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In this issue:

No "Great Man" Will Solve the Deadly Crisis of the Imperial Powers	2
The Catastrophic Trajectory of World Capitalism	6
The Labor Movement in the United States of America: Part 11 – The 8 Hours Movement is Back	14
The Anti-Historical Irish Nationalism	19
The Economic and Social Structure of Russia Today: Part One – Struggle for power in the two revolutions	41
From the Archive of the Left: Programme of Action Presented by the Left Minority from the P.C.d'I	50
Summaries of the Party's two latest General Meetings	59

## No "Great Man" Will Solve the Deadly Crisis of the Imperial Powers

The change of government in the United States last January led bourgeois commentators to reflect on the consequences that the replacement of the “great helmsman”, or rather a “mad helmsman”, could have on the foreign policy of the largest imperialist power in the world.

In fact, during the four years of the Trump presidency, with the motto “America first”, the sincerity of the US capitalists has prevailed; they have been forced to admit that they have to close themselves off from the rest of the world, that they have to defend their companies with a protectionist policy by imposing customs duties on the goods of their competitors, first and foremost China; they have proclaimed, instead of just doing it, to close their borders to immigrants; they have withdrawn from many international bodies that could have harnessed US economic policies under environmental pretexts. On the diplomatic, commercial and military levels, they have sought to establish unilateral relations with individual states in order to assert their superiority as best they can, no longer in a position to impose themselves against all at once.

This policy was not invented by Trump and his equally eccentric collaborators, it is a reflection of the relative loss of power of the US economy, which has long since ceased to be the world’s leading industrial power, nor the leading commercial power, even if it continues to maintain an undisputed military dominance.

But the “moderately isolationist” line followed for a few years, as well as the partial military withdrawal from certain areas and war scenarios, should be understood as a “catching up” in order to attempt new returns and interventions on the international scene: the new president will not be able to do anything other than continue the work of his predecessor. Those who expect, in a fideistic attitude, that the Democrat Joe Biden will renounce economic contention with other powers and adopt a “more peaceful” policy than the Republican Trump will receive nothing but bitter disappointments.

The new President Biden had already indicated the lines of the new administration in an article published in Foreign Affairs in March 2020. Those themes formed the basis of the 2020 Platform approved in August by the Democratic Party. The title was already very explanatory: “Why America must lead again – restoring US foreign policy in the post-Trump era”. Biden summarised his foreign policy agenda as follows: “President Trump has belittled, weakened, and abandoned allies and partners, and abdicated American leadership; as president, I will take immediate steps to renew the United States’ alliances and ensure that America once again leads the world”. It would therefore be a matter for the new administration to restore the United States to its role as the world’s leading power, to restore its dominant role.

Easy to say! The new administration is faced with a complex international situation in which the US is no longer unchallenged. Beijing now opposes American dominance in vast areas of the world, in a situation made more tense by the economic crisis and the pandemic.

It is clear that US foreign policy (but we could extend this judgement to many countries) demonstrates a substantial long-term continuity that transcends the political colour of governments.

It can be said that Washington’s foreign policy is the expression of a party “transversal” to the official parties, whose existence is demonstrated by the fact that fundamental foreign policy decisions, first and foremost those concerning wars, are taken in agreement between Democrats and Republicans.

It should also be noted that Trump has achieved some notable diplomatic successes in the latter part of his term of office that have been downplayed in the “liberal” caricature of the deranged president driven by destructive fury. The recognition of Israel by the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain (later joined by Sudan, Morocco and Qatar) under the Abrahamic Accords sees a revival of the US as a regional arbiter, a function in recent years overshadowed by Russia’s activism. It is hard to imagine that Biden will undo what his predecessor did in this field.

But the restoration of US dominance in the “free world” of which Biden speaks will come at a high cost, especially in terms of military spending, which is weighing increasingly heavily on the state budget. The magazine *Analisi Difesa* observes that “the Pentagon, the largest arms factory on the planet, plays an important role in US international policy. An industry that represents one of the components of its economic development: indirectly through the military supremacy it ensures and through increases in GDP. And this has been part of the strategic awareness of the ruling groups for a long time. As early as 1950, the Truman administration theorised not only the

full compatibility between butter and guns, welfare state and warfare state, but their close interdependence: the growth of the latter would feed the growth of the former, in a potentially unlimited virtuous spiral”.

But while it is true that government spending on armaments contributes to GDP growth, the United States, despite being the largest producer of armaments and the country that sells the most, is perhaps the only industrialised country in the world where life expectancy is falling, a clear sign of the decadence of its welfare state.

It is clear that they cannot continue to dominate the whole world for long and will have to make choices and sacrifices, something that no bourgeois state is ever prepared for.

This leads us to say that the foreign policy of the United States will not undergo any major changes.

In his first interview with the New York Times as president-elect Joe Biden said, for example, with regard to policy towards China, that he would not remove the tariffs imposed by Trump for the time being. He said there are two main points that will inform US strategy towards China in the coming years: preventing Beijing from taking away the US primacy as a world power, and building coalitions against it. Biden further stated, “I want to make sure we fight to the death by investing in America first. I won’t enter into any new trade agreements until we’ve made major investments here at home and on our workers”.

A speech that certainly echoes the Trumpian motto “America first”; even Biden is concerned with transmitting to US workers a petty nationalism to justify the constant deterioration of their conditions, by blaming workers in other countries, the Chinese, instead of their bosses.

In consonance with these words of Biden are the stances of the new Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and his also recent statements on fundamental international policy issues, in particular on relations with China. “I think President Trump was right, I don’t really agree with the way he dealt with the China issue in a number of areas, but the basic principle was the right one and I think it serves our foreign policy well”, and added that China is the main adversary with whom “we need to take a strong position”.

China will therefore remain the US’s main enemy, commercially, diplomatically and militarily. In the Pacific, the US will continue to deploy their massive military potential, a strategy already set by Obama, in order not to lose the vantage position in the area, and will try to strengthen the anti-Chinese bloc through a reaffirmed alliance with Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, India and Australia, as well as with some smaller countries in Indochina, the Philippines, etc., as was also done by the previous Republican administration.

Relations between the US and the European Union may also be more “cordial” and marked by “mutual respect”. But the EU remains a major commercial competitor of the US, while a political translation of its economic power would be a planetary threat. Washington will continue to use the lack of a single European foreign policy to privilege relations with individual countries. This divide and rule policy can be taken to extremes, as happened with two world wars played out on the theme of European unification, while a constant in recent years has been the attempt to counteract the cohesion of the EU, a policy that has seen its first substantial success with the Brexit affair.

The subject of Blinken’s clear condemnation was also the trade agreement between Beijing and the European Union reached at the end of 2020, which will facilitate European industrial investment in China.

The primary instrument for keeping European countries under control is NATO, and the new American administration will aim to strengthen it, also to oppose the feeble European attempts to create a supranational army. To this end, Biden has promised that he will make the necessary investments to ensure that the United States maintains “the most powerful military force in the world” and, at the same time, he will ensure that “our NATO allies increase their defence spending” in accordance with the commitment made under US pressure at the Cardiff Summit in 2014, during the Obama presidency, to devote at least 2% of GDP to defence and at least 20% of the defence budget to research, development and the acquisition of new weapons systems.

In the list of adversaries, after China comes Russia, but it is a very minor adversary, opposed as the second largest arms exporter in the world after the USA and as an exporter of hydrocarbons, especially to Europe.

But relations with Russia are ambivalent: Russia could have the function of containing a Europe under Germanic hegemony, while the disagreements with China lead us not to rule out a relaxation of relations between Washington and Moscow. For the time being, the aim for the US is to prevent cooperation between Germany and Russia, which is also a fixed point of US diplomacy for the new administration. This includes efforts to prevent the construction of the North Stream 2 gas pipeline in the Baltic Sea, which will allow Russia to supply Germany with gas.

Great Britain, which has left the European Community and is in an economic and social crisis, can only seek shelter under the US umbrella, offering itself as the first line of defence against Russian and Chinese infiltration into the Atlantic along the Arctic route, but also against any attempt to further European integration, especially in military terms.

The agreements that put an end to the war in Nagorno Karabak between Azerbaijan and Armenia through the heavy intervention of Moscow's diplomacy highlighted the weakness of the United States on the one hand and Turkey's growing military role on the other.

