international proletariat on the terrain of the "national issue" can only be, first and foremost, to *resist any call to arms for the independence of the nation, at any place in the world where it may be launched and to unmask any alliance with other classes that may be proposed for this purpose*. This, and this alone, is the political consequence that must be drawn from the balance of the post-war conclusion of national and anti-colonial struggles. It follows that the workers' movement must also *defeat once and for all the democraticism and "third-worldism" from which it still suffers, concealing itself beneath the banner of a high-sounding and clownish "anti-impe-*

rialism" which acts as a fig leaf for politics intending to stabilise the national capital of the weaker capitalist states.

Even if there have been historical moments in which the internationalism of the proletarian movement admitted the possibility of taking up a position on the terrain of national defence, today the working class, in oppressed nations, too, *can no longer take up the national banner that its own bourgeoisie has allowed to fall*. Instead, it is the exclusive task and duty of the proletariat of the oppressors to *demand the end of any form of national oppression and discrimination that its own bourgeoisie exercises towards other nations*. And not because the proletariat of the oppressors' countries should imagine that, by putting pressure on its own bourgeoisie, it will be possible to obtain a definitive and complete solution to the "national issue", or of any other issue, regarding either the exercise of democratic rights or the material conditions of the working class; nor because it has embraced the cause of the national independence of the people oppressed by its bourgeoisie, but because it has embraced the *cause of defeatism and internationalism* and is drawing all the necessary conclusions. Indeed, it is only by breaking off any form of class solidarity with its own bourgeoisie (even that which implicitly corresponds to some sort of "indifference" towards the national issue) that the proletariat will manage – as well as relieving the tremendous pressure exerted by imperialism on the proletariat of the oppressed nations (which gives an air of justification to the cross-class block advocated and practised in them) – to smooth the way for real fraternity with it in the joint struggle against world capitalism: *thus against all the capitalist States, whether large or small*.

In other words, the proletariat must clearly understand that the final solution to the "national issue" and thus the fate of oppressed peoples is and remains tied to the outcome of its revolutionary anti-capitalist struggle worldwide. In particular, the working classes of oppressed nations must seek unity with the proletariat of the imperialist cities and oppose claims for independence, fighting today *to defend their material standard of living*; whilst the proletariat of the countries at the centre of world capitalism and the nations of the oppressors must *take action against their own bourgeoisie* in order to put a stop to any form of national or racial oppression, which in practice becomes a powerful material obstacle to the unity of the international proletariat.

As usual, let us leave the last word to our texts: "What remains to be understood is the formula of left-wing Marxists at that time and in those countries: the self determination of peoples in a precise shared territory. This formula proclaims the rights and equality of nations and this, as we have shown on several occasions, referring to texts by Marx and Lenin, has no sense in our theory. It is the political significance that must be understood. [...] To declare that the nation has the right to decide its own destiny and that no-one has the right to impose on it from outside is a propagandistic and rather literary formulation, not founded on the doctrine of Marxist determinism. However, the sense is clear: it condemns any assumptions of legitimacy, any repressions of uprising,

any expedient that, in the case of unavoidable clashes arising from national independence and separatist movements, tends to link two generations of the workers' movement: one tolerable in certain historical phases [*now over throughout the world, Ed.*], which is solidarity with the revolt of the bourgeoisie and working classes; the other defeatist and reactionary, i.e. the solidarity of socialists with the State of the dominant nationality in maintaining that things can be settled legally and therefore would be repressed any attempt of taking up arms" 5.

To sum up: "Marx was revolutionary in 1848 [*the European theatre of double revolutions, Ed.*] when he affirmed that in Poland support was being given to the workers' party that wanted the liberation of the Zars", whilst "the followers of Bauer-Springer were traitors in supporting the 1914 Austro-Hungarian war [*the age of the double revolutions having closed in Europe after 1871, Ed.*] against the Slav revolt," because they should, instead, have broken their ties with Viennese chauvinism and defended the Serbs' right to self determination. Whereas, dialectically speaking, "good Marxists and revolutionaries were the Serb socialists who decided to oppose the war" of national liberation in 1914. There is no trace of contradiction between the defence of Serb self determination by the Austrian socialists and the refusal of the national war of independence by the Serb socialists.

The cases of the Balkans, of Kurdistan, and of Palestine

Let us now try to see what tactical application might derive from the general theoretical coordinates previously established, by referring to a few of the "critical" situations on the international chessboard. This is of no slight importance, since they are "difficult problems relating to tactics that, here more than anywhere else, *balance on a razor's edge* and at every new step there is the risk of losing the bearings of the Marxist interpretation of historical facts and the behaviour of revolutionary communists when faced with them."⁶ Commenting on the interpretation given by the the Communist International's IIInd Congress (1920) of the "national and colonial issue" and denying the alleged divergences – advanced by the usual "fashionable scholars and intellectuals" – between ourselves and the Bolsheviks on this question, as on the peasant issue, we wrote that "we agreed and agree without reserve on the general attitude to the problem," whilst always bearing in mind the need to tend towards "a complete settlement, able to mark out the safest possible path in a field where difficulties must never be forgotten, just as they must never be avoided"⁷.

Returning to the question of how pertinent the term self determination is today, in a historical situation where the cycle of the "double revolutions" is over for good, we must now investigate and consider where, how, and

5. *Patria Economica?* (1951), reproduced in the *Appendix to I fattori di razza e nazione nella teoria marxista*, Iskra Edizioni 1976, pp. 153-4 (the next quotation is on p. 154 of the same text).

6. *Storia della Sinistra Comunista*, vol. 2, Ed. Il Programma Comunista, p. 640.

7. *Storia della Sinistra Comunista*, op cit., p.641.

within which limits this formula can still be advanced by the Party, having accepted that it is exclusively *a question of the dialectical realisation of international working-class unity in the class war against capitalism*. As well as not being scientific, there is nothing in common with Marxism in an approach – typical of the “revolutionary of the pen and the drawing room” – based on the assumption that everything has already been decided and that only on this basis do we possess the keys for solving the complex problems that capitalism, in its contradictory development, poses for the workers’ movement.

As regards the issue of national settlements in the area of the Danube and the Balkans, it should be remembered once again that this was dealt with by Marx and Engels by examining first and foremost – about halfway through the XIXth century – the material conditions that had determined the revolutionary or counter-revolutionary role of the Slav peoples in Europe’s revolutionary process, thus also analysing the dynamics by which the Slav peoples could become a support, and not an obstacle, to the more generalised revolutionary movement in Europe. The international policy of the working class at that time was concentrated – as has been said – both on combating the pillars of counter-revolution in Zarist Russia - the reserve of Asian barbarism – and the main capitalist power, England, which – out of fear that the revolution might spread – did not hesitate to ally with Russia (as demonstrated by the handling of the Crimean war and as revealed by Marx in his studies of Anglo-Russian diplomatic intrigues). If pan-Slavism had represented a tool in the hands of the Russians, moving the different Slav nationalities against the revolutionary movement in Europe, highlighting the counter-revolutionary role of the southern Slavs (with the exception of Serbia and Poland) and their national claims, at this turning point in history the tactics of the Revolutionary Party towards the national movements of the Slav peoples can be defined. The main attention is always focused on strengthening the conditions favouring the revolutionary process, directing all efforts developing historically from social movement to these ends. In this perspective, Engels once more, in the article previously quoted (“What will happen to European Turkey”, 1853), argues that the constitution of a powerful Balkan-Danubian state functioning as a bulwark against Russia and Turkey would represent the solution to the “eastern issue” that would be most favourable to the revolutionary movement in general ⁸.

This message from Marx and Engels, after witnessing the failure of the national claims advanced by the Slav bourgeoisie at the time of the Balkan wars of 1912-13, was clear (and distinctly defined as *the position of the Marxist Party*) in Trotsky’s words: “It is not national differences but the dispersion into many States that weighs on the Balkans like a curse. The customs barriers break them down into separate parts. The intrigues of the capitalist powers intertwine with the bloody intrigues of the Balkan dynasties. If these conditions persist, the Balkan peninsula will continue to be a vase of Pandora.” And again: “The only way out of the chaos of the nations, States and bloody con-

8. F.Engels, op cit., p. 36.

fusion of the Balkans is the unity of all the peoples of the peninsula in a single political entity, on the basis of the national independence of its constituent parts" 9. A position that is taken up again by the Communist International, which considered the possibility of including it in the overall scheme of the international working-class revolution 10. Quite the opposite of this, to suggest the slogan of self determination today for Kosovs, Croats or Bosnians would mean ending up in the quicksands of *the most obtuse nationalism*.

Another two cases that our Party has tackled in the last few decades – with some oscillations and uncertainties – regard Kurdistan (particularly the area of eastern Anatolia, where Turkey is involved, as the main pillar of American imperialism in the strategic control of Europe and Asia) and Palestine. In the Arab world, including the oil-producing countries of the Middle East, national unity and political centralisation (which would have swept away the artificial boundaries drawn up, during the various share-outs to the advantage of the imperialist brigands and the archaic and semi-feudal tribal structures on which the various régimes in the area rest) could only take place in *two ways*: *from above* (Bismarck-style), through the decisive military intervention of a strong State, which would inevitably have set in movement the disinherited Arab masses; or *from below*, following an initiative developing out of spontaneous action by the masses themselves. The second option having been concluded at an early stage, the impossibility of following the first path, or terror of its consequences, initially produced incoherent and feeble attempts at unification through agreements between States and subsequently, since the Middle East is a strategic area for raw materials for power supplies, a consolidation of national States, almost all of which *literally fictitious*, which survive as a result of a difficult balancing act between the support of American imperialism and the call of religious fundamentalism.

9. L.Trotsky: *The Balkan Wars and The Balkan Issue and Socialdemocracy in Le guerre balcaniche*, ed. Lotta Comunista, respectively pages 33 and 59.

10. From the *Manifesto of the Balkan-Danubian Communist Federation* (1920): "The unification of these peoples is only possible in the context of a Soviet Balkan-Danubian federal republic." See: M.P. Canapa, *L'expérience soviétique et le problème national dans le monde, 1920-1939*, Paris 1981. The Balkan Communist Federation, and then the Balkan-Danubian, was constituted in January 1920, as a tool of the Communist International for coordinating and unifying the work of the Balkan communist parties on the national issue. After its first Conference, the previously quoted *Manifesto* was drawn up, addressing "the working classes of the Balkan-Danubian countries" (5/3/1920).

The "Kurdistan issue" seemed to us to differ from that of the Arab Middle East, since it involved – to a great extent – a fully capitalist State like Turkey, where national oppression of the Kurds (at the level of the most basic bourgeois rights) undoubtedly made the class fraternization of the Turkish and Kurdish proletariat difficult, as seemed to emerge from the dynamics of the trade union struggles in the suburbs of Turkish cities in the 'Nineties. It therefore became necessary to evaluate, and if necessary demonstrate, whether the domination – both economic and political – of the Turkish bourgeoisie were based on the oppression of the Kurds, in other words if the economic basis of Turkish domination were based on land-owning, in view of the orographic importance of Eastern Anatolia, and thus if it were possible to apply Marx's and Engels' indications regarding the Irish issue to this case. In other words, the Party had to verify whether

Marx's and Engels' tactical approach and indications for the Balkans was valid, or else the approach relating to the Irish issue, if it was found that the strength of the Turkish bourgeoisie was based on the oppression of the Kurds and that a hypothetical separation from the Kurds would weaken the Americans' strategic control of the area. Meanwhile, in the case of Kurdistan, our Party had to urge the Kurdish proletariat not to become trapped in the blind alley of the fight for national independence, denouncing it openly as a *distraction from the anti-capitalist struggle*, and launch the idea not of raising the banner of self determination but that of the *class struggle against the entire bourgeoisie of the region*, in order to avoid falling into the traps of the different factions of the Kurdish bourgeoisie and their double-crossing self interest. The real risk was that of remaining prisoners of the attempt to speculate on a possible dismemberment of Iraq, in order to secure – with the blessing of US imperialism – a “mini-state”, limited to Iraqi Kurdistan, where rich and important oil resources are concentrated: thus, an entity totally subjected to imperialist forces far more powerful than those at present dominating the Kurdish population.

Communists cannot, in fact, be unconditionally in favour of an independent Kurdistan in abstract terms: the context of reference is always the overall picture of the international revolution and the actual, decisive conditions that can favour its development, perhaps through a break with the inter-imperialist status quo. The Party pursues and urges the international unity of the working class and thus *rallying the Kurdish, Turkish, Syrian, Iranian and Iraqi proletariat* in the fight against their respective bourgeoisies *until all the States in the region are destroyed*. However, in order to remove the obstacles to this joint battle, communists must persuade the Turkish, Iranian, Syrian, etc. proletariat to fight any form of discrimination or persecution to the detriment of the Kurds and thus to take action *for the defeat* of their own bourgeoisie, *even* – and this was the conclusion of the evaluation – by approving the self determination of the Kurdish people towards a possible national separation, if this represented the lever for removing material conditions hindering the unity of the working class. Supporting a people's right to separate, if it so wishes, does not mean approving fragmentation, of States or of the proletariat, neither does it mean that this solution is considered to be a historically feasible event. It merely means encouraging the proletariat of the oppressors' States to disassociate entirely from their ruling class and, at the same time, snatching a formidable weapon from the Kurdish bourgeoisie – that of the presumed chauvinism of the Turkish, Iranian etc. proletariat, of their joint responsibility in the ferocious repression of the Kurdish people – thanks to which they still keep their *own* proletariat under their control. It means aiding the fight of the Kurdish proletariat against their own bourgeoisie and favouring their free association with their Turkish etc. class brothers, with whom they share the same condition, suffering from the lack of bourgeois rights that causes them greater hardship, worse material conditions and the more or less conscious hatred of the

proletariat in the nations oppressing them (wherever they work, at home or as emigrants) in an area of strategic importance for the outcome of the international revolution.