Turkey's aggressiveness will be another of the dossiers President Biden will have to deal with. In recent years Washington's relations with Ankara have become more tense, not only on the Syrian front, where Turkey is fighting US-allied Kurdish militias, but also because Ankara, deaf to US warnings, has equipped itself with the Russian S400 anti-missile system. Moreover, President Erdoğan has accused the US of having participated in organising the coup that attempted to oust him. The growing military commitments, from Syria to Libya and in the Eastern Mediterranean, are certainly weighing heavily on the Turkish state budget while the country is going through a severe economic crisis: the Turkish lira is in free fall and the unemployed, who make up 30% of the workforce, are receiving the paltry daily allowance of 38 Turkish liras, about \$4. The government is trying to further increase the pressure on workers by passing a new law favouring flexible work and temporary contracts.

In this situation Ankara, which has the largest army in NATO after that of the United States, cannot afford to give up Washington's support, but there are many contradictions, starting from the open clash with Greece, also a NATO member and an iron ally of the United States.

In the Middle East, it is likely that, in contrast to Trump's actions, the new administration will try to re-establish relations with Iran, reformulating the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreement on atomic energy, but also to review the balance of power in Iraq and Syria, in the face of the need, which worries both Washington and Tehran, to have a strong military presence in that area to defend the ruling classes and prevent the social upheavals caused by the heavy crisis that is crossing the entire region, as far as Lebanon.

Blinken, for his part, has shown that he does not believe too much in the possibility of creating a new deal soon on the Iranian nuclear issue after Trump in 2018 pulled out of the 2015 agreement. According to the Secretary of State, any return to the negotiating table with Iran will be preceded by a round of talks with Israel and the Gulf countries. Moreover, any negotiations on the nuclear issue must also include Iran's missile programme and an end of the support for its allied militias active in many Middle Eastern countries.

Iran may now be closer to acquiring an atomic weapon and this could push Biden to try to reduce the aspirations of this regional power by continuing to lay siege to it and strengthening its network of alliances with variable geography. Moscow is back in the game thanks to the fact that, in addition to its strategic alliance with Syria and its less organic but nonetheless long-standing alliance with Iran, centered mainly (but not only) on the Syrian war, it also has good relations with Israel and some of the so-called "petromonarchies" of the Gulf. Biden inherits a situation in which the results of Trumpian diplomacy place him on a path that has already begun of renewed US prominence in the Middle East, from which it will not be easy to withdraw. The attempt will be to prevent the emergence of a single regional power.

But the difficult thing will be to contain the inevitable social explosions in a crisis-hit Middle East.

In Central Asia, the United States has diminished its influence over Pakistan, to the advantage of China, and has been defeated militarily in Afghanistan, from which it will probably continue its withdrawal. In recent months they have been trying to forge an unprecedented alliance with India in an anti-Pakistani, and above all anti-Chinese and anti-Russian function. A process that can only continue.

On the African continent, the United States seems to be in a weak position, lagging behind the initiative of France, but also of China and Russia. During the Obama administration the military presence was strengthened, through the Africa Command (Africom), in the Sahel – the construction of a drone base in Agadez, Niger, dates back to 2015 – and in the Horn of Africa, but "in the four years of the Trump administration the disinterest of the United States in Africa has seemed evident", writes the magazine *Analisi Difesa*. It is conceivable that the new administration will try to regain the initiative in that continent, which is so important above all for raw materials.

Also in Latin America, in their “backyard”, the United States is forced to suffer China’s intrusiveness. According to data reported by Limes, Beijing invested just over \$7 billion in Latin America between 1990 and 2009, but between 2010 and 2015 it spent almost ten times that amount, \$64 billion. Chinese companies have built hydroelectric plants in Patagonia and the Amazon jungle, mines in the Andes, refineries in Costa Rica, Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil and Ecuador, a state-of-the-art nuclear power plant in Argentina and railways between Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Chile.

But it is clear that Washington cannot give up reaffirming its influence in Central and South America, even if its “physical” presence has been reduced in recent years. The need to control migratory flows is an obvious example, as is the need to tap into raw materials.

The economic crisis that is shaking the foundations of the capitalist economy, aggravated by the pandemic, is increasing tensions between the major imperialist states for the conquest of new markets, the acquisition of cheap raw materials, the occupation of strategic positions important for the defense of communication routes, etc.

In the coming years these tensions are bound to escalate, opening the way to a general military confrontation.

*Le Monde Diplomatique* rightly observes that “the handover of world hegemony rarely takes place without a general war”.

The capitalist system is leading mankind towards a new great slaughter, which could mark a handover between imperialist states, or, if the revolutionary force of the proletariat, under the leadership of its party, is able to intervene to prevent it, it could lead to a different transition: that from a ruling bourgeois class to the communist affirmation of a proletarian class that is finally victorious.

## The Catastrophic Trajectory of World Capitalism

Report presented at the September 2020 general meeting.

### The Growth of Debt

From 2002 to 2007 the frenzied accumulation of capital took place at the cost of colossal public and private debt. During this period the world debt increased by 73% at an absolute minimum. Private debt is generally higher than public debt. Debt is further aggravated by speculation, which drives up the prices of raw materials, real estate and all securities in general. Furthermore, in times of market saturation, the only way to continue capital accumulation has been through credit, hence debt.

After the crisis of 2009–10, the mountain of debt has continued to grow, at slower but nonetheless high rates, so that by the end of 2019 it will be three times as high as it was in the early 2000s. On the table you can see that the world debt has increased from \$74 trillion in 1997 to \$280,806 billion in 2019!

If we look at the indebtedness in the main imperialist countries in the non-financial sector, which includes the debt of companies, families and

states, expressed as a percentage of GDP, we notice three groups: at the top is Japan with a debt of 381% of its yearly GDP, followed by France with 327%, then England, China, Italy and the United States, whose debt is around 260% of the yearly GDP. Much lower down we have, as was to be expected, Germany with a debt of “only”, so to speak, 180%: virtuous Germany is indebted for almost two times its GDP. These debts today, due to the worsening of the crisis, have been hugely exceeded.

In absolute values, of course, everything changes: the United States is in the lead with a debt of more than 54,000 billion dollars, followed by China with 37,000 billion, then Japan with more than 19,000. The debt of these three nations represents more than half of the world’s debt, which means that their share of debt is greater than their weight in production. For the other major industrialized countries, debt ranges from just under 9 trillion, in France, to just over 1.7 trillion in Belgium. Given the current rates of asthmatic accumulation of capital, it is absolutely impossible that these nations can ever hope to repay their debt, especially since they have a tendency to explode in size with economic crisis.

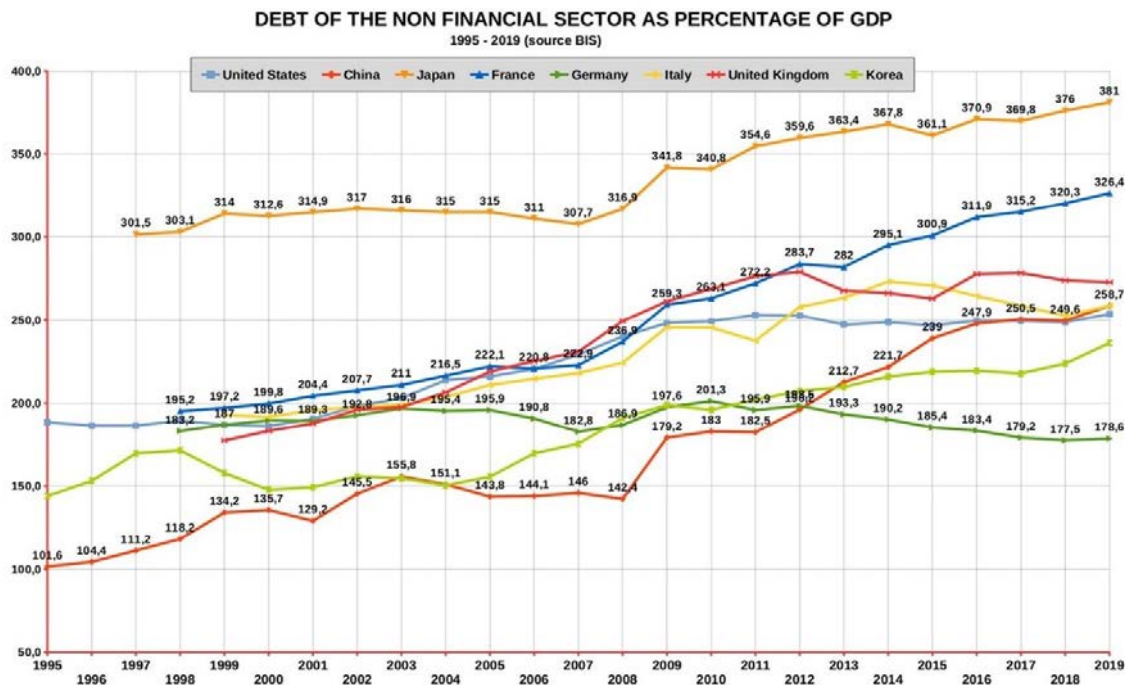
Our solution is very simple, in countries with mature capitalism: as soon as we take power, through expropriation of the bourgeoisie and the transition to the physical management of production and distribution, we will cancel all public and private debts. This will lead to the dissolution of international finance capital, which is precisely our aim!

What is striking, if you look at the chart in absolute values, is the almost exponential growth of China’s debt since 2007, from 5,384 billion dollars to 36,765, seven times the debt! This is the consequence of the crisis, it is at this price that Chinese capitalism has been able to maintain growth. But Chinese capitalism is at the end of its youthful momentum and a crisis of overproduction, linked to the insane accumulation of capital, is knocking at the door to put an end to the game, a crisis that will make the tragic crisis of the Great Leap Forward of the sixties pale in comparison!

Figure 1

<b>GLOBAL DEBT</b>						
<b>Institute of International Finance</b>						
	<b>1997</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
<b>WORLD GDP</b>	31 611	34 730	58 082	75 097	85 304	87 752
<b>DEBT : Billions of dollars</b>	74 000	96 000	166 000	212 000	246 000	280 806
<b>DEBT as % of GDP</b>	234%	276%	286%	282%	288%	320%
<b>Annual average increments</b>		5,3%	11,6%	5,0%	3,6%	4,5%

Figure 2



The graph showing debt-as-a-percentage-of-GDP of non-financial companies shows that in 2019 the most indebted are those of China, Belgium and France, at 150%. Japan and South Korea are second, at 104%, followed by England, Italy and the United States at about 75% of GDP. Finally, Germany with a “modest” 59%. What would have seemed enormous before the 1974–75 crisis, today seems modest when compared with the debt levels of companies in other countries.

In absolute values, everything changes: the indebtedness of Chinese companies, which has been growing since 2007, just like total debt, has skyrocketed from 3,000 billion dollars to more than 21,000 billion, a seven-fold increase. At this price, Chinese capitalism has managed to maintain capital accumulation and avoid a severe recession (Fig. 4). For French companies, debt comes not so much from investments, which are quite small, at least at home, but rather from share repurchases. Companies go into debt to buy back their own shares in order to sustain the price and pay substantial dividends to shareholders.

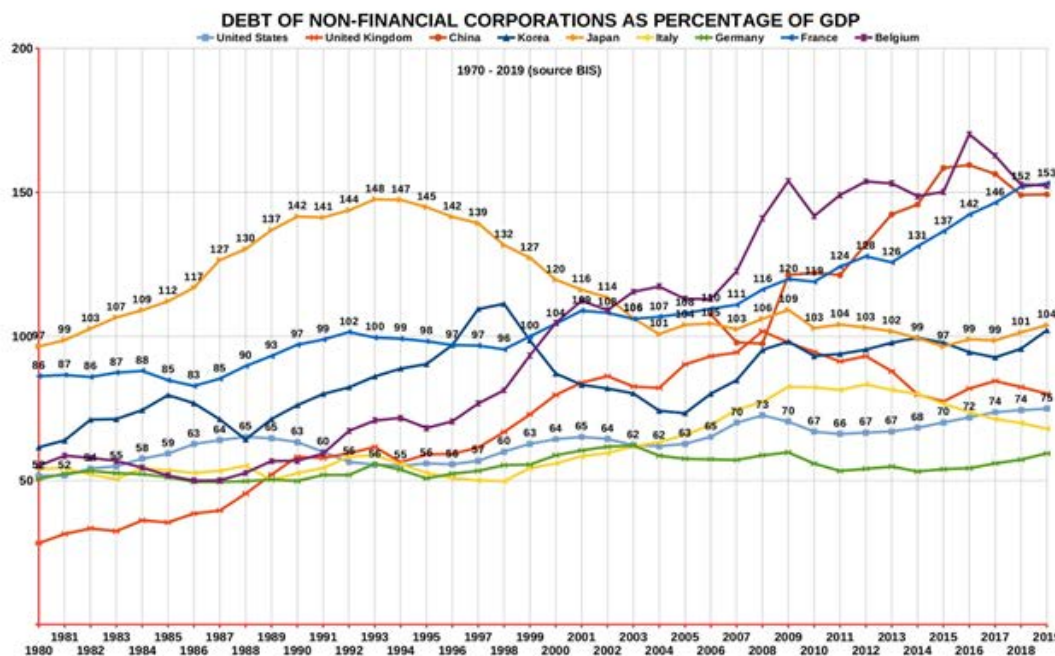
Regarding the public deficits, the worst is not Italy but Japan which, with a debt of 204% of GDP, beats all records. Then there is Italy with 135%, which is not as high as Japan but is nonetheless impressive. France, England, Belgium and the United States fol-

Figure 3

<b>NON-FINANCIAL SECTOR DEBT INCREMENT</b>					
<b>BIS</b>	<b>Billions of dollars</b>	<b>Billions of dollars</b>	<b>Increment</b>	<b>Billions of dollars</b>	<b>Increment</b>
	<b>2000</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>from 2000</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>from 2007</b>
<b>United States</b>	19 094	33 124	73%	54 460	64%
<b>China</b>	1 643	5 384	228%	36 765	583%
<b>Japan</b>	14 338	14 601	2%	19 438	33%
<b>France</b>	2 751	6 375	132%	8 899	40%
<b>United Kingdom</b>	2 978	7 146	140%	8 038	12%
<b>Germany</b>	3 722	6 733	81%	6 965	3%
<b>Italy</b>	2 213	5 166	133%	5 168	0%
<b>Korea</b>	761	2 043	168%	3 934	93%
<b>Spain</b>	1 079	3 855	257%	3 647	-5%
<b>Belgium</b>	631	1 317	109%	1 763	34%
<b>Russia</b>	234	843	260%	1 415	68%
<b>Turkey</b>	186	618	232%	799	29%
<b>TOTAL : 43 Countries (90 % of World GDP)</b>	<b>59 590</b>	<b>111 595</b>	<b>87,3%</b>	<b>190 028</b>	<b>70,3%</b>

low with just under 100%.

Figure 4



Finally, Germany with 60%. At the bottom of the list is Russia which, after its bankruptcy in 1989, is restarting with a minuscule 14.5%: thanks to income from gas and oil exports, it has managed to drastically reduce its debt. But due the crisis, which is causing the price of raw materials, especially oil, to plummet, the debt of the Russian state can only grow again and will soon find itself in the company of all the others.

For comparison, in 1978, after the 1975 crisis, the debt of the French government was 21%! With this scale of magnitude, we can measure the effects of the successive crises of overproduction and the decline in capital accumulation.

Following the sharp worsening of the recession due to Covid, the debt-to-GDP ratio has certainly risen, but it's still too early to have contemporary data. However, it's projected that the debt-to-GDP ratio of the French state will rise from 100% in 2019 to 120% in 2020, that of the United States from 100% to 137%, and that of Italy from 136% to 150%.

However, we were able to construct a table with IIF data showing that the debt-to-GDP ratio of industrialized countries rose from 380% of GDP in 2019 to 392% in the first quarter of 2020, which is only a modest increase, but there's no doubt that in March, April, and May, debt rose sharply.

### The Old Mole

After discontinuing “quantitative easing” in 2014, the FED timidly raised the interest rate by 0.25% in 2015 and again in 2016: the two base rates thus rose from 0% and 0.25% to 0.50% and 0.75%. With the economic recovery of

Figure 5

Institute of International Finance		
DEBT as % of GDP		
	2019	2020 Q1
Industrialized Countries	380%	392%
France, Canada, Norway	220%	230%



2017–18, it grew courageous, with a further 0.25% tweaks, and in early 2019 it had reached 2.25% and 2.50%. Since October 2017, it has even started to reduce its debt, expecting to return to a “normal” situation within 5 years. This seemed reasonable. At the time we predicted that it would not have time to do so because the crisis would come first, and the facts have proved us right.