According to our previous definition of the issue, this was a *transitory and contingent solution* resulting in the weakening of the strategical lynchpin in American control apparatus in the area: a solution that could remain valid until the time, which we hoped would come as soon as possible, when the Kurdish proletariat would break off all ties with its historically condemned nationalism. At this stage there would no longer be any need to encourage the Turkish, Iraqi, Iranian etc. proletariat to support the Kurds' right to self determination. In this sense, the approach formulated by Marx and Engels to the Irish question could be taken into consideration (and possibly applied). This did not contradict our theoretical approach: the Party was well aware that, being a situation that is included amongst the phenomena of the imperialist age, although not typical of it (and Marxism has demonstrated that a historical period includes typical and untypical aspects), a shift in the development pattern of the revolutionary process, speeding it up and favouring the international working-class movement, could also lead beyond this tactical approach. As Lenin wrote: "The socialdemocrats [*communists, Ed.*] in the dominating nations must claim freedom of secession for oppressed nations, because otherwise recognition of the equal rights of nations and international working-class solidarity would, in practice, be empty words, mere hypocrisy. And the socialdemocrats [*idem, Ed.*] in the oppressed nations must consider as a cornerstone the unity and fusion of the working class of oppressed peoples with the working class in the dominating nations, since otherwise these socialdemocrats [*idem, Ed.*] will involuntarily become the allies of one or another of the national bourgeoisies [...] Marx demanded the separation of Ireland from England, 'even if, after the separation, it might be necessary to agree to federation,' and he demanded it not from the point of view of the petit-bourgeois Utopia of pacific capitalism, nor for reasons of 'justice towards Ireland', but with a view to the interests of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat in the dominating nation, i.e. England, against capitalism [...] The internationalism of the English proletariat would have been hypocrisy, if the English proletariat had not demanded Ireland's secession [...] From the viewpoint of Parabelum [*pseudonym of Radek, a critic of the cry for self determination, Ed.*] Marx was leading an 'illusory fight' when he supported Ireland's claim to secession. But in practice this claim was the only one to be consistent with a revolutionary programme, to correspond to internationalism, to defend centralism in a non-imperialist sense."¹¹

For Marxists, the decisive element as regards the national issue is the creation of a situation that is more favourable to the overall development of the proletariat's class struggle. This is what Marx, Engels and Lenin teach us. In Marx's and Engels' analysis the Polish and Irish issues are two "international issues". The former was considered an integral

11. Lenin: "The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self Determination" (1915), in *Lenin Complete Works*, Vol. 21, pp. 374-375.

and inseparable part of the German issue: Polish independence – in view of Poland's role as a hinge between West and East – was considered vital for Germany to free itself of the alliance with the Czars and thus France to succeed in freeing itself from the empire. As regards the latter, Irish independence was the lever for putting an end to the "impotence" of the English working class – an impotence of which it was the "secret". The favourable attitude towards Polish and Irish independence lasted in Marx and Engels even after 1871, the date when we accept that national wars are no longer the "typical" phenomenon of the western European area. The appropriateness for the Party to launch the battle cry of self determination – and thus the political secession of a nation – is thus always linked to the creation of conditions that are most favourable to the world revolution, and which include the weakening of the most powerful imperialism and the removal of factors that separate different factions of the proletarian class within a national context (which, moreover, in the case of Turkey, appears from the very beginning, due to a delayed bourgeois revolution, as a nationally heterogeneous State).

On these bases, we evaluated the usefulness of the self determination formula in the case of Turkish Kurdistan. Today the course of events leads us to reconsider the way of approaching the issue, now increasingly limited to Turkey itself. The self-determination formula – in the absence of an intransigent mass movement supporting the independence of the Kurdish regions – runs the risk of becoming deviant, always remembering that it is the *duty of the Turkish proletariat* to use all means of ending the oppression of Kurdish proletarians (justified by the difference in nationality), if it does not wish to become accomplices in the infamy of its own bourgeoisie, which, moreover, has never been particularly delicate with its own proletariat.

As to the "Palestinian issue", it should first be remembered that the State of Israel represents a state entity artificially created by American imperialism to act as a counter-revolutionary police force throughout the Middle East and that its very constitution contains the material and physical source of the Palestinians' national oppression, as well as representing the material confirmation of how inconsequential the Palestinian and Arab bourgeoisie has been ever since this historical event. Israel has been an essential lever for the capitalist transformation of the Middle East; and the Palestinians have been the victims of unusually violent national persecution and oppression, deprived of their land and thus radically transformed into proletariat and dispersed throughout the area (a material element that constitutes a powerful basis for gathering together the proletariat under the banner of its international programme for fighting capitalism). Israel's special feature is that it comes into being as a colonising State, which is a characteristic that in no way derives from its religious nature (all the States in the region share this aspect), but from the fact that its economy depends heavily on enormous foreign financing, partly deriving directly from the United States and partly imposed by the latter country on Germany with the pretext of the Holocaust.

Instead, what must be firmly denied are the false consequences that have sometimes been inferred from this correct premise in the past, i.e. the battle cry of the “destruction of the State of Israel” as the shape that the consequence of Palestinian self determination would take and develop. Today, this battle cry risks becoming an *openly nationalist objective* devoid of any basis in an area now completely bourgeois, like the Middle East, despite the persistence of Jewish privileges and the consequent oppression and persecution of the Palestinians – aspects that have been tolerated for too long by the western proletariat, paralysed by the crumbs of material privileges that have fallen from the banquet table of the imperialist predators and ensnared by the cross-class ideology preached by the false workers’ parties. Up to the present, the result produced by the course of inter-imperialist contradictions with regard to the “Palestinian issue” consists in a Palestinian Bantustan-state which the Israeli bourgeoisie first put up with and then endorsed. In this situation, the Palestinian proletariat has already experienced the real consequences of the long-desired “national independence”, limited and partial as it is. From this derives the need for the class Party to claim, on behalf of the Palestinian proletariat, *not “national defence” but the possibility of returning between Israeli borders with rights (and thus also salaries and other conditions) that are completely equal to those of the Israelis*: this would mean the end of Jewish privileges and the material forms of national oppression of the Palestinians. In this case, it is a question of guaranteeing within the state of Israel itself *equal material rights for the Arab proletariat*. Only on this condition will the Arab working class be able to recognise the Israeli proletariat as their natural ally in the future, or – better – as their class brothers.

However, a correct evaluation of the present situation and consequent action by the Party cannot ignore the *central role of an analysis of the balance of power in the area*. In fact, this balance must be our starting point, rather than repeating simple, empty statements of intent, which are fine for putting our conscience to rest but cannot represent the scientific basis for the Party’s present and future action. Today, it can be considered that a class-oriented revolutionary path in Israel and throughout the Middle East can only be the result of a catastrophic military defeat of the State of Israel, whose strength lies mainly outside the country and derives mostly from foreign financing and military aid.

To sum up very briefly, the following elements must be considered:

- a) the State of Israel is the launching pad for all projections of American power in the area. Up to now Europe and Japan have profited from this situation and have participated in the financing of what is an authentic mercenary State;
- b) given that the Israeli proletariat is extremely various (Hebrews, Arab-Israelis, immigrants from south-east Asia, from eastern Europe, from Africa, from Latin America...), the class collaboration and chauvinism of the salaried workers of Jewish origin are rooted *not* in the religious element *but* in the fact that they constitute a “work-

ing-class aristocracy" with their own special characteristics and privileges, linked to the specific nature and role of the State of Israel: i.e., they are wage workers for whom – because of material conditions – solidarity with the State of Israel comes before any, even vague, class identity or membership;

- c) defeat of the Israelis' internal front is only possible in the case of a general collapse of the State. It may come economically with the termination of free financing by the imperialist Trilateral (but already a stop to European aid could pose great economic problems for the Zionist State and its American protector)¹² or politically, through a military defeat.

In the present situation this defeat is inconceivable. Only a revolutionary process that shook Europe, unifying and centralising it under a revolutionary dictatorship, could set off economic, political and military dynamics leading to this result. Without this condition, the dispersed and desperate forces of the Palestinian proletariat and the disinherited Arab masses, were they to be persuaded to fight, are of no military value, though politically they would be of considerable significance: in fact, to paraphrase what Marx says about revolution ("the first result of revolution is the revolution itself"), it could be argued that the first victory of the Palestinian proletarian struggle is the battle of the Palestinian proletariat itself. In this context, *the cycle of purely national struggles and movements for Palestine and for the whole of the Middle East is thus finally devoid of any historical perspective*. Therefore the Party can do no more than indicate a *single solution* to the Palestinian proletarian masses, one that also contains the possibility of cutting through the knot of national oppression and discrimination: that of *establishing themselves on the ground of an open class struggle against all the rapacious bourgeoisies of the region, in defence of their material living and working conditions*, a struggle capable of bringing together in a single front working classes of mixed nationalities, to be sealed by the open, anti-capitalist fight of the proletariat in the imperialist cities¹³.

12. In Marxist doctrine the State is the organ by which a social class dominates. To call the State of Israel "Zionist" does not detract from this function but merely brings out a further "constitutional" characteristic of the Israeli State's beginnings. For Marxism the special nature of Judaism does not derive from racial factors but from the history of the Jewish people, and Lenin (see: "The Position of the Bund in the Party", *Complete Works*, Vol. 7, pp. 86-97) comments that "the idea of Jewish nationality is of a clearly reactionary character" and "it is contrary to the interests of the Jewish proletariat, because it arouses in them, directly or in more devious ways, a state of mind that is hostile to assimilation". It is also implicitly true that after the foundation of the State of Israel, particular interests of the bourgeois Israeli State also begin to arise, but this does not alter the fact that it finds all the strength necessary to resist and expand from support coming from abroad and from the functions it carries out in the area.

13. "The Palestinian Issue and the International Workers' Movement", *Il Programma comunista*, no. 9/2000.

Conclusions

In a text of ours written in 1924 for discussion at the Vth Congress of the Communist International and entitled "Communism and the national issue", a most important warning was given: "Certain simple formulas

are vital for our Party's agitation and propaganda and in all cases these imply less danger than an excess of elasticity and open-mindedness. But these formulas must be points of arrival and results, not points of departure for an investigation of the issues, such as have to be dealt with by the Party's highest organs of criticism and deliberation, in order to make these conclusions available to the mass of militants in clear and explicit terms"¹⁴.

In connection with the "national issue", *two fundamental errors* must be avoided. The *first* is of a petit-bourgeois nature and basically consists in the unconditional defence of the "nationality principle" (whilst we make the – bourgeois – "right" to self determination subordinate to *requirements for the development of the international revolutionary movement*). The *second* is of an *indifferentist-mechanical* nature, which, by identifying the issue with that of the "double revolution", or identifying and confusing the economic and political aspect of the liberation of oppressed nations, ignores the material obstacles that arise on the path of the international unity of the proletariat and thus falls

back (Luxemburg-style) into an idealistic vision of the revolutionary process – or, worse (in Serrati and Graziadei-style), into the jingoistic (chauvinistic) spirit typical of the working-class aristocracy, criticised by Lenin in his intervention at the IInd Congress of the Communist International (1920)¹⁵.

14. "Communism and the National Issue", *Prometeo*, June 1924.

15. See our *Storia della Sinistra Comunista*, Vol. 2, pp. 629-642.

A possible "political" oppression should not be confused with economic oppression: the latter cannot be eliminated in a bourgeois context and can also apply to States that are formally independent. On the other hand, no form of annexation carried out by capitalist States through wars or military invasion and occupation can be traced back to "political" oppression. The term "national oppression" stands for all forms of discrimination, so that a part of the population (and thus the proletariat, too) suffers in the end from worse material conditions, just because they are of a different nationality. "No privilege for any nation or any language! Not the slightest oppression or the slightest injustice towards a national minority!": these are Lenin's words¹⁶. Here we are in the field of "political democracy" (whose claims, as Lenin again reminds us, can always be achieved only in an incomplete and deformed manner in the imperialist age) and certainly the evolution of capitalism has robbed these phenomena of relevance (and volume) of space, compared to Lenin's times; but the political need for the free and fraternal union of the international proletariat imposes – once again in Lenin's words – *the ample use of conflicts that also arise on this terrain*. The attitude of the proletariat in the imperialist cities and the countries of the oppressors becomes fundamental: if proletarian solidarity is not to become a rhetorical and empty slogan, it must *put a radical end to any support for the action of its own bourgeoisie*. Not by chance Lenin, when drawing up these directives, reminds us – unlike the "Proudhon" attitude which in the name of the social revolution denied the need for a fight against national oppression – of Marx's

demands and emphasises their internationalist significance, i.e. their close connection to the internationalist interests and spirit of the working-class movement¹⁷. With the formula of the “opposite and dialectic instructions” to the proletariat in the countries of the oppressors and the oppressed, in which our self-determination formula can find its development, Lenin codifies and formalises the theoretical indications of Marx-Engels on the Irish question (in a fully capitalist area).

Every theory, as we have always emphasised and practised, proceeds through formulation and subsequent adjustments in the light of historical experience up to the present. This also held true for the “revolutionary defeatism” formula which, at the time, Lenin and left-wing elements had to defend with teeth and claws from those who objected that it favoured the bourgeoisie, albeit in a different country. For the international proletarian movement no solution to any question must be placed above class interests and those of their struggle, both of which are international.