In Europe, the ECB, starting in April 2018, began to gradually decrease “quantitative easing” and finally ceased in December 2018. It even planned to start raising interest rates starting from the summer of 2019.

The slowdown in mid–2018 and then the recession in 2019 belied all these beautiful plans. As stated in “Les Échos”, “The hope of a return to ‘normality’ that had appeared in the last two years, after the violent shocks of 2008–2009 and 2011–12, has vanished”. As early as March 2019, bond rates began to fall, as did bank values in financial markets, not to mention the mini–stock market crash of winter 2018–19.

The signal to back off was given by the Central Banks of Australia and New Zealand, which began lowering their benchmark rates in the face of the danger of a new recession. They were soon followed by the Central Banks of India, Turkey, etc., and finally the FED.

“A dozen central banks have lowered rates in recent months in an attempt to stimulate sluggish growth and to weaken inflation against the backdrop of trade and technology wars. As in 2008, the wave first took shape in the Pacific and gained strength and height. These are indications of a general trend that will continue among central banks,” said Christopher Dembik, an economist at Saxo Bank, in June.

The FED has since begun buying back Treasury bonds. Until now, maturing Treasury bonds and mortgages had not been replaced, allowing the FED to reduce its debt. Beginning in mid–2019, in addition to replacing maturing bonds with new purchases, the repayment of maturing mortgage securities was used to purchase an equivalent amount in Treasury bills. The composition of the balance sheet was thus changed in favor of treasury bills. Thus, a normalization of monetary policy was implemented; interest rates were barely positive in real terms and debt was almost five times higher than before the crisis of 2008–2009.

The ECB postponed the interest rate hike planned for the summer of 2019 and since June 2019 has been “talking” about new quantitative easing. Since 2020, with border closures in March–April and medical confinement following the pandemic, the economic situation has become particularly bleak.

One may wonder how this mode of production manages to maintain itself, as it has long since fulfilled its historical role of socializing the productive forces and thus has become totally obsolete and parasitic. As we have stated many times, monopoly capitalism works better than the liberal capitalism of Marx’s time. Not that the economic laws of the capitalist mode of production have changed, not at all, they are exactly the same. The ultimate phase of capitalism, which is to say, imperialism, the era of monopolies, as Lenin called it, is nothing but a superstructure. But that allows it to overcome the limits imposed by private property by using a small part of the means offered by the socialization of the productive forces.

This is how the central banks of the Eurosystem, of England, the United States, Japan and China, with their conventional and unconventional interventions, prevent the collapse of the entire system by maintaining the circulation of capital, credit and buying back treasury bills and corporate bonds, and lowering interest rates that would otherwise be unsustainable for many states and businesses.

During the crisis from late 2008 to 2009, following the collapse of Lehman Brothers and AIG, the FED flooded the financial sector with \$1.1 trillion and loaned \$600 billion to central banks in other countries that needed it. Then came “quantitative easing 1”, which repurchased \$600 billion in Treasury and mortgage bonds. Since this was not enough, a “quantitative easing 2” repeated the process, this time with 1.1 trillion, then a third was launched, preceded by “Operation Twist”, which consisted of exchanging short and very solvent securities for long–maturity securities, which were more difficult to collect. As a result, the FED’s balance sheet grew from \$929 billion at the end of 2007 to \$4.5 trillion at the end of fiscal year 2014.

For comparison, from 1945 to 1985, the FED’s balance sheet in constant dollars in 2011 waved around just over \$400 billion. From 1985 to 2007 it doubled to 800 billion in 2007, right before the crisis. And since then it has exploded.

The mechanism of these purchases is interesting, in that it shows how monopoly capitalism manages, to some extent, to overcome the limits of private property. A conventional bank, in order to lend money, opens an account in which it registers a debt, which earns interest, and credit for the amount lent. To lend this money it uses leverage: the bank has very little equity, usually 4–5% of its assets plus customer deposits and loans from other banks. The overdraft that it makes available to customers is a simple bookkeeping trick, which is to say, it's purely virtual money that the bank has just created out of thin air. As long as the outflow of money does not exceed the inflow, all is well. Banks that need to borrow money draw on the interbank market from those that have too much. It is said that deposits make loans and loans make deposits. This is how banks create money. This is also how a "Ponzi scheme" is created. Anything goes as long as the interest is paid regularly. But all this turns to ruins with the advent of the crisis and the increase of insolvencies!

Central banks operate in the same way, with the added right to print money on their own account. In addition to their own capital, which consists of currency and gold, but which remains limited, they have the deposits of their customers, i.e. the deposits of all other banks. For the ECB these are the deposits of the central banks in the euro area, which together make up the Eurosystem. But of course, as with a conventional bank, these deposits are much smaller than total loans. In France, for example, the total deposits in banks in 2020 amounted to 2,487 billion euros, while the assets of the six main banks alone reach 8,684 billion, or 3.5 times the deposits. And the larger the bank's balance sheet, the greater the leverage: leverage can be up to 30 times, as in the case of Lehman Brothers before it failed. Since the Basel II and III Accords, attempts have been made to mitigate these leverage effects, particularly by imposing a capital requirement of 7% of the balance sheet. But the accord doesn't take off-balance sheet items into account!

When central banks put money into circulation, either by lending directly to banks or by repurchasing government and corporate bonds in the financial markets, they earn interest. In the case of the FED, the interest it receives from buying treasury bills and bonds goes directly to the Treasury. In other words, in the case of the United States, the U.S. government lends money to itself. This is not possible for all states. The Bank of Japan does the same thing, in its own way. In Europe, the central banks of the Eurosystem cannot pay interest to their own state, nor can they buy treasury bills directly from states, they must buy them back "on the secondary market", from banks and financial institutions. This is one of the limits imposed by the European Council on the Eurozone, which many sovereignists find distressing, but in reality it's just the result of a compromise between bourgeoisies.

Returning to the FED, this mechanism means that, alongside American investment funds, it's the first holder of Treasury securities, \$4,445 billion in May 2020, 63% of its gigantic balance sheet, which today exceeds \$7 trillion. The amount held by U.S. investment funds, particularly pension funds, is of the same order of magnitude. China is far behind in comparison, with 1,185 billion, followed by Japan with 1,061 billion, and far behind that is Russia with 102 billion, less than a third of what the Irish state holds. The amounts held by China and Japan have shown remarkable stability over time.

As colossal as the FED's balance sheet may be, in relation to the GDP of the United States it nonetheless remains one of the smallest compared to that of the ECB and above all Japan. The BoJ's balance sheet at the end of 2018 exceeded 100% of GDP, and is now at 116%.

The Swiss Central Bank is one of the few central banks that can afford that privilege. Little-big Switzerland not only enjoys a comfortable trade surplus, but also, and more importantly, a very large financial flow ("current account") surplus. This is far from being the case, for example, in France, which in this aspect even resembles Greece!

Some "sovereignist" currents, especially in Italy, dream of a return to a so-called national sovereignty, where the Central Bank could grant loans to the State and to national enterprises at very low rates. They forget an important point, namely that the Italian Central Bank does not have the size and weight of the Eurosystem. Should Italy exit from the euro and return to the national currency, speculative funds, such as hedge funds, attracted by the smell of cheap money like vultures to carrion, would attack the lira by speculating on its devaluation. And with far greater means than those available to the BoI. After hemorrhaging foreign currencies, the BoI would be knocked out.

This is, in fact, what was going to happen to the Bank of France in 1992. The various European states, including the UK, had just reached an agreement to keep their currencies in a fixed parity with a small fluctuation band; this was the EMS (European Monetary System), the predecessor to having a single currency. But then Europe went into

recession again and Germany, in order to attract capital, raised interest rates. Immediately, “hedge funds” rushed through the breach, throwing marks against other currencies. They started with the weakest link, the lira, which soon gave way. Then they moved on to the pound: the attack was so violent the Bank of England was brought to its knees in a single morning and the pound had to leave the EMS. They then turned their guns to the Franc. After difficult negotiations with the leaders of the BuBa (the German central bank), French government officials managed to get Germany to lower its interest rates while France raised its own. This cut off the speculators and ruined them. Eventually the attack ended, but the Bank of France was forced to make a huge outlay of its reserves. It nearly gave in: in the opinion of its governor at the time, if the speculators had continued for another hour or two it would have found itself out of currency and would have had to abandon the fight. Perhaps then there would have been no single currency.

While the sovereignists of all kinds continue to dream, in the meantime the Italian bourgeoisie, pragmatic and accustomed to selling itself to the highest bidder, has opened the ports of Trieste and Genoa to Chinese imperialism – it won’t be long before one of these two ports falls entirely into the hands of Beijing.

But keeping the topic on Central Banks. The ECB, faced with the lack of economic recovery, after two massive loans to European banks, in turn embarked on a “quantitative easing” campaign. In four years, from March 2015 to December 2018, it bought government bonds worth 2,550 billion euros and some corporate bonds. The objective of the operation was twofold: to lower interest rates and force banks and financial institutions to lend to businesses and

households. The result was a spectacular drop in interest rates, even for heavily indebted states. During this period it bought back about 3/4 of government bond. As a result, at the end of its quantitative easing, it held around 21% of European government debt. After Covid-19, it should be above 30%.

For its part, the BoJ is doing the same thing, but on an even larger scale, so that today interest rates are very low, even reaching the negative. Around 10 trillion bonds in the world today are at negative rates, meaning that investors pay to lend, which is cheaper for them than paying management fees. These negative-rate loans mainly benefit the Japanese, German and French governments.

So does capitalism the age of monopolies work better? Yes, in a sense, it succeeds in pushing back a bit the limits imposed by private property, keeping interest rates at very low or even negative levels, keeping states alive and financial, as well as saving commercial and industrial enterprises, which would otherwise be forced to declare bankruptcy. But, as Lenin said, *in the era of monopolies, capitalism is dying while standing!* And this is what we are witnessing spectacularly today.

Because this artificial maintenance in a state of survival is at the price of a debt that is becoming more and more colossal, of an immense growth of the balance sheet of the banks, which sooner or later can only collapse.

We report here the balance sheet of central banks:

And what does all of this result in? Why didn’t capitalism make it out of the crisis that began at the end of 2007? Why is there, instead of a sharp crisis like in 1929, a long agony?

Because lowering rates is not enough to restart capital accumulation. Entrepreneurs do not invest according to the interest rate, but according to the order backlog. And in times of overproduction, orders languish.

Figure 6

<b>BALANCE SHEET OF CENTRAL BANKS AS % OF GDP</b>		
	<b>01/09/18</b>	<b>01/05/20</b>
<b>FED</b>	20,80 %	32,00 %
<b>ECB (euro zone)</b>	40,40 %	46,00 %
<b>Bank of Japan</b>	99,80 %	116,00 %
<b>Swiss central Bank</b>		122,00 %

Central banks can flood the financial market and banks with dollars or euros, but this does not change the fundamental problem, which is that this mode of production no longer makes historical sense, but is artificially maintained in a state of survival.

It is only in the interest of the big bourgeoisie, which derives immense privileges from the exploitation of the proletariat, i.e. of the waged workers.

What happens to this mountain of money, which is not invested in production? In countries like Turkey or Argentina, excess liquidity translates into hyperinflation. In Argentina, for example, the monetary base went from 200 billion pesos in 2012 to 1,250 in 2019, and the exchange rate in the same period from 5 pesos per dollar to 58: an inflation rate of 1.160%.

There is no inflation in the big imperialist countries for two reasons: first, overproduction, and the resulting trade war are exerting strong deflationary pressure, which is countered, for the moment, by truckloads of liquidity that artificially maintain the value of stocks and prices. Second, much of this money is sterilized by the bourgeoisie, which invests in so-called safe securities, such as real estate, gold, gold-indexed securities, etc. So from 2012 to 2019 the price of residential real estate increased by 33% in OECD countries and 44% for commercial real estate (offices, stores). And this is just an average, but house prices in cities like Paris, London, New York, Berlin, etc. are skyrocketing.

The current situation is reminiscent of the end of the Roman Empire, an agony that lasted centuries. Fortunately, in the age of capitalism everything goes much faster. The current crisis has been going on for half a century, since the first great international crisis, in 1975.

It took the revolutionary violence of the Germanic barbarians to free Europe from the rot that the Roman State and the slave society had become, and thus allow the passage to the feudal mode of production, which, in its time, opened a new development to the productive forces.

The revolutionary force today is that of the proletariat, whose role is to overthrow the bourgeoisie, abolish capitalist relations of production and bring forth the birth of communist society. We have the first hints of a future renewal of the class struggle with social explosions all over the world, but we are still far from a real recovery of the movement, with a vanguard of the proletariat tending to join the party.

How long can such a state last? Until the situation becomes uncontrollable and unbearable.

With the dramatic worsening of the crisis, we must expect an explosive increase of precariousness and business failures by the end of the year. We are currently seeing this with the increase in unemployment and in those who are forced to resort to soup kitchens. And corporate bankruptcies and rising unemployment will be accompanied by an explosion of unpaid debts.

In 2016, the non-performing loans of Eurozone banks amounted to 1,180 billion euros. Those of Italian banks were 360; they fell down further in 2019 to 680 billion. Italian banks were selling them mixed with better quality securities and passing them off as good investments. Another part, under pressure from the ECB, has been sold to “hedge funds”, which buy them back at very low prices in order to get whatever they can out of them.

The consequence will be the collapse of many financial institutions and large banks, such as the Deutsche Bank, which has been in very bad shape for years. Without even mentioning the Chinese banking giants, which are plagued with these non-performing loans. And what about “shadow finance”, which is out of control and has taken on gigantic proportions?

To show the fragility of the system we recall here a significant episode of September 2019. Prices in global stock markets had been falling since the end of September 2018 as a result of the slowdown, then economic recession, rising interest rates, and the FED’s shrinking balance sheet, which had made money more expensive. Another consequence was that the FED’s shrinking balance sheet meant that money was also becoming less abundant. In 2014, at the end of quantitative easing, U.S. banks had \$3 trillion in cash on deposit at the FED, an amount that was subsequently reduced at the end of 2019, following, among other things, the FED’s withdrawal and the reduction of its balance sheet to \$1.3 trillion.

In this context, an incident occurred that forced the FED to intervene. As already mentioned, financial institutions and in particular banks refinance themselves on a daily basis on the interbank market according to their liquidi-

ty needs. In 2008, this market crashed following the recession and the collapse of Lehman Brothers bank, forcing the FED to intervene to restore interbank circulation and credit.

In late September 2018, the same incident repeated itself, bringing back unpleasant memories for Fed executives. As a result of more demand for liquidity than usual, interest rates began to rise to 6% and then 10%, crippling the market from day to day. To restore the flow of money between financial institutions, the FED was forced to intervene for four consecutive days, injecting money totaling \$278 billion.

This “incident” demonstrates the weakness of the banking system and the lack of mutual trust between banks. Everyone knows that a few of them could face a severe recession, given the small amount of equity capital. This is true for the US and perhaps even more so for Europe, Japan and China. In Europe, Northern banks prefer to pay high fees by depositing their surplus with the ECB rather than lending it to Italian, Spanish and Portuguese banks. In recent years, French and German banks have paid 7 billion euros in fees to the ECB for their deposits. And what about Italian, Spanish and Portuguese financiers who prefer to deposit their money in German and Luxembourg banks rather than in a bank account in their own country?

All this shows once again that this system is being kept alive artificially. Without the intervention of the central banks everything would collapse!

So, if our tireless old mole does its job well, we can expect, as the crisis deepens, the collapse of large financial institutions, as in 2007 with AIG and Lehman Brothers. The collapse of Deutsche Bank will also be a heavy blow for the German state. If two or three large institutions collapse all the dams will give way.

It will then be the classic great crisis, with deflation, which will be followed by the resumption of the class struggle. Only when the proletariat moves will an aura of life return to breathe some life on this putrid society.