The following points are the result of this:

1. The present-day context, typical of the current imperialistic phase, is that – demonstrated by Lenin – of the war “of economic claims between the various big capitalist States in sharing out world resources for production, especially of the colonies in the less advanced continents¹⁸.
2. The Party’s objective is to remove all conditions that act as a material barrier to the international unity of the proletariat and, in any case, to reaffirm this necessity as a programme.
3. Any claim regarding the advisability of national secession must always be evaluated and conditioned by reference to the need to promote the revolutionary process, and subordinated to this, in the awareness that economic and democratic transformations of any type cannot be totally achieved until the bourgeoisie and its rule is abolished, always bearing in mind the “historical relativity and class content of all claims for political democracy, including self determination”¹⁹
4. Throughout the world, the end has come for any hypothesis of “double revolution”, which might suggest the proletariat sharing objectives or alliances, even of a temporary nature, with its own national bourgeoisie.
5. Nonetheless, the need may exist, at certain times and in certain areas, to pursue the advance of international working-class unity through opposite, though interconnected, objectives to those in the oppressor and the oppressed nation: the former has the task of carrying out defeatist action towards its own bourgeoisie, no longer collaborating jointly in the oppression of another people and allowing the possibility – if the conditions of the revolutionary struggle demand this – of constituting a politically independent nation; the latter, strengthened by the attitude of the proletariat in

16. Lenin: “The Working Class and the national Issue”, in *Complete Works*, Vol. 19, pp. 74-75.

17. Lenin, “The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self Determination”, *Complete Works*, Vol. 22, pp. 147-160.

18. *I fattori di razza e nazione nella teoria marxista*, op. cit. p.120.

19. Lenin: “The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self Determination”, op. cit., p.160.

the ruling nation, must refuse any alliance with its own bourgeoisie and tend towards unity with the proletariat of the oppressor. The tactical directives of the Party in the present historical situation, which place on the agenda a purely proletarian revolution worldwide, consist in encouraging workers in the oppressed nation to break off ties with the nationalism of their own bourgeoisie and at the same time call the workers in the dominant nation to defend the oppressed nation's right to self determination, as a material lever for shattering the bases of cross-class solidarity in the midst of the oppressed peoples.

All this on *certain well-defined conditions*, which consist in the fact of a) the actual existence of national oppression and not an artificial opposition of populations manoeuvred by imperialism or a situation connected to a transitory foreign military occupation during the course of hostile operations (as is the case in Iraq, today); b) authentic nations being involved and not "peoples without history", in the sense intended by Engels of peoples "lacking elementary historical, geographical, political and industrial conditions of independence and vitality" ²⁰; c) the persistence of national oppression constitutes an objective hindrance to the unification of the international proletariat and the class struggle, since it is due to this oppression that the proletariat of the oppressed nation is still subject to the nationalist propaganda of its own bourgeoisie.

This is the significance that Marxism gives to the formula of self determination, a term that Lenin himself realised was imperfect, but which we shall have to continue using until a better one is found. Faced with accusations of "dualistic propaganda", Lenin's reply to Piatakov-Kievski is valid: we cannot ask the workers of dominant nations the same as we ask the workers of oppressed nations ²¹.

It could be objected, after having repeated that Lenin – polemising with Luxemburg, Piatakov-Kievski and others – highlighted the political aspects of the oppression and referred exclusively to them, that, if the revolution is purely proletarian throughout the world, the classical thesis of Lenin is outdated, given also the irreversible failure of the bourgeoisie and those of peoples that failed to acquire a national status at the time. We reply that the development of capitalism may well have produced this consequence, particularly after a phase of acceleration of the revolutionary process in the centres of world imperialism: however – as already explained earlier – the observation that the era of the double revolutions is over does not automatically lead to the elimination of situations that still linger on, in which the proletariat's refusal of solidarity with its own bourgeoisie and defeatist strategy towards it must not result in recognition of the right to secession, if this is a tool for achieving the free and total unity of the proletariat and if this situation does not become an obstacle to the

20. F. Engels: "Democratic Pan-Slavism", in Marx-Engels, *Complete Works*, Vol. VIII, pp. 364-381.

21. Lenin: "On a Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economy," in *Complete Works*, vol. 23, p. 53.

international development of the anti-capitalist revolution ²².

6. Contrary to any third-worldist and petit-bourgeois deformation, it should be reiterated that the political guidance of the proletariat - an international class - can only be located, deterministically, in the areas that constitute *the epicentre of capital's domination* and thus of the decisive class struggles between proletariat and bourgeoisie, quite apart from what may be the initial engine of the revolutionary process (more probably on the outskirts, in the weaker links in the chain, than at the heart of the bourgeois system) and the contribution made to it by the proletariat of all countries.
7. All this does not entail a mechanistic view of the revolutionary process: social revolution can only be a *long period of battles* and cannot help involving all classes and "impure" movements, with all their prejudices and backwardness, since the imperialist age is merely the final phase of capitalism and thus based on the foundations of capitalism and its laws of unequal development.

22. It is not a question of incongruence or of unclear positions. As confirmation of this, it should be observed that Lenin himself in "Theses on the National Issue" places the emphasis simultaneously on the following aspects (Thesis 4): "If socialdemocracy [*i.e. the communists, Ed.*] recognises the right of self-determination for all nationalities, this definitely does not mean that it renounces an independent evaluation of the appropriateness, in each single case, of secession by one country or the other. On the contrary, the socialdemocrats must give a precise, independent judgement, taking into account both the conditions for the development of capitalism and the oppression of the proletariat of different nations by the combined bourgeoisie of all nationalities and the general tasks of democracy, and, first and foremost, the interests of the proletariat's class struggle for socialism [...]. Socialdemocracy must therefore do its utmost to warn the proletariat and working classes of all nationalities against the obvious trap of their bourgeoisie's nationalist slogans [...] the worker who places political unity with the bourgeoisie of his own nation before complete unity with the proletariat of all nations thus acts against his own interests, against the interests of socialism and of democracy" (Lenin, *Complete Works*, Vol. 19, pp. 220-227).

CHICAGO, 1905: THE BIRTH OF THE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD

In the history of the American workers' movement, at least from 1905 to 1920, the *Industrial Workers of the World* (I.W.W., commonly known as *wobblies*) held a position of considerable importance. It is thanks to this organisation, which came into being by special initiative of the Western Federation of Miners (founded in 1897 and the protagonist of the toughest of fights in this sector) that the workers of the West (but not only), where capitalism had established itself in its most modern and fiercely exploitative form, were finally able to present a united front to the big companies spreading towards the Pacific coast. Unlike the corrupt and ultra-reformist American Federation of Labour, it made no distinction of race, nationality or colour and unqualified, seasonal and migrant workers – the most oppressed and therefore the most beligerent – were in the forefront.

The *wobblies* were responsible for the great strikes of 1907 in the mines of Nevada and the steelworks of Pennsylvania, of 1911 in the timber industry of the extreme north-west, of 1912 in the textile industry (Lawrence, Massachusetts), of 1913 particularly in the silk factories (Paterson, New Jersey) and, in the First world war, for the powerful movements in the copper, timber and steel industries. In all these glorious episodes, the practice of extending specific

struggles, of militant solidarity between different categories, of abstention from work with no time limits (the Paterson strike lasted 7 months!), of open organisation and acceptance of both the employed and the unemployed, together with the firm decision not to surrender to the police and, if necessary, to the army, either in “peace” time or when the First World War broke out and the United States entered it in 1917 – all this made the pulses and veins of the so perfectly democratic US rulers tremble, made the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois citizens foam with rage and the official orators of the ruling class and their opportunist lackeys thunder from the tribunes (as well as the priests of a thousand different American churches and sects from the pulpits), whilst the lead bullets of the police cut down hundreds of militants and the prison gates were thrown open to jail them in their thousands. A golden roll of honour from all these viewpoints, which the I.W.W. filled with the obscure names of an ardent proletariat that dared to write on its banners: *Abolish the wage system!*

Decimated by the repression of the police forces, labelled outcasts by the trade unionist and political bonzes, weakened by their own theoretical and programmatic inadequacies (which were subsequently reflected in tragic organisational weaknesses), the

I.W.W. movement started to decline after the First World War. However, it did not die out and, in the oppressive atmosphere of the stars and stripes Republic, the fact that its voice persists, even feebly, is one of the few signs of life. The opening lines of the “1908 Preamble”, published in every issue of the Chicago *Industrial Worker*, cannot be read without emotion: “The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life. Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the earth and the machinery of production, and abolish the wage system. [...] Instead of the conservative motto, ‘A fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work’, we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, ‘Abolition of the wage system’. It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism”¹.

The acknowledgement of a heritage and tradition of great and heroic battles, of obstinate insistence in the grey world of the dollar, of an eminently open profession of faith in the revolutionary role of the working class, of the persistent criticism of opportunist trade unionists “who allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry” and encourage in them “the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers” (idem), must not, however, close our eyes to the unsubstantial nature of the I.W.W.’s theoretical and programmatic bases. The latter are basically analogous to those of European anarcho-trade unionism and, from some points of view, to Italian “Ordinovismo” originating from Gramsci²: a lack of substance which, as far back as 1920-1921, prevented those bold workers –

the only ones to persist in holding aloft the torch of class revolution – from finding the path of communism and joining the Third International or even the International of Red Trade Unions. They are in favour of “direct action” and “a general strike” but then refuse the *political battle* and its organ the *class party*, whilst they see the general strike as a thaumaturgic means of bringing about the collapse of the “system” *on its own*, by virtue of the dead weight of paralysed production. They are immediatists: thus they refuse the mediation of the party-form and hence the State-form (dictatorship) as the “imposition of leaders on the masses”, “substitution of a will” that is unrelated to the immediate will of the class in its indistinct, general and, it must be said, vague, nature. The wobblies declare: “By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old” (idem). They thus refuse violence (as though a general strike were not in itself violence!) and thus terror, because it destroys the means of production: instead, their “direct action” aims at making useless the means of production for exploiters, while *preserving* them for the use of the workers, once the bosses are deprived of their control. And so, contrary to their best intentions, they slip into a sort of gradualism and reformism: let’s keep the machines shining, because one day they’ll fall into our own hands! It is thus curious but logical for the I.W.W. to consider not only the “industrial unions” but also *existing* co-operatives as cells of the new society within the old... Like the anarcho-sindicalists, the I.W.W. react vigorously to parliamentary degeneration and the opportunism of the traditional

1. See Joyce Kornbluh, ed., *Rebel Voices: an I.W.W. Anthology* (The University of Michigan Press, 1968).

2. For a criticism of all these positions, see Vol. II of our *History of the Communist Left* (Edizioni Il programma comunista, 1972), in particular chaps. VI, VIII and IX.

“workers” parties and trade unions – driven to open blacklegging and the support of bourgeois institutions – but then refuse *any* organisation into a party, any form of State: they fail to understand (as the Third International observed in a letter of January 1920)³ that “destroying the capitalist State edifice, breaking capitalist class resistance and disarming it, confiscating property and passing it over to the workers: to carry out all these tasks, a government, a State is necessary – the dictatorship of the proletariat, by means of which the workers can break the enemy class with a fist of iron”. All this – and indeed even the earlier defeat of the bourgeois régime – presupposes organisation into a political party. They fail to understand that the general strike either transforms itself into the right conditions for armed rebellion, or exhausts itself; that it is impossible to build “the structure of the new society within the shell of the old”, because nothing new can be “built” unless power is won and exercised in order to crush the resistance of an “entrepreneurial” class that will not disappear just because we have “put down our tools.” This is the source of the internal battles, which produced repeated lacerations between the “politicised” and the “unpoliticised”, between “centralisers” and “decentralisers”.

Like the anarcho-syndicalists, they believe that a *certain* form of economic organisation – in their case the form based on industry and not on skill or trade – is in itself revolutionary, confusing a problem of *strength* and *content* with a problem of *form*. In so doing, they do not realise that any immediate form of organisation can have revolutionary or reformist aims, and be counter-revolutionary, according to whether revolu-

tionary or reformist political forces and programmatic content prevail. This is well demonstrated in the United States itself by the fact that the principle of organisation by industry and not by skill or trade was adopted by the Congress of Industrial Organisations (C.I.O.), which subsequently assumed an identical position to that of the reformist conservatism of the A.F.L..

The profound sense of militant solidarity, the refusal of any distinction of race or nation, the call to the great levers of direct economic action including the general strike, are the strong points of an organisation that re-connects a negative present to a resplendent past. The ball and chain attached to it is its pre-Marxism, as is well demonstrated by the enthusiastic praise of the *wobblies* sung by “workerists” of all sorts and varieties in Europe and America – the sworn enemies of the party and centralisation of economic and political battles. But in the huge battles that are to take place in what today seems to be the impregnable temple of Mammon – just as it seemed impregnable when the *wobblies* of a hundred years ago launched their war cry against the system of wage work – a minority of those proletarians will feel (or rather will be *obliged* to feel) that the class party, revolutionary dictatorship, the red terror, are links in the only chain joining the first, instinctive reactions of the working class against its own exploitation to the final objective of its emancipation (that same emancipation that it saw before it, when organising itself as “industrial workers of the world”). It will see that “*every economic battle is a political battle*”, that “*the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat*” as a necessary step “*towards the suppression of all classes and a classless society.*”

This is the only way that the I.W.W. must be remembered on the hundredth anniversary of their birth.

3 Extracts from the letter can be read in Jane Degras, ed., *The Communist International. 1919-1943. Documents*, Vol. I: 1919-1922 (1951). The quotation is here from the Italian version (Fellinelli 1975), pp. 87-89.

Back to Basics

Theses on tactics of the communist party of Italy (*Rome Theses, 1922*)

Introduction

The Communist Party of Italy was formed in 1921 (at the Livorno Congress) on the basis of the "21 Moscow Conditions of Adherence" and of the program that introduces the "Rome Theses" reproduced here. The Left, which led the party until early 1923, energetically began the work of political (then military) cadre-building, agitation and propaganda, and, above all, of intervention in the powerful economic struggles of the proletariat. The latter had not yet been repressed by the democratic State apparatus and the fascist bands proliferating in its shadow, nor by the subtle job of political and organizational *disarmament* developed within its ranks by the reformists. Of all the sections of the International, it was the CP of Italy that first launched and energetically supported the proposal for a *united front* on the trade-union level (or, "from below"). The tactic had two aspects. On the one hand, it invited the three existing worker organizations (CGL, USI, SF) ¹ to fuse into one single organization and, on the other hand, to orient its struggles toward the unification of all trade demands into a single platform, to be defended (and this was "a question of principle") on the basis of the method of a single action – the general strike –, meanwhile forming within the CGL a tight and efficacious network of communist groups acting as a "transmission belt" so as to place the federation under the political direction of the party. At the same time, the PC of Italy was also the only one to fight fascism *on its own terrain*, that of violence, neither ignoring nor hiding from the proletariat the fact that it unfortunately found itself on the *defensive* – for reasons independent of its actions or will – though without hesitating, as circumstances allowed, to undertake necessary and desired *counter-attacks*.