## The Labor Movement in the United States of America: Part 11 – The 8 Hours Movement is Back

(Continued from issue no. 47 of Communist Left)

The reduction of working hours had been for many years the main objective of the workers, or at least the only objective really able to make them fight together. As early as the 1830s and 1840s, reformers' associations had lobbied for laws to be passed for the working day of ten hours first, and then eight-hours; but even in cases where these laws were passed, they remained dead letters, or almost dead letters. Even in industries where, thanks to strikes and negotiations, the hours were reduced, the bosses had taken back the concessions at the first opportunity; on the other hand, if the eight-hour system had not been adopted everywhere, the companies that had accepted it would have been at a disadvantage compared to the others.

In 1884, the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions, an organization that would later become the American Federation of Labor, adopted a resolution saying, "From May 1, 1886, the eight-hour time shall be the legal working day".

A resolution passed by the Federation itself in December 1885 recalls that the idea of the eight-hour general strike was born from the failure of other methods. The resolution recalled that it would be futile to expect the introduction of the eight hours by legislation, and that the unified demand to reduce working hours, supported by a solid and decisive organization, would be more effective than any law.

The call for a general strike was based on the concept that "in their attempt to reform the dominant economic situation, workers must rely only on themselves and their power".

There was little support from existing organizations for the May 1st strike movement. The federation that had set the date of May 1 as the deadline was so weak that when it came to having a response from members on the project in question, only about 2,500 voters voted. Powderly, leader of the Knights of Labor, opposed the May Day strike from the outset. In a secret circular of December 15, 1884 he had proposed that instead of striking, members would be invited to write a brief composition on the eight-hour problem at all Knights meetings, which was to be sent to the newspapers on the occasion of Washington's birthday on February 22, 1885!

The anarchists initially claimed that the eight-hour turmoil was a compromise with the wage system. Their newspaper, the "Alarm", declared: "It is a lost battle and... even if the eight hours were accepted the wage-earners would not benefit from it". In the end, however, the anarchists, especially in Chicago, understood that they had to stay with the struggling workers and made a fundamental contribution to the movement.

However, the idea of the eight-hour general strike had struck the imagination and awakened the hopes of hundreds of thousands of workers and, despite opposition from national leaders, the unrest spread from one place to another throughout the country. Local Knights of Labor organizers, despite the center's protests, formed new local sections based on the eight-hour question; as we have seen, given the poor connection between center and base, the negative attitude of the leadership was not felt at the base, and the eight-hour unrest was one of the components of the KL's resounding success between late 1885 and the first half of 1886.

Powderly himself will also complain about it later:

"In the first half of 1886 many of the new sections began to approve motions in which they invited the central assembly to fix the date of the strike for the eight hours on May 1, 1886; then they sent them to the Grand Master Workman of the Order, who immediately realized the serious danger for the organization that was represented by the ignorance of the new members gathering so quickly in the new sections. They had been induced by unfounded assertions to subscribe; and many organizers contributed to feed the illusion in order to obtain 'great advantages'".

At this point Powderly deliberately tried to sabotage the movement. In a secret circular to the local sections of the Knights of Labor he wrote: “The direction of the Order has never fixed May 1st as the date of a strike, and it never will. On the first of May, no section of the Knights of Labor must strike for the eight hours with the idea to obey the orders of the direction, because such an order has never been, and will never be, given”.

All the excitement represented a kind of class conflict that Powderly abhorred. The hostility of the KL leaders did not succeed in stopping the strike, nor was it able to prevent the wide participation of the local sections of the Order in it, but it was of very serious damage to the unity and effectiveness of the movement.

The activity in preparation for the strike became massive in March and reached its peak in April. There were a considerable number of strikes for the eight hours in advance of the set date, the request for the eight hours was also included in the struggles that had other objectives and there were massive demonstrations throughout the country. The movement had its strengths in major industrial cities, Chicago, New York, Cincinnati, Baltimore and Milwaukee; to a lesser extent in Boston, Pittsburgh, St. Louis and Washington.

Already before the end of April, almost a quarter of a million workers were involved in the movement; about thirty thousand had now obtained the eight-hour day or at least a time reduction. At least 6,000 were already on strike in the last week of April, and in the same month it was estimated that no less than one hundred thousand were ready to go on strike to impose their demands.

However, the movement actually proved to be more extensive than expected. By the second week of May, participation had reached 350,000 workers, 190,000 of whom were directly affected by the strike. 80,000 struck in Chicago, 45,000 in New York, 32,000 in Cincinnati, 9,000 in Baltimore, 7,000 in Milwaukee, 4,700 in Boston, 4,250 in Pittsburgh, 3,000 in Detroit, 2,000 in St. Louis, 1,500 in Washington, and 13,000 in other cities. It has been calculated that nearly 200,000 workers managed to get the eight-hour day without wage reduction after the big strike on May 1; but the others also got a substantial time reduction.

In Milwaukee, well in advance of May 1, a vast worker’s agitation began. In February 1886 the local assemblies of the Knights of Labor, against the will of the direction of the Order, organized the League for the eight hours, which the local unions joined the following month. The pressure was reinforced by a mass gathering of three thousand people.

As May 1 approached, the struggles extended to all industrial categories. The agitation led to a work of deterrence against all the factories, and soon a peaceful crowd had gathered in the streets of the city. The governor, alarmed, sent three militia companies, which were obviously welcomed with stones. The next day, May 3, the troop confronted the crowd, and after a warning that no one heard, fire was ordered, following an explicit order from the governor. The crowd dispersed, leaving six dead on the ground; it was the end of the eight-hour movement in Milwaukee, and the workers returned to work under the same conditions as before.

But in those days not in all cities had the result been so tragic, despite the acrimony of the bosses. In general the agitation was a success: in New York, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Grand Rapids, St. Louis, Washington, etc. the strikes had a very large participation, even if often the workers took the opportunity to include salary increases in the demands.

In Troy, New York State, there were 5,000 strikers for the eight hours, including 2,000 stove factory workers and all construction workers. 300 railroad workers of Italian origin went on strike for the increase in wages, and, “once stopped working, they tied red handkerchiefs to picks and shovels and marched all together along the railroad to the place where another team was working, whom they persuaded to join the strikers”.

In several cities, of course, the eight-hour movement failed to expand, as in Boston.

Although in many cases in the following years the bosses unleashed offensives to recover what was then granted, often with success, the general strike of May 1, 1886 represents a turning point for the American workers’ movement, especially for the consciousness acquired on that occasion of the strength that the united class can express and exercise; this gave rise to an unprecedented push for affiliation to trade unions. Those struggles, because of the Haymarket events, remain a historical reference point for the entire working class worldwide, a warning about how ruthless and unscrupulous the bourgeoisie can be when frightened by the force expressed by the united class in struggle.

The movement of May 1, 1886 produced an extraordinary echo throughout the world. In just a few years the first of May became an international working-class day.

## Haymarket

The heart of the movement was Chicago. The Knights of Labor as well as trade unionists and anarchists in the city, having abandoned the primitive hostility, all supported the Association for the eight hours that led the unrest for the strike. Throughout the month of April there was a series of major demonstrations. Everyone was certain that, with the combativeness shown by the workers and the excellent organization, the movement would be successful.

But also the opposite side was prepared. More than a year earlier, newspapers had already reported that the city's businessmen had set up paramilitary groups by arming their employees, and that the National Guard had been expanded. "In just one of the large companies there is an organization of 150 young men armed with Remington breech-loading rifles, who conduct regular exercises. And this is certainly not an isolated case".

On the eve of the strike, a "Times" correspondence from Chicago said:

In the last forty-eight hours various members of the Commercial Club have paid almost two thousand dollars in order to equip the First Regiment of the National Guard of Illinois with a machine gun; the idea had been proposed Tuesday evening during the exercises and the inspection to the regiment. This was immediately adopted when it was pointed out that in case of revolt such a weapon would be valuable in the hands of the soldiers.

By May 1, in Chicago, the movement had managed to obtain large concessions: one thousand brewers had reduced their hours from sixteen to ten, and as many bakers, who previously worked from fourteen to eighteen hours, had obtained the ten-hour day. A good part of the workers in the furniture factories obtained the eight hours with an increase of twenty-five percent in the hourly wage; 1,600 textile workers got a ten hours salary, working eight hours. A reduction in hours had also been imposed in some companies producing shoes, canned goods, tobacco and cold cuts, but many more were the workers who were preparing for a very bitter struggle: among them 4,000 bricklayers and labourers, 1,500 brick kiln workers, 1,200 metalworkers, slaughterhouse workers, carpenters, coopers, woodworkers for building, shoemakers, upholsterers and mould makers.