The CP of Italy was (and this is not a contradiction) a party of the *offensive* as a party of *permanent* opposition *can only be* in relation to the regime of capital. And this not because – as was too hastily said at the time and repeated by the opportunists today to mask their treachery – it would have been loathe to order a retreat if necessary or, worse, because it dreamed only of feats accomplished by active minorities (something which was always openly shunned as non-*Marxist* and so foreign to the Party): but on the contrary, because it knew itself constrained by the historical situation in rising to the *supreme challenge* of the enemy (a necessity which it did not deplore but recognized and manfully shouldered) *and because it would never*, even in a position of retreat, have accepted to place itself on the

1. CGL: General Confederation of Labour, controlled by the social-democrats; USI: Union of Italian Trade-unions, controlled by the anarchists; SF: Union of Railway Workers.

terrain of the material and ideological disarmament of the proletariat by invoking laws, rights or democracy.

While the proletariat, fighting the everyday struggle with admirable generosity, found itself constantly abandoned to its own fate or, worse, betrayed by its "leaders", the obstacle that the party encountered in its battle for the authentic *rearmament* of the proletariat was the enormous barrier of the right and the social-democratic centre. That is precisely why the struggle against social-democracy was an indissoluble and integral part of the party's struggle against the bourgeoisie, its central organ, the State, and its "illegal" military formations, even though they were in large measure *covertly maintained* by the government and *openly* so by the industrialists and big landowners. And that is also why the party could predict that the defeat of opportunism, the right or the center, would be both the result and condition of the increase of its influence upon the proletariat. The latter recognized the party as its *sole* guide; it alone merited confidence not because of *verbal* proclamations but because of its *actions* and the constancy of its *practical as well as doctrinal positions*: because it knew how to read from the *isolation* imposed by the unfavorable European and world situation a logic not of discouragement, but of *force*.

The *Theses on Tactics* were presented at the 2nd Congress of the Communist Party of Italy ² as a contribution to the definition of complex and fundamental questions of interest to the communist movement in its entirety, it being understood that the party would in any event submit to the final decisions of the Komintern Executive. In order to fully understand the theses, it is necessary to bear in mind certain aspects of the history of the Communist International at the time. The value of the theses derives not from their polemically contingent worth: but, this we emphasize, because they contain the balance-sheet of *real* conflicts not only on the Italian plane but especially on the European and extra-European plane, and because they draw from this balance-sheet not the "discovery" of new directives as much as the

confirmation of invariant directives which, for that very reason, we believe must be valid always and for all. Today we have all the more reason to consider them *definitive*.

Held from 22 June to 12 July, 1921, the 3rd Congress of the International had undertaken the critique of the unfortunate "March Action" in Germany and the "tactics of offensive" promoted – with much confusion – by groups more marginal to the German party than part of it. The Congress reached two fundamental conclusions that the Left in Italy was the first to agree with. For one, because it considered them "in the spirit of clarification as part of the shared patrimony of all communist Marxists, if correctly and fortuitously applied" ³. For another, because the Left itself was acting in this sense in leading the party into one of the most difficult but most exalting phases of the proletarian struggle in Europe. The conclusions were the following:

1) It is not sufficient to have parties solidly anchored to the principles of revolutionary Marxism and

2. The "Theses" were first published in *Rassegna Comunista*, No. 17, 30 January 1922; they were presented at the 2nd Party Congress held at Rome, 20-24 March 1922 (thus the name *Rome Theses*). The delegates were Amadeo Bordiga and Umberto Terracini.

3. Quoted from the series of articles on "The Tactics of the Communist International" that appeared between 12-31 January 1922 in the organ of the CP of Italy and translated into French in *Programme communiste*, No. 51-52, pp.94-120. In Italian, they can be read in our *Storia della sinistra comunista*, Vol. IV (Edizioni il programma comunista, 1997), pp.272-294, and we will subsequently quote from this edition. These articles are particularly important for understanding our overall position on tactical questions.

based on the resulting norms sanctioned by the founding congress of the International – parties as a result uniquely composed of elements possessing a clear vision of the necessity of the revolutionary struggle from which they do not let themselves be deflected because they have attained (or hope to attain) partial or temporary results. These parties must gather around themselves increasingly numerous phalanxes from the proletarian army, so that the development of the situation itself leads to a general struggle against the enemy class and its governmental apparatus. The formation of truly communist parties and the conquest of the great proletarian masses are two conditions that *not only do not exclude* each other, but *coincide* perfectly, as the first is thinkable only as a function of the second and the second is only achievable on class-bases as a function of the first.

- 2) Winning over ever-larger strata of the proletariat to the political influence and finally the material direction of the party does not result from (nor will it ever result solely from) the work of proselytism and propaganda: it requires that the party *actively* participate in and *give impulse* to the economic struggles that groups of proletarians engage in under the pressures of *contingent* material interests. It would be infantile and even anti-Marxist to ignore these struggles and interests, since the first are the source of all class conflicts and the second reflect the compelling thrusts of social antagonisms. The party, on the contrary, proposes to shoulder them and develop them “in their real and necessary processes, harmonizing them to make them converge in the general revolutionary action”⁴. The party that dreams of launching the final assault under whatever the circumstances, abstracting from relations of forces that it would in no way attempt to modify because it considers the final assault as the only action at its disposal, is beyond the pale of Marxism, as is the party that gives itself only purely “educational” or quantitative “recruiting” tasks, while waiting passively for a Zero-hour that is always far away and nebulous: in the first instance, it’s voluntarism; in the second, mechanicism.

For us, agreement on these questions raised neither objections nor reservations: agreement was *total*. But what the “March Action” and its consequences should have *in fact* demonstrated was not so much the risk of coups *à la Blanqui* (in any case, the theses of the 3rd Congress denied that one could speak of such in this specific case); nor was it the risk of falsely “leftist” theorizations arising in the margins of communism, and in the KAPD in particular, as this infantile disorder was curable within the Third International. Rather, the risk was the *nervousness* and *instability* of the young parties of Central Europe, oscillating between passivity *prior* to the unleashing of elementary movements they had neither foreseen nor wished for and the verbal extremism following the *fait accompli* (it was the same problem a year before at the time of the Kapp Putsch, and it was the same in March). The danger was one of empiricism and eclecticism varying according to the situation and reflecting – particularly in the German party – a lack of ideological homogeneity present from the beginning, but aggravated subsequently by the hasty

4. Op. cit., p.274. For the action on the united front on the trade-union level, lead by the Communist Party of Italy in 1921-22, see Nos.11-18 (1967) of our Italian-language organ, *Il Programma Comunista*; for its action against fascism, see the articles in Nos. 16,17,18,21,22 (1967) and 1,2,3 (1968) published in French in *Programme Communiste*, Nos. 45-50, under the title “Le P.C. d’Italie face à l’offensive fasciste”, as well as our pamphlet *Communisme et Fascisme*. In Italian, all these documents can be read in our *Storia della sinistra comunista*, cit.

fusion of the party with the left of the Independent Party. Even greater was the danger that this perpetual oscillation would find its *point of equilibrium* in a clearly *rightist* orientation, which effectively did manifest itself several months later, only to cost dearly in the fall of 1923. A grave symptom of this had already appeared with the crisis (severely judged at meetings of the Executive of the International before and during the 3rd Congress) of the Czechoslovak party. Its 400,000 members (!), recruited at the price of watering down the party program and principles, were certainly numerous but sick with parliamentarism and shamefully passive before the very arduous social struggles led by the Czech proletariat⁵. And what pre-occupied the Left above all was the possibility that these oscillations around, let us say, a *rightist barycentre* might install themselves within the International (as was indeed happening) in the midst of the most tragic moment of the life of Bolshevik Russia, a moment when its very own isolation rendered even more urgent an influx of healthy blood and pure oxygen from proletarian Europe.

In this context, one understands the reasons for our tenacious, and by no means "byzantine", opposition to the launching of general and ill-defined formulae, whose meaning for Lenin or Trotsky was clear to us but, precisely because of their indetermination in a historical period when the trenchant precision of directives was an imperious necessity, lent themselves to interpretations that, alas, inclined them to compromise. The slogan concerning "the conquest of a *majority* of the working class", understood as the *conditio sine qua non* of the assault and conquest of power, is a typical example. And yet Lenin had clearly explained its meaning: "Of course, we do not give the winning of the majority a formal interpretation, as do the knights of philistine 'democracy'... When in Rome, in July 1921, the entire proletariat – the reformist proletariat of the trade unions and the Centrists of Serrati's party – followed the Communists against the fascists, that was *winning over the majority of the working class* to our side... This was far, very far, from winning them decisively; it was doing so only partially, only momentarily, only locally. But it was winning over the majority"⁶. Very soon, nevertheless, it became evident that for numerous parties (and for certain currents even within the Russian party and, by inflection, the International), the "conquest of the majority" signified something else altogether. At times, it meant the material conquest of a *numerical*

5. Terracini's error, speaking at the 3rd Congress not only on behalf of the Communist Party of Italy but also for the German and Austrian parties, lay in not developing all these points with dialectical sureness. Thus Lenin's severe reprimand, although he would, with his usual forthrightness, recognize that as a reaction to these badly absorbed "leftisms", he had to ally himself "with the right" and more so than the real problems of the international movement demanded, as would be proven by the later developments of June-July 1921 (See in particular Lenin's *Notes of a publicist*, March 1922, which is very outspoken against Levi and Serrati).

6. Lenin, "Letter to German Communists", 14 August 1922.

majority through party membership (a contradiction in terms of the fundamental 1920 "Theses on the role of the party in the proletarian revolution"). At other times, it meant not the conquest of a majority of the working class, but of the "*masses*" in a *general sense*, whether organized or not, whether proletarian or "popular." At other times again, in the most favorable light, it meant abstractly establishing a statistical level of determinate *direct* influence (or, worse, of effective *control*) over the working masses – a level considered sufficiently adequate for the party to feel itself authorized by the relation of forces to engage the final battle. One thus ignored the existence of much more important factors

than numbers, according to which – as had happened in Russia in 1917 – a party with limited manpower (that is, *disregarding its will*) but solidly anchored in a continuity of program and action within the class, could find itself at the head of developing situations and assume such a role with courage; such a party fully has the right to demand not to be judged on the efficiency of its practical action according to the dry, academic and unstable criteria of numbers 7. Too quickly, however, the bad habit of “judging” parties on the basis of their numerical weight or electoral results developed and transformed meetings of the Executive Plenum into courtrooms, a sad prelude to future Stalinist practices. Finally even more grave deviations, that we will not examine here, manifested themselves at the 4th Congress: certain currents or fractions of parties translated the slogan into the purest and most traditional parliamentarism in which one could discern invitations to fractions of the social-democracy to join the dance, even to organizational reconciliation. In short, the principal danger that was emerging was the belief that one could overcome temporary setbacks or accelerate the development of the revolutionary process by artificially “fabricating” parties of supposedly *maximum caliber*, by assembling together the debris of social-democratic collapse or by elaborate diplomatic negotiations on the basis of mutual concessions. This was tantamount, in fact, to breaking the *strict discipline of program, action and organization* that is the truly distinguishing sign and authentic criterion of the class party.

The danger was not imaginary and our cries of alarm were not dictated by idealist a priori. Indeed, the proof is that Moscow at that very moment agreed to discuss the eventuality and conditions for the posthumous adherence of that Italian Socialist Party whose incurably counter-revolutionary nature historical events had once again recorded in blood and steel on the flesh of proletarians (the first “pacification pacts” with the fascists were signed while the social-democratic pilgrims were travelling towards the Mecca of their false repentance). Allowing the PSI a recourse to appeal meant the introduction within the International of the more than equivocal category of the “sympathizing party” in addition to the official party and, on the same plane as the latter, in direct liaison with Moscow 8. To ask of the PSI, after the well-deserved reprimands it had drawn from Lenin, Trotsky and Zinoviev during international congresses, that it separate from the right-wing of Turati (which it did not do, not even at the Milan congress that took place several months later), meant putting into question the terms of adherence formulated in 1920: in fact, the amputation of the right from the PSI represented an effective test *prior* to the founding congress of the CP of Italy as it would have provided proof of the complete acceptance of the 21 “Conditions”. But this no longer had any point as of *that moment* when, at Livorno, the center under Serrati and the right under Turati joined together en bloc *against* Moscow’s orders. And if that was not sufficient proof, the PSI had shown many times, in the course of bloody confrontations

7. Trotsky himself, at the Executive Plenum of the International in February-March 1922, where he reaffirmed several times over and with force our common principles, allowed himself to set quasi-mandatory percentages (the 3/4!) to measure the degree of influence required to launch the attack. Would he have bothered with such laboratory experiments at the time of stirring Red October when he fought by Lenin’s side, where even the arithmetics of majority-minority were swept aside within the Central Committee?

8. As is now known, the category would be tragically institutionalized at the 5th Congress in 1924, and the first instance of a “sympathizing party” would be that of Chiang Kai-chek the butcher!

between classes, even on basic economic questions, that it *in fact* refused the International's platform just as it had several times already condemned the *platform's principles*. Parties are not formless aggregates of individuals or groups; they are *organisms* formed in the course of a real history and possess their own internal logic that cannot be set aside or deformed without undermining the very foundations of the party itself and the conditions for its further development. It served no purpose to say that, in the last analysis, the PSI was no worse than the parties of the Second International, for the excellent reason that even if the Left in its energetic work of rearming the proletariat had been directly affected by the PSI's sudden shifts, it did not make of its refusal to fuse with the PSI or certain of its currents, a national or local issue, or even a question of prestige, but a question of the proper *international* orientation. In any case, once severed from its right wing, what could the PSI (or any of its equivalents in other countries) be other than the Italian version of that social-democratic center so accurately denounced by Lenin and the Bolsheviks for its skill at masking its veritable nature, its gradualist and parliamentary reformism, with purely verbal "intransigence"? And what would have been the result of its fusion as an *organized* group with the CP if not the reproduction of the unfortunate model of a party not so much with two souls as with "two bodies", two mechanisms in opposition, and thus paralyzed in all its movements, as had so often already occurred in the crucial events immediately after the war? And finally such a compromising with last-minute penitents would have introduced into the Komintern (as we know today did happen) the disastrous practice of periodic regressions and perpetual oscillations characteristic of the *tactical eclecticism* that lets itself be dominated by the vicissitudes of the "situation" instead of mastering them with the firmness of its positions and the accuracy of its historical predictions.

Six months had scarcely passed when this second danger, predicted with proper prudence by a leadership little inclined to superficial judgments and easy condemnations, explicitly took form for the first time in the "Theses on the united front", voted by the Executive of the Communist International on 28 December, 1921.

The 3rd Congress had formulated its theses on the development and arrangement of communist parties with the aim of the conquest of the masses, in a perspective then considered – rather optimistically perhaps – as that of the more or less imminent revolutionary assault. The point of view of the International changed towards the end of 1921 (for us, the new phase had already been in effect for a while); namely, that the offensive was now being taken by the ruling class; in every country, the proletariat was fighting energetically simply to defend its livelihood and was instinctively borne towards surpassing all divisions according to political currents or professional categories in order to act upon the largest possible front, and with the greatest possible unity. The "Theses of the Third International on the Proletarian United Front" put the issue in terms that seemed to accord fully with the practice of the CP of Italy since its formation at Livorno. It was a question of agitation centred upon a plan of tactical defense for the proletariat as a whole which, while basing itself upon demands and contingent objectives so as to spread and generalize economic struggles according to the elementary forces of the working masses themselves, *would not stop* at that but would prepare to graft onto it a *counter-offensive*; that is, a return to the single perspective of revolutionary action envisaged from the first by communists, while at the same time readying militants

and workers formed in the hard school of the struggle for the defense of their daily bread. In the words of the "Appeal of the Communist International to Proletarians of the World" (1 January 1922): "We say to you, proletarians: if you do not dare engage in the definitive struggle; if you do not dare engage, weapons in hand, in the struggle for dictatorship; if you do not dare engage in the great assault against the citadel of reaction, at least gather together in the struggle for life, the struggle for bread, the struggle for peace. Align yourselves in battle formation in order to carry out this struggle, *unite as a class against the class of exploiters and destroyers of the world*".⁹

Understood in this sense and within its precise limits, the united proletarian front *could have been* the one that the Left itself had first proclaimed and defended vigorously in Italy – i. e., the united front which we proposed through our trade-union network to the large labour federations, upon the certainty that the situation was such that general movements of the whole proletariat (that is, if the latter took up the problems of not only to one category or locality *but of all categories* and localities), could only have come about in a communist manner: that is to say, in the form *we would have given it had it been up to us to lead the class a whole*. We were certain that the proletarians who had entered the struggle with objectives and means of action compatible in principle with their affiliation to such and such a party of working-class origin (and so equally shared between social-democratic or anarchist workers, etc.) would draw from the experience of the struggle itself, and our propaganda and example, the conviction that *even* the defense of daily bread is possible *only* if one prepares and takes the offensive in all its revolutionary developments as we envisaged it. Yet the Theses of the International insisted strenuously on exactly this point and reaffirmed that any return to organizational "unity" after the recent scissions was to be excluded. Unfortunately, they did not stop there: repeating and endorsing certain initiatives of the German party (which shifted from one pole to the other according to the tendency to perpetual oscillation we mentioned earlier), they proposed a whole series of initiatives that ranged from sending "open letters" to the other parties to agreements or alliances with them (agreements that were nevertheless temporary and based on contingent objectives), including even parliamentary support for social-democratic governments that were defined as "working-class", such as those already in place in Saxony and Thuringia, and as was being suggested for Sweden with the arch-opportunist Branting¹⁰.

Here began the disagreement between the Left and the Communist International. We understood the "united front" as an action common to all categories, all local and regional groups of workers, all national trade-union organizations of the proletariat, which by its very logic and the development of the situation would finish up *in the struggle of the entire proletarian class in a clear communist direction*. The united front did not mean and could not mean an informal muddle of d-

9. From *Il C.E. dell' Internazionale Comunista per il fronte unico proletario*, Libreria editrice del PC d'Italia, Rome, 1922, p.81.

10. To jump ahead, it is worth noting that in the "Theses on the question of reparations", written at the time, there were already allusions, even then, to possible communist participation in a "worker's government": "The question of whether or not communists in Germany should join a worker's government is not a question of principle but of opportunity [!!!]. Such a decision depends upon the degree of force that the working class commands when it enters the government, and the immediate opportunities offered for increasing this force." Here one already sees the shadow of the fall of 1923.

ifferent political methods, the effacing of the distinction between revolutionaries and opportunists, or the diminishing (even temporarily) of our specific character as a *party of permanent opposition to the State and the other political parties*.

It is true that the Theses of the International insisted upon maintenance of the absolute independence of the party as the prejudicial condition of the united *political* front: but "independence" is not a metaphysical category: it is a *genuine fact* that can be destroyed not only - in an extreme hypothesis - by the constitution of mixed action committees or parliamentary alliances (and we shan't speak of the governmental alliances that would follow), but also - in a more modest approach - by the initiation of proposals for common action when one is certain from the outset that they will be rejected and so will be employed to unmask the enemy.

One can destroy the "independence" of the party even in the latter case because one blurs in the eyes of proletarians the clear perception of the chasm that separates the reformist road from the revolutionary road, and legalistic democracy from the dictatorship of the proletariat - a chasm *whose existence we have always affirmed and which precisely justifies our very existence as a party*, as it is nothing less than the chasm *that distinguishes us from all the other parties*. It is vain as well as anti-Marxist to claim that we can allow ourselves such maneuvers or that we will be assured of coming out of them *as we were before*, just because we communists have been tempered in a difficult struggle and possess an immutable program. This is not necessarily true: we are not only a factor but also a product of history, we may wield the tactical instrument with a sure hand, but we are also conditioned by it and so negatively conditioned if we employ it in contradiction to our final objective. And that is even more true for the masses that follow us, or are beginning to follow us, *precisely because we are tracing a path diametrically opposed to that of our false "brothers" or "cousins"; the same path that they, the masses, should always see us following, and not "equivalent" paths even if they appear to be that*. It is not our intentions but our actions that gain us the sympathies of those layers

of the proletariat that we have not yet formally penetrated. However, to extend a hand to the parties that we have always publicly denounced, to invite them to join us in an action that *inevitably* goes beyond the limits of defending the living conditions of the proletariat in order to raise the question of the State and of our position in terms of the State and actual class forces, is to indulge in a particularly disastrous action. Indeed, it *destroys* the *autonomy* that we have gained with such difficulty, and provokes among our ranks and among the masses confusion and meanderings that will only make more difficult the passage from the antilegalistic struggle to the conquest of power. In our tactical formula, united front on the trade-union level and ceaseless political opposition vis-à-vis the government and all the legal parties are perfectly compatible elements; regardless of intentions, can the same be said of the united *political* front?

It is true that, under certain conditions, the coming to power of a so-called workers' party¹¹ can be a *useful factor* in our struggle for winning over ever deeper layers of the proletariat. But this *cannot* be thought of as an *intermediary* step towards the conquest of power (as certain parties, and from the beginning of 1922 to the

11. At the time we observed that it was absurd to describe a social-democratic government as a "worker" government (as would shortly be done with the Ramsay MacDonald ministry!!!): "A party that voluntarily limits itself to legality, that is to say that can conceive no other form of political action save that of the institutions of the bourgeois democratic Constitution, without recourse to civil violence, *is not a proletarian, but a bourgeois party*" (*The Tactics of the Communist International*, op. cit., in *Programme Communiste*, No. 51-52, p. 115).

end of 1923 even certain sectors of the Third International, assumed): *on the contrary*, it would open the eyes of the proletariat to the veritable counter-revolutionary nature of gradualist and democratic reformism. Such a coming to power, however, would be of use *to us* and orient the masses in a revolutionary direction *only if we had predicted and denounced* the inevitable outcome beforehand – only if we had *acted unremittingly* so that the experience – *if we had not known how to (or been unable to) prevent it* – did not lead to fresh disasters and further massacres of the proletariat.

Here arises the problem, that we have always brought up insistently, of the necessary *limits of tactics*. These limits are not set by ourselves, but *by history*, and we cannot ignore them without sacrificing what amounts to the first *subjective* condition for proletarian victory, short-term or long-term: namely, *continuity* of program, practical action and organization – a continuity which is the other face of the *autonomy* of the party. Either one agrees that there are historical constants that allow definitive prediction of the camps that different parties, including “workers” parties, will choose, or it is Marxism itself that crumbles. Either one agrees that our strength as communist parties derives precisely from being able to make such a prediction – that we do not attempt to hide but loudly proclaim as that which distinguishes us from all other parties and is our *raison d’être* – or the entire edifice of the resurrected International collapses.

This is what the Left wrote several days before the Rome Congress when it still led the C.P. of Italy, and several days after the second Executive Plenum (that endorsed the December 1921 “Theses on the United Proletarian Front”): “There is not doubt, when considering the current situation, that the large mass is ready to act upon immediate objectives and that it does not see the necessity for the longer term revolutionary objectives which the communist party itself sees clearly. One must utilize the disposition of the masses in the light of our revolutionary ends by participating in the movement that carries the masses towards objectives designated by the situation”. But we asked: “Is this true under all conditions without restriction? *No. When we consider as our tactical limit the necessity never to renounce those practices that characterize the communist party, that is to say, opposition to the bourgeois government and the legal parties, are we theorizing or are we proceeding correctly on the basis of experience?*”¹²

A year previously we had already answered the question, and answered it not as theoreticians but on the basis of the balance sheet of a double experience: that of the bloody post-war struggles and, inseparable from them, the collapse of the Second International over the outbreak of the war. This balance sheet had an *international* (not just a national) scope; it was *historical* (not contingent) just like the balance sheet that Marx and Engels drew from the class struggles in Germany and France during 1848-1849 with its *definitive* judgment as to the attitudes of the radical petite-bourgeoisie and its parties at crucial moments of the class war. It should have been possible – due to our critical action and indefatigable practice – to have forever spared the Western proletariat from “the necessity to learn at the price of its blood the true function of social-democracy in history.” But we know that *fatal* and *necessary* function, and it not only forbids us from building organizational and political bridges, even transitional ones, towards a party in which we recognize our *enemy*; it also forbids us, in the event such a party would come to power under the

12. “The Task of Our Party”, in *Il Comunista*, 21 March, 1922.

thrust of still abused proletarian masses, blinded by the reformist mirage, from tempering the severity and irrevocability of our judgment upon such a form of government until disillusionment opens the eyes of the masses. But because we are already certain, we can declare beforehand: "Where the proletariat does not have the force to avoid it, such an interlude does not represent a necessary condition for the advent of revolutionary forms and institutions, nor a useful preparation for the proletarian assault: it will be on the contrary a desperate attempt by the bourgeoisie *to deprive it of or deviate it from its strength*, and in the event the working class would still have enough force to revolt against 'legitimate', 'humanitarian' or 'good' social-democratic government, to crush it mercilessly beneath the blows of reaction"¹³.

13. "The Function of Social-Democracy", in *Il Comunista*, 6 February, 1921, reprinted in *Communisme et Fascisme*, Editions Programme Communiste, pp. 35-38.

14. A militarily inspired organization of banal anti-Fascism that pretended to be "above parties", see *Programme Communiste*, No. 46, p. 51, as well as *Storia della Sinistra Comunista*, cit., Vol.IV.

There, then, is the limit! And it is a *practical* limit. There is thus not the slightest need for hesitation: history *cannot undo* what it has accomplished; tactics are not a neutral instrument that the party can deploy without being itself influenced by them: no skillful maneuvering nor subtle deployments authorize us to reassemble once again the tangled web of common action, mixed committees, or "well-meaning neutrality", if not outright support, of governmental combinations that are supposedly "a step forward" towards the revolution or its corollary, the dictatorship of the proletariat. For the screen of the "united

political front" dissembles a charm for intermediary routes, returns to the past, and other lost unities cobbled together for better or worse; in short, a nostalgia for solutions less crudely surgical than those which reality imposed upon the Bolsheviks and which the holocaust of 1918-1919 made even more imperative still in advanced capitalist Europe. The Left was fully conscious of this danger, a particularly live one in the West, in which the process of programmatic and organizational delimitation of the young communist parties had occurred too hastily and summarily within the space of an ancient and especially pernicious democratic tradition. In Italy itself, even the very party that throughout Red 1921 had arisen *like one man* in a proud and ceaseless battle against the capitalist offensive, displayed behind the slogan of the united political front some regrets over a schism still considered "too leftist" by the party's refusal to ally itself organically with the "*arditi del popolo*"¹⁴, and by its tenacious opposition to recuperation (or rather *the abstract hope* of recuperation) by the Serratist current. And in Germany it was even worse. We knew perfectly well that the promoters of the united front were defending the vital necessity of preserving the absolute autonomy of the party in the quicksand of tactical maneuvers (one need only refer to the numbers of warnings against the danger of "elasticity" in the theses presented by the Executive of the C.I. in December 1921). But that was still not enough as the Left would demonstrate beyond all possible equivocation in its 21 March 1922 article (as it would also do in the "Rome Theses"): "For us, *the independent existence of the communist party* is still only a vague formula unless one clarifies the worth of that independence by exposing the reasons *that have made it imperative*, namely the schism with the reformists on the one hand and on the other *its identification with the programmatic consciousness and organizational discipline of the group*. The content and programmatic orientation of the party can be negatively influenced by tactical er-

rors as the party, considered as an organization of militants and, even more largely, of the masses it frames, among them the trade-unions, is not just a simple machine, but precisely and at the same time a product and a factor of the historical process."