On May 1, 30,000 workers went on strike, and perhaps twice that number participated or attended the demonstrations. About 10,000 Bohemians, Poles and Germans employed in sawmills and lumber yards paraded through the streets of the city with the band and flags preceding them. Perhaps because of the number of demonstrators there were no violent clashes with the police.

By May 3, more and more groups of workers had joined the strike. A correspondent from "John Swinton's Paper" wrote jubilantly: "It's the real eight-hour boom and we're getting one victory after another. Today all the canned meat factories of Union Stock Yards have surrendered... The workers are mad with joy at this great victory".

That day, locked out McCormick employees held a mass assembly in front of the factory. The workers had already been out of work for three months. They were desperate. August Spies was haranguing the crowd on the movement for eight hours when the factory siren sounded and the scabs came out, having finished their day's work. Immediately a field battle broke out, with stones, bricks, fists, sticks. A few shots were fired. Then the police arrived and, opening fire on the crowd, killed four workers in a few minutes and wounded even more.

The atmosphere became again hot, and the next day there were several clashes between the demonstrators and the police. The anarchists invited the workers to arm themselves, with an inflamed flyer entitled "Revenge!". Many mass meetings were scheduled that evening, including a rally at Haymarket Square to protest against police violence.

At the Haymarket rally on May 4 there were only about 1,200 people present, actually peaceful and apparently had not followed the warlike invitation of the anarchists; when it started raining only 300 remained. The last speaker was finishing his speech, when to everyone's amazement a squadron of 180 policemen entered the square; the crowd was ordered to disperse. While the speakers were getting off the stage, a bomb was suddenly thrown that exploded



in the middle of the policemen, killing one of them and wounding almost twenty (five of them died shortly after). The police closed ranks again and opened fire on the crowd, killing several bystanders (it is not known exactly how many) and wounding at least 200 of them.

A period of popular hysteria followed. Excited by the press, ordinary citizens attributed all the blame to the workers' agitators, anarchists, socialists. The "New York Times" wrote:

Since the times of the war of rebellion (the Civil War) no disturbance of peace has ever moved the feelings and public opinion at this point as much as the murder of policemen perpetrated by anarchists in Chicago on Tuesday night. We use the word murder with the perfect awareness of its meaning. It is foolish to call this act of crime "tumult": everything proves that it is a calculated murder, deliberately planned and carried out in cold blood".

The wave of anger and fear caused by the Haymarket events was used against the workers' movement in general. Thanks to a still naive and gullible public opinion, the enemies of the workers' movement had a free hand in the repression of what until then had been a winning and non-violent offensive, if not defensively so. The mayor of Chicago Harrison issued a proclamation in which he declared that, since the gatherings, marches and other such things were "dangerous" in the conditions of the moment, he had ordered the police to disband all meetings or gatherings. The police set up their nets, and within two days no less than fifty alleged radicals' gatherings were raided and those who were even vaguely suspected of affiliation to radical groups were arrested.

Most of the arrests had taken place without a warrant and for some time no specific charges were even filed against the accused. Years later, the chief of police admitted that the police had used all the most traditional equipment to persecute representatives of the workers' movement: invention of secret societies, confessions extracted with the third degree and torture, finds of fake guns, dynamite, bayonets, various bombs, etc..

Of the hundreds of workers arrested, eight were chosen for trial, chosen not for the political profession (they were all anarchists), but for the fundamental role played in the success of the struggle: eight workers' leaders who were tried and sentenced to death; four were later hanged (a fifth died in prison, officially for suicide), although there was no evidence that they had anything to do with the incidents. Sorge thus recalls their torment:

They died as men on November 11, 1887. None of them, except one who was speaking from the stage, was present in the square when the bomb was thrown. The chronicle of the trial is that of a shameful farce, in which judge and jury did nothing but satisfy the demands of the city bourgeoisie who demanded a bloody revenge on the protagonists of the eight-hour struggle. In 1893, the remaining prisoners were pardoned by Governor John Peter Altgeld. In the reasons for the pardon it was recognized that: "the documentation of this case shows that the judge conducted the trial with malicious ferocity... page after page the judge's insinuating notes were made with the intention of leading the jury to their own prejudice... there is no such episode in the whole story.

The organized labor movement itself did not know how to behave, and the most reactionary lines prevailed: the KL came to publicly attack the defendants, the AFL asked for clemency only for aversion to capital punishment, and not to make martyrs of the anarchists.

## The Reaction

The movement was faced with a very harsh reaction, which took its cue from the hysteria over the Haymarket events and used the techniques already tested against the strikes in the Southwest System. In fact within a week the unrest ceased and the workers returned to work while the bourgeoisie deployed all its police and militia forces.

The formation of employers' associations aimed to keep under control, or rather to make the union practice disappear, became a rising tide. In September, one of the most valuable journalists in the field of workers' struggles wrote: "Since last May, many large companies and employers' associations have resorted to all kinds of exceptional

expedients to break up the workers' organizations, which had acquired so much strength in the last two or three years. Thomas Scott, president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, said, "Give the workers and strikers a bullet diet for a few days and then you'll see how they welcome this bread.

To take just two cases among the many, the association of shirt manufacturers in Jamesburg, New Jersey, suspended two thousand employees after they had been found to be members of the Knights of Labor, and for the same reason the silverware manufacturers in New York, Brooklyn and Providence formed an association and suspended two thousand workers. Thousands of them were not only fired but also put on blacklists to prevent them from finding employment elsewhere. The Iron-Clad Contract (later known as "Yellow-Dog Contract"), which forced workers to swear that they would never join a workers' or trade union organization, became a widely demanded requirement for employment.

Lockouts became a common costume. The entrepreneurs who in 1885 and in the first months of 1886 had given in to the claim of the 8 hours hastened to re-establish the working days of 10-12 hours. Those who protested were branded as anarchists, and therefore "murderers", in the light of the propaganda financed in the newspapers by the bosses. The most affected were the trade union activists, who invariably ended up on blacklists.

Naturally, the most devastating effects were felt on the Knights of Labor, who at the beginning of 1886 had, according to some sources, more than a million members: a fifth of them dissolved in a few months, beginning a decline that would soon be accomplished, as we have already seen. A decline due to the attacks of the employers, in part, but above all due to the contradictions within the Order, which had proved to be absolutely unsuitable to lead great workers' struggles. All the strikes conducted by the KL after the Haymarket events were resolved in failures.

For some time the movement for solidarity and defense of workers was silenced, but within less than ten years it would rise again, demonstrating its unstoppable strength. For years a new organization, which had learned the lessons of KL's failures, was already developing and would take its place, not as a short-lived phenomenon as had happened to previous national trade union federations, but as an organization destined to remain, for better or for worse, in the history of the American workers' movement to the present day, the American Federation of Labor.

## The Anti-Historical Irish Nationalism

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|--|---|
| <a href="#">1. A short summary</a>   | <a href="#">10. Revolt in Dublin</a>                          |
| <a href="#">2. Ancestral ethnic unity</a>  | <a href="#">11. Towards a National State</a>                  |
| <a href="#">3. The first modern colony</a>   | <a href="#">12. Ulster</a>                                    |
| <a href="#">4. Riding the wave of the American and French Revolutions</a>            | <a href="#">13. Bourgeois Counter-Revolution in the South</a> |
| <a href="#">5. Marxism and the National Question</a>                                 | <a href="#">14. A Nationalism "Betrayed"?</a>                 |
| <a href="#">6. Marx and Engels on Ireland</a>  | <a href="#">15. Social Struggle under Threadbare Banners</a>  |
| <a href="#">7. Extermination and the Industrial Revolution</a>                       | <a href="#">16. Armed Irredentism</a>                         |
| <a href="#">8. From the Eighteen to the Nineteen Hundreds</a>                        | <a href="#">17. From the Bullet to the Ballot</a>             |
| <a href="#">9. Bourgeoisie and Proletariat in Ireland during the First World War</a> | <a href="#">18. Conclusion</a>                                |

### 2020 Introduction

This article, which combines the work of three comrades, was published in our Italian press in 1989 and part of it appeared in the same year in *Communist Left*, under the title ‘Ireland – Sinn Fein: from the Bullet to the Ballot?’ we are now pleased to publish this translation of the entire article.