And the conclusion drawn was that: "In no case can the party declare its acceptance of postulates and means of *action that would sanction policy in contradiction with its program*...It cannot accept to share responsibility for actions that could eventually be directed by other dominant political elements in a coalition whose discipline it would have accepted beforehand (*without which* there could be no coalition). On the other hand, with respect to the problem of a social-democratic government, it is necessary to demonstrate that it cannot solve the problems of the proletariat, and to demonstrate this *even before* the constitution of such a government, to avoid the complete collapse of the proletariat in the wake of the failure of such an experience. Our theses themselves state that such an action on the part of the party does not arrest the development of the process leading up to it, and it is curious to observe that this is agreed to, even at the price of a flagrant contradiction, by one of the party's adversaries when he states that this development is accelerated by the revolutionary pressures of the masses. When the communist party *refuses to line up with the forces that demand a social-democratic government*, it only becomes the protagonist - by virtue of its positions, its propaganda work, and its struggle - of the pressure of the most revolutionary part of the masses. It is thus that *its opposition to social-democracy is not only theoretical but practical*, putting the lie to the concept certain comrades have of dialectics that would be synonymous, according to them, with versatility of attitudes. In reality, it is precisely dialectics, understood in their true sense, that explains that the opposition of communists to the social-democratic experiment, either *before or after*, is a factor that accelerates the historical process of which that experience itself is a part."

And the article ended on a note that could today seem prophetic: "*There are tactical limits traced not by theory but by reality*. That is so true that, without sounding like Cassandras, we can predict that if we continue along the path of unlimited tactical oscillations and contingent alliances with opposing political parties, the results of *the bloody experience of class-war experienced by the proletariat will slowly be destroyed, with the result not of spectacular successes but the extinction of the revolutionary energies of the proletariat*. One is risking once again to see opportunism celebrating its Saturnalia upon the ashes of the revolution, whose forces it is already describing as unsure, hesitant, and ready to take the road to Damascus"¹⁵.

And unfortunately that's exactly what happened, confirming yet again that the ends do condition the means, and disastrously so if those means are not determined by the end and a function of it.

In presenting its "Theses on Tactics", the Left (and through it the party) demonstrated with sure consciousness and precision that it knew how to evaluate all factors in the light of history, even class struggles, and as a factor of these struggles trace a clear and steady revolutionary road. Contrary to the claims of today's parrots, who stupidly repeat after the fact the critical polemics of yesteryear, it was not a question of neglecting the many forms of the revolutionary struggle. On the contrary the Left foresaw them and examined their possible repercussions on the actions of the party (even more so, by its preoccupation

15. "The Task of Our Party", in *Il Comunista*, 21 March 1922.

with the inevitable effects stemming from periods of ebb). But above all it related all the vicissitudes of the struggle to our final goal - one which not only inspires our "thinking" and is not only an objective to be reached after a long combat, but al-

so that impregnates a *present* less rich in promises. In making of the present an inseparable link in the long chain that connects the past to the future, contingent struggles to the final battle, the party never invoked the pretext of a revolutionary ebb to throw overboard, like a cumbersome weight, fidelity to the principles that are on the contrary the very condition of a better future.

16. We have emphasized those aspects that connect the "Rome Theses" to the dramatic history of the International and the entire communist movement, in order to stress that they arose from the very heart of real struggles and physical confrontations within the proletariat, and not from the elucubrations of genial "minds". *The organic nature of the party; the relationship of the party to the class; and relations with other political parties*: these were the burning problems of a glorious era, despite its shadows. We have omitted the part on the "Italian" situation, which has a place of its own in volume IV of the *Storia della Sinistra Comunista*, in order to bring into greater relief the *international* nature and scope of the Theses, whose "Italian" portion was only the corollary or, if one prefers, the application in relation to the specific analysis of the relations of force in a given country, including the theses on the agrarian and trade-union questions.

The abandonment of the anchor that constitutes programmatic integrity, continuity of action and the solidity of the organizational connection that is the result, meant the International's fall into

the abyss of "socialism in one country" and the Stalinist counter-revolution. Because it held on firmly, the Left preserved the thread, though thin, to which the proletariat can cling to in the course of its future reascendancy which will be difficult and exhausting no doubt, but certain!¹⁶

"Rome theses, 1922"

Preamble

The object of the theses presented here concerns the general perspectives that must guide the Party in its actions towards the realization of its program as well as its goal, and the methods it must follow to determine what initiatives to take and what direction to give its momentum.

The problem is not presented in the particular aspects of each of the Party's different spheres of action (parliamentary, trade-union, agrarian, military, national, colonial questions, etc.). These are not treated separately here as they form the object of other discussions and resolutions of international and national congresses.

The theses presented here follow from the program the Communist Party of Italy adopted at Livorno and are the result of the doctrine and methods shared by both the Communist International and the Party whose program declares that:

"The Communist Party of Italy (Section of the Communist International) is constituted on the basis of the following principles:

1. An ever-growing contradiction between the forces and relations of production has developed in present-day capitalist society, bringing about the antagonism of interests and the class struggle between the proletariat and the dominant bourgeoisie.
2. Present-day relations of production are preserved and maintained by the power of the bourgeois State which, based on the system of representative democracy, constitutes the principal organ for the defense of the interests of the capitalist class.
3. The proletariat can neither break nor modify the system of capitalist production from which its exploitation derives without the violent destruction of the bourgeoisie.
4. The indispensable organ of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat is the political party of the class itself.
Grouping within its ranks the most advanced and most conscious part of the proletariat, the Communist Party unifies the efforts of the working masses by leading them from the struggle for group interests and contingent results to the struggle for the revolutionary emancipation of the proletariat.
The role of the Party is to develop the revolutionary consciousness within the masses, to organize the material means of action and to lead the proletariat in the development of the struggle.
5. The world war was caused by the unresolvable internal contradictions of the capitalist regime that have led to modern imperialism. And thus a crisis in which capitalist society is breaking apart and the class struggle can only lead to an armed conflict between the working masses and the power of the various bourgeois States.
6. Following the overthrow of bourgeois power, the proletariat can only organize itself into the dominant class by the destruction of the old State apparatus and the creation of its own dictatorship, that is to say, by basing the representative organisms of the State upon the sole productive class and by depriving the bourgeoisie of all political rights.
7. The proletarian State's form of political representation is the system of workers' and peasants' councils already being applied in Russia, the point of departure of the world proletarian revolution and the first stable instance of the dictatorship of the proletariat.
8. The necessary defense of the proletarian State against attempts at counter-revolution can only be assured by depriving the bourgeoisie and all parties hostile to the proletarian dictatorship of the means of agitation and political propaganda and by giving the proletariat an armed organization that can repulse any internal or external attack.
9. Only the proletarian State will be able to intervene systematically in the economic relations of society by carrying out the measures required to assure the replacement of the capitalist system by the collective administration of production and distribution.
10. Such a transformation of the economy and thereby of all the activities of social life will, following from the elimination of the division of society into classes, result in the progressive elimination of the necessity of the political State whose apparatus will little by little be reduced to that of the rational administration of human activity."

I. The organic nature of the communist party

1. The Communist Party, the political party of the proletarian class, acts collectively on the operational basis of a unitary orientation. The initial motives that cause elements and groups from within this collectivity to organize for unitary action are the immediate interests that the economic situation produces among the different groups of the working class. The role of the Communist Party is characterized essentially by the utilization of the energies thus contained to attain objectives that, in order for them to be common to the entire working class and the result of all of its successive struggles, are integrated beyond the interests of particular groups and the immediate or contingent demands raised by the working class.
2. The integration of these elementary thrusts in a unitary action manifests itself through two principal factors: one is the critical consciousness from which the Party derives its program; the other is the will that, expressing itself in the disciplined and centralized organization of the Party, is the instrument of its action. It would be erroneous to believe that this consciousness and this will can be obtained (or must be expected) from mere individuals, for only the integration of the activities of numerous individuals in a collective unitary organism makes their realization possible.
3. The Parties' and the Communist International's programmatic declarations contain a precise definition of the theoretical-critical consciousness of the movement. Such a consciousness, as well as its national and international organization, derives from the study of the history of human society and its structure in the present-day capitalist era on the basis of the facts and experience of the authentic proletarian struggle and active participation within it.
4. The proclamation of such a program (and the nomination of individuals to the different functions of the organization) would appear to result from democratic consultation among Party delegates. In reality, they are the result of a process that, by the accumulation of experience and the preparation and selection of leadership elements, allows the program to take shape and the Party structure to develop its own hierarchy.

II. The communist party's process of development

5. The proletarian Party organizes itself and develops to the degree that the maturation and evolution of society allows the consciousness of the general and overriding interests of the working class to appear. Collective and unitary action thus develops in this sense. In reality, the proletariat only appears in history and acts as a class when it develops the tendency to give itself a program and means of common action, that is to say, when it organizes itself as a party.
6. The proletarian party's formation and development is not continuous or regular, but passes through, both nationally and internationally, very complex phases and periods of generalized crisis. Very often, proletarian Parties have experienced a degeneration that has deprived their actions of unity and conformity to the highest revolutionary goals, or at least have attenuated, as opposed to accentuating, these indispensable characteristics of its activity. It thus frag-

mented itself in the pursuit of advantages limited to such and such a group of workers or contingent, reformist objectives, adopting methods that compromised the work of the revolution and the preparation of the proletariat to the realization of its class ends. By such measures, proletarian Parties often opened their ranks to elements that could not yet join in collective unitary action for the supreme objectives. Such a process always led to revisions and deformations of doctrine and program, and the relaxation of internal discipline which, instead of giving the proletarian movement a general staff of adequate and decisive leadership, turned it over to masked agents of the bourgeoisie.

7. As a result of new situations and the pressure of events that have provoked the working class to action, it is possible to reverse this misdirection and return to the true class Party. Such a renewal takes the form of a split by that part of the organization which, by defending the program and criticizing the experiences that have been unfavorable to the struggle, and by forming a school and an organized fraction within the old party, has reestablished the continuity indispensable to the life of the unitary organism based upon consciousness and discipline. From this consciousness and discipline a new Party is formed. Such is in general the process which leads from the flawed parties of the 2nd International to the Communist International.
8. The development of the Communist Party, after the conclusion of such a crisis, can be described as "normal" for the purposes of analysis, which does not preclude the return of critical phases in new situations. By offering maximum continuity by means of defense of the Party program and the life of the leadership hierarchy (above and beyond replacement of disloyal or spent leaders), the Party also assures a maximum of useful and efficacious work in order to win the proletariat to the revolutionary struggle. It is not only a question of the edification of the masses, and even less so of putting on display an intrinsically pure and perfect Party, but rather one of obtaining the best return from a real process. As will be seen below, it is a question of making sure that, by means of systematic propagandist work as well as active participation in social struggles, an ever-increasing number of workers advance from the terrain of partial struggles for immediate interests to the terrain of the organic and unitary struggle for the communist revolution. For it is only on the basis of the existence of such a continuity of program and leadership that the Party can not only overcome the suspicions and reticence of the proletariat in its regard, but also channel and rapidly and efficiently frame the new energies won from the unity of thought and action into the unity of movement that is an indispensable condition for the revolution.
9. For the same reasons must be considered entirely abnormal the integration by the Party of other parties or fractions of parties. A group that distinguishes itself by a different programmatic position or by an independent organization does not bring to the Communist Party usefully absorbable elements, but alters the firmness of its political position and the solidity of its structures: in such a case, the increase in manpower, far from corresponding to an increase in the forces and capacities of the Party, could well paralyze rather than facilitate its work in directing the masses. It is desirable that the Communist International declare as rapidly as possible that it will not tolerate the slightest deviation from these two fundamental organizational principles; namely, that there can

only be one Communist Party per country and that one can join the International only by means of individual membership in the Communist Party of a given country.

III. Relations between the communist party and the proletarian class

10. The delimitation and definition of the characteristics of the class party that found its constitutive structure as the organ of the most advanced part of the proletarian class do not prevent but on the contrary necessitate that it be intimately connected to the rest of the proletariat.
11. The nature of these relations is deduced from the dialectic that determines the formation of class consciousness and the unitary organization of the Party. This dialectic leads to the displacement of the vanguard of the proletariat from spontaneous movements arising out of partial group interests to generalized proletarian action. However, far from doing so by denying such elementary movements, their unity is assured by means of the vital experience that results from the struggle to realize these movements, active participation in them, and close attention to their development.
12. The work of continuous ideological propaganda carried out by the Party is thus inseparable from both the Party's actions and the proletarian movement in all its forms. It would be banal to think that participation in the struggle for contingent limited results is contradictory to preparation for the final and general revolutionary struggle. The mere existence of the unitary organization of the Party, together with the indispensable clarity of its program and its no less vital organizational and disciplinary firmness, is already a guarantee that, far from never attributing to partial demands the value of ends in themselves, we consider the struggle on their behalf a means for gaining experience and training crucial to useful and effective revolutionary preparedness.
13. The Communist Party therefore participates in all forms of proletarian economic organization open to all workers without distinction on the basis of political conviction (trade-unions, factory committees, cooperatives etc.). Its fundamental position towards organisms of this kind is that they must understand that since all workers find themselves in a given economic situation, it is by constantly defending itself that it will most usefully increase its own sphere of activity. For that end, the Party organizes its militants, who are members of these organizations, into groups or cells dependent upon the Party. Taking a front-row place in the activities launched by the economic associations in which they militate, the Party militants draw to themselves and thus into the ranks of the Party those elements which, in the course of the struggle, have shown themselves to be mature enough to join. Since they tend to draw in their wake most of the workers in these organizations and win leading positions, they thus become natural vehicles for Party orders. The work that they accomplish is not limited to propaganda or recruitment or electoral campaigns within proletarian assemblies: it is organizational work that develops in the thick of the struggle and helps the workers to derive the most useful conclusions from their actions.

14. The work and orientation provided by communist groups tends to give the Party definitive control of the organs leading such economic associations. National trade-union federations in particular appear to provide the surest way of leading movements by proletarians not organized in the Party. The Party considers that it has every interest in avoiding splitting the trade-unions and other economic associations. Thus, as long as their leadership is in the hand of other parties or political currents, the Party will not press upon its own members so that they follow directives for action, different from those decided upon by these organisms, while at the same time it never ceases to exercise the deepest and widest critique of the action itself and of the practical attitudes of their leaders.
15. Not only does the Communist Party participate, as has just been described, in the life of the proletarian organizations engendered naturally by real economic interests; not only is the Party in favour of the growth and reinforcement of such organizations, but by means of its propaganda it provides evidence in support of problems that are of real interest to the workers, problems which, in the development of the situation, can lead to the rise of new organisms of economic struggle. By all such means and through a thousand channels, the Party enlarges and reinforces the influence it has upon the proletariat, thus deriving advantage from every action or possibility of action in social life.
16. It would be a completely erroneous conception of the Party to think that it requires of each of its members considered in isolation a perfectly clear critical consciousness and a total spirit of sacrifice. Likewise would it be wrong to expect the Party to limit its influence to revolutionary unions of workers brought together in the economic realm on the basis of secessionist criteria and consisting only of proletarians prepared to accept given methods of action. On the other hand, nor can it be expected that, at a given moment or on the eve of general actions, the Party would have a majority of the proletariat under its control, still less a majority from within its own ranks. Such a precondition cannot be postulated without taking into account the dialectical process of development of the Party itself. It makes no sense, not even abstractly, to compare the numbers of workers within the disciplined and unitary organization of the Party or under its control, with disorganized or dispersed workers, or even those affiliated with corporatist organisms that are unable to unite them organically. The conditions to which relations between Party and class must answer in order to effectively produce generalized actions as well as the means by which to bring these about are defined below.

IV. Relations of the communist party with other proletarian political movements

17. That part of the proletariat, which is organized in other political parties or sympathetic to them, is particularly resistant to grouping under Communist Party influence. All bourgeois parties have some proletarian members but those that interest us here are the social-democratic parties in particular as well as the syndicalist and anarchist currents.

- 18.** The Party must develop a relentless critique of the programs of these movements and demonstrate their inadequacy for the emancipation of the proletariat. Such a theoretical polemic will be all the more efficacious to the extent that the Party can best argue that experience confirms the long-standing programmatic criticism it has developed in opposition to these movements. That is why in polemics such as these, one should never cover up methodological divergences, not just in terms of particular problems of the moment but especially with respect to greater extensions of proletarian action.
- 19.** Furthermore, these polemics must be reflected in the realm of action. Communists must not refuse to take part in the struggles of proletarian economic organizations even when these are led by socialists, syndicalist or anarchists, unless the entire mass should spontaneously rebel against these actions. They can nonetheless demonstrate that the erroneous methods of its leaders condemns such actions to powerlessness or, at a given point of its development, utopianism, whereas the communist method would have produced better results in terms of the general revolutionary movement. In these polemics, communists must always distinguish between the leaders and the masses, laying at the feet of the former the responsibility for errors and mistakes. Nor should they give up an opportunity to denounce just as vigorously the work of leaders who, despite revolutionary sincerity, favour dangerous and erroneous tactics.
- 20.** The Communist Party has as essential objectives the gaining of ground within the proletariat, as well as the increase of its manpower and influence at the expense of the currents and political parties of dissident proletarians. On the condition that the programmatic and organizational profile of the Party never be compromised, these objectives will be met through participation in real proletarian struggles on grounds that can simultaneously be those of action in common or in reciprocal opposition to them.
- 21.** In order to attract proletarians belonging to other political movements, the Communist Party will not follow the method of organizing communist fractions or sympathizers within these movements. This course of action is on the contrary perfectly normal in order to penetrate trade-unions, without pushing so that they be abandoned by communist groups organized within their ranks. Applied to political movements, such a method would compromise the Party's organic unity, and this for the reasons stated above with respect to the organizational development of the Party.
- 22.** Nor should it be forgotten in propaganda and polemics that numerous workers already ripe for the unitary and revolutionary conception of the struggle only joined the syndicalist and anarchist ranks in reaction to the degeneration of the old social-democratic parties. The vigor of communist polemics and struggle against the latter will be a factor of the first order in bringing these workers over to the revolutionary terrain.
- 23.** Obviously one cannot be a member of both the Communist Party and another political party. This incompatibility extends to all movements which, without calling themselves parties, have a political character, as well as all associations whose conditions of membership have a political orientation; for instance, the freemasons.

V. Elements of tactics of the communist party drawn from an analysis of the situation

24. In the preceding points, the general criteria guiding relations between the Communist Party and other proletarian organizations were established in the light of the very nature of the Party. Before discussing tactics proper, it is necessary to consider what elements a study of the overall situation brings to their determination. The program of the Communist Party foresees that in the course of the development which has been generally attributed to it, it will accomplish a series of actions in correspondence with successive situations. There is thus a close connection between programmatic directives and tactical rules. Analysis of the situation therefore is a complementary element in the solution of tactical problems since, in its critical consciousness and experience, the Party has already defined a certain development of these situations, and has thus delimited the possibilities of action corresponding to each of these. Analysis of the situation permits a more exact control of the developmental perspectives that the Party has formulated in its program; but if ever such an analysis entails substantial programmatic revision, the problem will not be solved by a simple tactical about-face: the programmatic vision itself will be inevitably subject to rectification with grave consequences for both the organization and the strength of the Party. It must therefore attempt to predict the development of situations so as to be able to deploy in each situation all the influence it can bring to bear. Only to wait for situations to develop, and basing itself on eclectic and shifting attitudes, is the method characteristic of social-democratic opportunism. If Communist Parties should ever succumb to this kind of drift, they will have contributed to the destruction of communism both as ideology and as militant action.
25. The Communist Party only possesses unity and only tends towards the development prescribed by its program to the degree that it contains within its ranks that fraction of the proletariat that has overcome the tendency to move solely in response to the immediate thrust of particular economic situations. This overcoming occurs precisely by means of political organization, which is to say that the Party's overall activities, far from being subject to situational immediacy, are related to it by the interplay with rationality and will. If critical consciousness and initiatives of will have only very limited value for individuals, they are fully realized in the collective nature of the Party, and even more so to the extent that it presents itself as the precursor of forms of human association which, instead of passively submitting to the laws of economic facts, will be truly able to rationally direct them because they will have overcome the formlessness of present-day economic organization.
26. However, the will of the Party must not be exercised capriciously, nor must its initiatives be extended arbitrarily. The limits of both are precisely set by the program and by assessment of possibilities and opportunities for action deduced from the analysis of contingent situations.
27. It is by situational analysis that one can determine the respective strengths of the Party and enemy movements. The Party's first concern must be the correct assessment of the portion of the proletariat that will follow it if it undertook an action or engaged a struggle. In order to do this, the Party must have an accu-

rate idea of the pressures of the economic situation on the masses and the spontaneous upheavals that these can lead to, along with the developments that Communist Party initiatives and the attitude of the other parties could bring to these upheavals. Whether it is a time of growing prosperity or, on the contrary, of hardship and crises, the effect of this phase over the life and activity of the working-class organizations is a complex one. Nor can such an assessment be deduced from cursory examination of a situation at a given moment, as it is necessary to take into account the previous evolution, as well as the shifts and variables of all the preceding situations. For example, a time of prosperity can give rise to a powerful trade-union movement which, if followed by a period of crisis and pauperization, can rapidly lead to revolutionary positions that entail the possibility of victory for the broad organization of the masses such a movement will have achieved. On the other hand, a period of progressive impoverishment could stress such a trade-union movement to the extent that in the next period of prosperity, it could no longer provide material for revolutionary organization. These examples (which could be inverted) prove that "the graph of the economic situation and that of class combativeness intersect according to complex laws, the latter being dependent upon the former, but without formally corresponding to it". The rise of one can correspond, in given cases, to the rise or fall of the other, and conversely.

- 28.** The integrating elements of such an analysis are several. One would have to examine not only the effective tendencies of the proletariat's ability to give form to and develop class organizations, but also every kind of response, including psychological ones, produced on the one hand by the economic situation and on the other hand by the attitudes and social and political initiatives of the ruling class itself and its parties. On the political plane, situational analysis would include the positions of the different classes and parties in relation to State power, as well as an assessment of their strength. In this perspective, the normal course of the development of situations in which the Communist Party could be led to act with increased efficiency, while at the same time delineating ever more clearly the limits of its tactics, can be categorized in five broad phases. These are: 1. Absolutist feudal power. 2. Bourgeois democratic power. 3. Social-democratic government. 4. An interim period of civil war in which the bases of the State are shaken. 5. Proletarian power as expressed by the dictatorship of workers' and peasants' councils. In a sense, the tactical problem consists not only in selecting the right approach for efficacious action, but also in making certain that the actions of the Party not go beyond the opportune limits that, by reverting to methods corresponding to phases already completed, would halt the Party's development and, far worse, cause it to lose its revolutionary preparedness. The following considerations refer to actions of the Party in the second and third political phases mentioned above.
- 29.** To develop organically, the Communist Party must possess a critical method and consciousness that lead it to formulate a program. It is precisely for this reason that the Party and the Communist International cannot grant maximum tactical liberty and elasticity to the decision-making centers, leaving the determination of tactics to the latter's judgment on the basis of an overview of the situation. The Party program is not characterized by a simple goal that can be reached by any means, but is that of a historical perspective in which means and

ends are intimately related. In the various situations, tactics must therefore harmonize with the program and, to that end, the general tactical principles for successive situations must be precise within certain limits. To be sure, these need not be rigid but always increasingly clear and less fluctuating as the momentum gains force and approaches the final victory. It is only thus that maximum centralism in both the Parties and in the International can be attained; that is to say, that the decisions for action taken by the center will be adopted and executed without resistance not only by the Communist Parties, but also by those parts of the mass movement that the Parties will have succeeded in controlling. It must not, in fact, be forgotten that the root of acceptance of the organic discipline of the movement consists not only of the initiatives of individuals and groups as a result of development of the situation, but in a continuous and logical progression of experience that brings them to rectify their perspective of the road to be taken to obtain the greatest efficiency in the struggle against the conditions of life that present-day social organization imposes upon the proletariat. That is why, before calling upon their adherents and those proletarians who will follow them to act at the sacrifice of themselves, the Parties and the International must be able to systematically provide an overview of their general tactical principles and to demonstrate why they constitute the only road to victory. If the Party must therefore define the terms and limits of its tactics, this is not from a desire to theorize or schematize the complex movements it could be led to undertake, but is the result of practical and organizational necessity. Such a process of definition might seem to limit the Party's possibilities of action, but it is the only guarantee of the continuity and unity of its intervention in the proletarian struggle, and it is for these very concrete reasons that it must be undertaken.

VI. "Indirect" tactical actions of the communist party

30. Conditions do not always present themselves for "direct" tactical action, since this implies an assault upon bourgeois power by the Communist Party and the forces at its disposition. Far from limiting itself simply to proselytizing and propaganda, the Party can and must exert its influence upon events by regulating its relations with other parties and social or political movements and by exerting pressure upon them in order to determine development of a situation favorable to its own ends and hasten the moment when decisive revolutionary action would be possible.

What initiatives or attitudes to adopt in such cases constitutes a delicate problem. In order to be effective, the first condition must be that they in no way appear to be in contradiction to the Party's long-range ends as concerns the struggle proper, according to the program it alone defends and on the basis of which the proletariat will fight at the decisive moment. The propaganda of the Party does not only possess theoretical worth; above all it results from the positions the Party adopts daily in the real proletarian struggle, in which it must continually advance the necessity for the proletariat to embrace the communist program and methods. Any attitude that would relegate to second place the integral affirmation of this propaganda or make such-and-such a contingent result

an end in itself and not a means towards a greater end, would lead to a weakening of Party structures and an ebb of its influence upon the revolutionary preparation of the masses.

31. In the phase defined above as that of bourgeois democratic power, political forces are generally divided in two currents or "blocs": the left and the right who fight for leadership of the State. The social-democratic parties, that are coalitionist in principle, adhere more or less openly to the left bloc. The Communist Party is not indifferent to the development of this struggle, be it by raising points or making demands that interest the proletarian masses and concentrate their focus, or because a victory by the left could in reality smooth the way to the proletarian revolution. As concerns the problem of the tactical opportunity of coalitions with political elements of the left, this must be examined without either falsely doctrinal, stupidly sentimental or puritanical apriorism. One must begin from the fact that the Communist Party is only capable of initiating momentum to the degree it can pursue with continuity the work of organization and preparation from which comes the influence that would allow to call the masses to action. It can thus not permit itself tactics in response to occasional or momentary criteria, even on condition of foreseeing a sudden about-face, or reversal of fronts that would transform yesterday's allies into enemies when such tactics proved insufficient. If the Party does not wish to compromise its connection with the masses and the possibility of reinforcing it at a moment when that will be of the utmost necessity, all of its public declarations and attitudes have to express its continuity of method and intention; that is to say, be in complete harmony with its propaganda on behalf of the final struggle and its preparations towards that end.
32. In preparing the proletariat both ideologically and practically for the revolutionary seizure of power, one of the essential tasks of the Communist Party is to mercilessly criticize the program of the bourgeois left and any program that would make use of democratic and bourgeois parliamentary institutions for the resolution of social problems. Most of the time it is only by means of demagogic falsifications that the bourgeois right and left manage to interest the proletariat in their divergences. Obviously these falsifications can not solely be demonstrated by means of theoretical criticism: it is in practice and in the thick of the struggle that they will be unmasked. The aim of the "left" is not a step forward to an interim stage somewhere between the economic and political capitalist system and a proletarian system. In general, its political demands tend to lead to improved functioning conditions and the defense of modern capitalism, be it as a result of the content proper of these demands as well as the illusion they give the masses of being able to use current institutions for their emancipation as a class. This applies to demands for widening of the suffrage and other guarantees for the improvement of liberalism, as it does for anticlerical policies and the overall politics of freemasonry. It applies as well in the case of economic or social reforms: either they will not be realized, or they will be only on condition and with the aim of blocking the revolutionary thrust of the masses.
33. If the coming to power of a left bourgeois government or even a social-democratic government can be considered as a step towards the final struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat, this is not because it would provide useful eco-

conomic or political bases or, even less so, because it would give the proletariat greater liberty of organization, preparedness or revolutionary action. It is the Communist Party's duty to proclaim what it knows not only because of Marxist criticism, but from bloody experience: such governments will allow the proletariat freedom of movement only as long as it considers and supports these governments as its own representatives. But at the first assault of the masses against the institutions of the bourgeois democratic State, they will respond with the fiercest reaction. It is thus in a wholly other sense that the coming to power of such governments could prove useful; namely, to the degree that their deeds would constitute for the proletariat a real experience that would allow it to conclude that only its dictatorship proper can bring about the defeat of capitalism. It is obvious that the Communist Party will only be able to make efficient use of this experience to the extent that it would have denounced beforehand the failure of such governments and will have preserved a solid independent organization around which the proletariat will be able to group when it will find itself forced to abandon the groups and parties whose governmental experience it would have initially supported.

- 34.** A coalition of the Communist Party with parties of the bourgeois or social-democratic left would thus harm the revolutionary preparation of the proletariat and would render utilization of the governmental experience of the left difficult. Furthermore, it would practically and considerably retard the victory of the left bloc over the right. In fact, if the clientele of the bourgeois center over which the two blocs battle orients itself towards the left, it would be rightly because it is convinced that the left is no less a conservative enemy of the revolution than is the right. For it knows that the concessions it proposes are for the most part apparent only, and when they are effective, it is because they are aimed at braking the revolutionary upsurge against the institutions supported by the left as by the right. As a result, the presence of the Communist Party in a coalition of the left would cause it to lose a large part of its followers, in particular in terms of electoral support, a loss that the support of the Communists could not compensate for. Such a policy would probably retard the experience as opposed to accelerating it.
- 35.** It is undeniable that the left bloc espouses demands that are of interest to the masses and often correspond to their real exigencies. The Communist Party does not ignore this fact and would not support the superficial thesis that such concessions are to be refused since only the final and total victory of the revolution warrants the sacrifices of the proletariat. Such a position would serve no purpose since its only result would be to reinforce the influence of the democrats and social-democrats over the proletariat. Instead the Communist Party would invite the workers to accept concessions from the left as an experience over whose outcome the Party would not seek to conceal its pessimism, insisting on the need for the proletariat not to throw away its political independence and organization if it does not wish to emerge damaged by the experience. It would incite the masses to demand of the social-democratic parties that they keep to their engagements since they have made themselves the guarantors of the possibility of realizing the promises of the bourgeois left. By its independent and uninterrupted criticism, the Party would prepare to gather the harvest of negative results that will come from these experiences, denouncing

the united front of the entire bourgeoisie against the revolutionary proletariat and the complicity of the so-called workers' parties that, by upholding the coalition with a part of the bourgeoisie, have made themselves its agents.

- 36.** The parties of the left and the social-democrats in particular often affect demands of such a kind that only an appeal to the proletariat for direct action could bring them about. In fact, if the struggle were engaged, the insufficiency of the means proposed by the social-democrats for the realization of their program of working-class measures would become immediately apparent. At that moment, the Communist Party could espouse the same demands and make them more precise; in fact, prominently put them forward as a banner of struggle for the proletariat as a whole in order to force the parties that only spoke of them out of simple opportunism to work for their realization. Be it a question of economic demands or even of a political character, the Communist Party will propose them as the goal of a coalition of trade-union organizations. It would, however, not form leading committees of struggle and agitation on which it would be represented with the other parties; in this way, it would be better able to keep the attention of the masses focused on the specifics of the communist program and preserve its freedom of movement for the moment when it would have to expand the platform of action by going beyond the other parties, now abandoned by the masses after this demonstration of their powerlessness. Thus understood, the trade-union united front (united front from below) offers the possibility of overall actions involving the entire working class. The communist method can only emerge victorious from such actions, as it is the only one capable of giving content to the unitary movement of the proletariat, and the only one not to share the slightest responsibility for the doings of parties that affect verbal support for the cause of the proletariat out of opportunism and with counter-revolutionary intentions.
- 37.** Another scenario could take the form of an attack by the bourgeois right against a democratic or socialist government. Even in such a case, the Communist Party would not proclaim solidarity with governments of this kind: if it welcomed them as an experience to be undergone so as to hasten the moment when the proletariat will be convinced of their counter-revolutionary aims, it can obviously not now present such governments as victories worth defending.
- 38.** It could happen that a government of the left would allow right-wing organizations, the white bands of the bourgeoisie, to keep up their attacks against the proletariat and, instead of coming to its support, would refuse it the right of responding by force of arms. In that case, communists would denounce such complicity as the true division of labour between the liberal government and the irregular forces of the reaction, in which the bourgeoisie would no longer debate the respective merits of democratic-reformist anaesthesia or violent repression, but employs them both simultaneously. In that situation, the veritable and worst enemy of the revolutionary preparation is the liberal government which leads the proletariat into believing it will defend it to preserve legality so that the proletariat not arm or organize itself. Thus, on the day when under the pressure of events the proletariat will be forced to struggle against the legal institutions that preside over its exploitation, the government will easily be able to crush it with the help of the white bands.
- 39.** It can also happen that the government and the parties of the left that com-

prise it invite the proletariat to participate in armed resistance against attacks from the right. Such an appeal only conceals a trap. The Communist Party would greet it with the proclamation that arming the proletarians means the coming to power of the proletariat and the proletarian State, as well as the destruction of the bourgeois state bureaucracy and the traditional army since neither of these would follow the orders of a legally constituted government of the left from the moment it called the people to the armed struggle. Only the dictatorship of the proletariat could thus bring about a lasting victory over the white bands. As a result, the Communist Party will neither practice nor espouse the slightest "loyalism" towards an endangered liberal government. On the contrary, it will show the masses the risks of consolidating that government's power by giving it the proletariat's support against an uprising from the right or an attempted coup d'état. Leaving control of the army to the government parties, that is, surrendering without having overthrown the current political and state forms, would be tantamount to consolidating the very organism called to oppose the revolutionary advance of the proletariat at the precise moment when that advance will have imposed itself as the only possible outcome against all the forces of the bourgeois class.

VII. "Direct" tactical actions of the communist party

40. In the case considered above, the attention of the masses was drawn by the demands presented by the bourgeois left and social-democratic parties as the objectives to be attained or retained, and in turn were subscribed to with greater clarity and energy by the Communist Party though all the while openly criticizing the means proposed by the others for their realization. But there are other cases where the immediate and pressing needs of the working class, whether for further gains or simple self-defense, would be met only with indifference from the left or social-democratic parties. If because of social-democratic influences over the masses, the Communist Party does not dispose of sufficient force to be able to appeal directly to them, it would take up these demands and call for their realization by a united front from below, made up of proletarians organized in trade unions. This would avoid having to make an offer of alliance with the social-democrats, and the Party could even proclaim that they have also betrayed the contingent and immediate interests of the workers. Such a unitary action would find communist militants at work in the trade-unions, leaving the Party free to intervene in the event the struggle took another course, as it would inevitably find the social-democrats, and perhaps even the syndicalists and anarchists, against it. If the other proletarian parties refused to back the trade-union united-front demands, the Communist Party would content itself with criticizing them and demonstrating their complicity with the bourgeoisie. In order to destroy their influence, it would above all have to participate on the front-lines of the limited proletarian actions the situation would not fail to give rise to and whose objectives would be those for which the Communist Party had proposed a united front for all local organizations and categories of workers. This would allow it to demonstrate concretely that in opposing the spread of such movements, the social-democratic leadership is only preparing their de-

feat. Naturally, the Communist Party will not only content itself with laying the blame for erroneous tactics before the other parties. With all the wisdom and discipline required, it will keep a steady watch for the right moment at which to go beyond the resistance of the counter-revolutionaries; that is, when a situation arises such that in the course of the development of the struggle nothing further will stand in the way of the masses responding to the call to action of the Communist Party. Such an initiative can only be taken by the Party center; in no case can it be taken by local Communist Party organizations or communist-controlled trade-unions.

41. More particularly, the term "direct tactics" designates actions of the Party when the situation obliges it independently to take the initiative of attacking the bourgeois power so as to topple it or deliver a mortal blow. In order to be able to undertake such an action, the Party must dispose of an internal organization solid enough to warrant the absolute certainty that orders from the center will be perfectly executed. It must moreover be able to count upon the discipline of the trade-union forces it controls so as to be sure that a large part of the masses will follow it. In addition it needs military formations of a certain efficiency and, so as to be able to keep control over the direction of the movement in the likely event it would be outlawed by emergency measures, requires an underground apparatus and especially a network of communications and liaison that the bourgeois government would not be able to control.

In offensive actions, it is the fate of very lengthy preparatory work that is at stake. Before taking such a heavy decision, the Party will therefore have to have thoroughly studied the situation. It will not suffice that it be able to count on disciplined forces it directly manages and control, nor can the possibility be dismissed that the bonds uniting it to the most vital fraction of the proletariat won't be broken in the course of the struggle. It will also have to be assured that its influence over the masses and the participation of the proletariat will grow in the course of action, since the development of the latter will awaken and put into play widespread tendencies within the deep layers of the mass.

42. It will not always be possible to proclaim openly that the overall movement unleashed by the Communist Party has as its aim the overthrow of bourgeois power. Except in the case of an exceptionally rapid development of the revolutionary situation, the Party could engage in action on the basis of slogans that are not those of the revolutionary seizure of power, but can only, in a sense, come about by means that the masses would consider to be only immediate and vital demands. In the limited sense that these slogans would be realizable by a government that would not yet be the dictatorship of the proletariat, they give the Party the possibility of putting a stop to the action at a certain point where the organization and combativeness of the masses would not be harmed. This could prove useful if it appears impossible to continue the struggle to the end without compromising the possibility of taking it up again effectively at a later point.
43. Nor can it be excluded that the Party could deem it opportune to directly put forward a slogan for action knowing that it is not yet a question of taking power, but only of continuing a battle in which the prestige and the organization of the enemy will be shaken, which would materially and morally reinforce the proletariat. In that event, the Party would call the masses to the

struggle either for objectives that can truly be reached or for more limited objectives than those it would propose in the event of success. In the Party's plan of action, these objectives would be ordered successively in such a way that each success would constitute a platform from which it could strengthen itself for the struggles ahead. Thus could be avoided as much as possible the desperate tactic of throwing oneself into the struggle where the only possible outcomes are either the triumph of the revolution or, in the contrary case, the certainty of defeat and the dispersal of the proletarian forces for an unforeseeable time. Partial objectives are indispensable for maintaining control over the action, and these can be formulated without their coming into contradiction with the Party's critique of their economic or social content; that is, when they are considered only as ends in themselves whose attainment would satisfy the masses and not as the occasion for struggles that are a means and a step towards the final victory. To be sure, determining these objectives and the limits of action is always a terribly delicate problem; it is from experience and in the selection of its leaders that the Party fortifies itself and learns how to assume this supreme responsibility.

44. The Party does not subscribe to the belief that when the proletariat lacks combativeness, it is enough for a daring group to throw themselves into the struggle and attempt feats of arms against the bourgeois institutions for their example to awaken the masses. It is in the development of the real economic situation that the reasons must be sought that will bring the proletariat out of its prostration. If the tactics of the Party can and must contribute to that awakening, it will be by means of far deeper and sustained work than the spectacular gesture of a vanguard hurled to the assault.
45. However, the party will use its forces and discipline for actions conducted by armed groups, workers' organizations and even whole masses when it has full control over them in terms of planning and execution. Such actions, which may have a demonstrative and defensive value, will be designed to offer the masses concrete proof that with organization and preparation it is possible to counter some of the ruling class's resistance and counter-attacks, whether they take the form of terrorist actions by reactionary groups, or police prohibition of certain forms of proletarian organization and activity. The goal will not be to provoke a general action, but to give the demoralized and defeated mass the highest degree of combativeness through a series of actions that combine to awaken in it a feeling and need for struggle.
46. The Party will absolutely avoid letting the internal discipline of union organizations be violated by local organizations and by the communists active in them during this kind of local action. Communists must not provoke ruptures with the national central bodies directed by other parties, since, as indicated above, these must serve as indispensable supports for the conquest of such bodies. However, the Communist Party and its militants will follow the masses attentively, giving them all their support when they respond spontaneously to bourgeois provocations by breaking with the discipline of the inaction and passivity imposed by the leaders of reformist and opportunist unions.
47. In the situation that characterizes the moment when state power is being shaken and is about to fall, the Communist Party, deploying its forces to the maximum, and conducting as much agitation as possible for revolutionary actions,

will not lose any opportunity to influence moments of unstable balance in the situation by making use of all the forces that may momentarily be marching with it, though its action must remain independent. When it is certain of taking control of the movement once the traditional State organization has collapsed, it will be able to make transitory agreements with other movements fighting in its camp, without - and this is important - expressing this in mass propaganda or slogans. In all these cases, the only measure of the appropriateness of these contacts and the appraisal that must be made will be success. The Communist Party's tactics are never dictated by theoretical *a priori* or ethical and esthetic concerns; it is solely dictated by the need to conform to the methods and reality of the historical process, in accordance with the dialectical synthesis of doctrine and action that is the heritage of a movement which will be called upon to become the protagonist in the broadest social transformation, the leader of the greatest revolutionary war in history.

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