It is true that the title, on its own, might give the impression that we have always been opposed to the national struggle, but this is not so. There is nothing in the article that says the Irish struggle for independence has *always* been counter-revolutionary or pointless; or that it would have been better if Ireland had remained as part of Great Britain; or that we oppose an eventual reunification of the island. But at the time the article was written, with internationalism in Ireland almost a dirty word, a robust attack on nationalism was required, and the title was appropriate to the circumstances. In a word, the article must be seen in the context of the time it was written, addressed to Irish proletarians in 1989, not to English workers in Marx’s time.

In preparing the text for publication in the English language, 32 years later, inevitably we found a few things that appeared disproportionate, a few inaccuracies, a few points that could have been included, or stated better. We have therefore made a few minor changes here and there, and no doubt some inaccuracies will remain; but those aside, we stand by the substance of the article in its entirety.

An old joke from Northern Ireland depicts an encounter between two strangers: “So, are you a Protestant or a Catholic?” the first one asks. “Well, I’m an atheist” says the second. “Ah!” replies the first, “But are you a *Protestant* atheist, or a *Catholic* atheist?”.

This sense of there being no way out from the entrenched sectarianism, even if slightly blunted, is still very real in Northern Ireland today. But by directing the spotlight of Marxism onto this seemingly intractable impasse the article reveals that the deadlock *can* be broken, and that the resetting of loyalties on a class foundation, is not only possible, but is an urgent necessity. The translation of this article from 1989 is therefore long overdue, and will hopefully contribute to that process of redefinition.

## 1. A short summary

For more than sixty years our current has strictly adhered to a set of programmatic and tactical positions that are indissolubly linked to the totality of our doctrine. And it isn't that we do this out of love for abstract coherence, or in pursuit of ultimate logical consistency, but in the secure knowledge that it is the only way of ensuring, in the course of the Communist movement's disorientating alternation of phases of advance and retreat, that "the future is safeguarded only by safeguarding in the present the past and projecting it into the future".

The need to continue our research into national and racial issues, formerly undertaken by Marx and by Engels, continued by Lenin, and then by the Left and then by our party minuscule though it is, requires us once again, in light of recent and ongoing upheavals, to revisit the Irish question. It is a case of dealing with reality by plugging the leaks that have weakened the revolutionary front.

In one of our texts we wrote: "the current situation, characterized by the temporary absence of an autonomous proletarian movement restricts us – in the field of practical activity – to defending the integral nature of our classic texts, to combatting their adulteration, to remembering that inevitably changing circumstances will pose anew the problem of making practical connection between the programme and proletarian struggles, to not putting in place of those struggles our intellect, and using it to resolve problems that ten times out of nine have been raised by the bourgeoisie".

The report on Ireland became the introduction to a much more comprehensive study by the party on the Irish question.

By applying the scalpel of historical determinism to the subject of Ireland we can hardly fail to notice how, throughout all its misfortunes, this ancient people managed to resist historical adversity, due mainly to the misfortune of finding itself in such close proximity to another larger island which had had the opportunity to develop earlier on both the economic and socio-political levels.

If the first nation to emerge with a bourgeois capitalist system was England, it can certainly be said that Ireland was its first colony; indeed, the occupation of Ireland by the English can be dated back to around 1170, whereas the union of the English people with the Scots and the Welsh to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain would occur in subsequent centuries and after bitter internecine struggles; but as a real union, not as a subjugation!

For centuries, the Irish people were trampled underfoot first by feudal landlords then by the English bourgeoisie; hunger, epidemics and forced emigrations did not allow a natural development of this people to take place and the worst brutalities and atrocities were the order of the day, even if accompanied by demagogic half-measures which did nothing to resolve the most urgent problems. The speaker, after pausing to consider the latest electionist evolution of the IRA, which is showing its democratic-populist and bourgeois face ever more clearly, then gave a synthetic description of the ups and down Ireland has experienced over the course of the last two centuries.

The generous struggles of this period, from the time of the American Revolution to the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, were all of them defeated, mainly because Ireland had the misfortune to be too near to England.

The great famine in the 1840s was caused not so much by insects (the potato blight) but by the merciless economic laws of a capitalism in rapid development. The industrial development of Ulster also dates to this period, and it would mark the first step towards the differentiation of the two parts of the country and is the key to understanding the real reasons for the present division. But it was only from 1800 onwards that the English government started to systematically exploit the differences between Catholics and Protestants, the reflection of real and growing economic differences between the North and South of the island. This policy would intensify over subsequent decades as the government in London came to realize it couldn't maintain its rule over the whole of Ireland; henceforth the struggle for independence would come to be increasingly identified with the Catholics whereas previously numerous Protestants had played a distinguished role.

In an Ireland split in two civil war became inevitable: temporarily postponed by the war (except for the courageous but unsuccessful insurrection in Dublin in 1916), it exploded immediately afterwards.

The *status*, offered by London not long afterwards, of formally independent State, although deprived of Ulster, was accepted by many pro-independence leaders, and in 1922 the new government proceeded to form its own army,

whose aim was mainly to control the numerous “malcontents” demanding a united Ireland. Fighting would break out even more violently between the ex-comrades in arms, but the Irish bourgeoisie managed to “pacify” the country.

Irish capitalism, more agrarian than industrial, had managed to obtain “its own” State, but only thanks to an unwarlike compromise with London and not by means of political or military force. It was, moreover, at the price of renouncing the wealthiest part of the island. Its “revolutionary” violence was expressed above all against the rebels who didn’t accept the cowardly treaty.

Today Sinn Fein continues to talk about a united Ireland as though a paradise on earth which, once conquered, could magically resolve all the problems of the country; problems which are actually caused by an economic situation which exists on a global scale. In reality it is a false objective which the Irish bourgeoisie waves in front of the proletariat to ward off its subversive power, and which the proletariat must ignore in order to be free to fight on its own behalf, and *for itself alone*.

If in the far off times of the revolutionary bourgeoisie Marxism hoped for an independent Ireland, mainly because this would also have freed the English workers to struggle for their own emancipation, today the objective of national reunification is a distraction from the revival of economic and political struggle on a class basis.

## 2. Ancestral ethnic unity

After the slow retreat of the last glaciations, human beings would be impelled by natural necessity to direct their continual peregrinations towards zones where the land had been revived and transformed, in which certain types of flora and fauna had disappeared and others replaced them.

It is difficult to establish much about the *first communist societies* on the Irish island, but it is certain that before the arrival of Celts it was already inhabited, as evidenced by the remains of a Megalithic civilization which existed more or less between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> millennia BC.

In fact it is only in the first centuries of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC that the Celtic tribes inhabiting central-Southern Germany begin their slow expansion to the East, towards Asia Minor by way of the Balkan peninsular, and to the West crossing France to reach the Iberian peninsula (where mixing with the indigenous peoples they gave rise to the Celto-Iberians) and to the British Isles. The Celts were never really a politically united people, but they shared a distinctive language and for many centuries a religion (druidism).

Subdivided into various tribes they bring to mind the Boii, who in 390 AD, after occupying the valley of the Po, reached Rome and put it to fire and sword. Those tribes which occupied the area of present-day France the Romans called Gauls, while various others moved across to the British Isles: Cantii, Iceni, Cornovii, Brigantes, Picts, Caledonians, Scots, Welsh, etc.

There is not much evidence of the ancient history of Ireland. This is partly because for many centuries it lay outside the sphere of action of the great expansionist movements of those peoples who were the forerunners of the future civilizations. The Greeks make vague allusions to it, the Romans, who for almost four centuries were installed in Britannia, found themselves in serious difficulties there due to the continual revolts and raids but had neither the time nor the inclination to cross the stretch of sea which separated them from Ireland. In fact it might well be said that they never actually managed to completely subjugate the “big island” either.

We know that for many centuries Ireland, divided into various tribal territories, was not a compact, centralized or politically organic unit, in fact there were frequent struggles and wars between the tribes; and the same was the case in England before the unexpected arrival of the Roman legions. In fact one can say it was actually the Irish who on many occasions landed on the shores of Britannia and mounted lightning attacks on Roman legions, before immediately withdrawing.

In the final centuries BC, pressure increased from Germanic peoples, who sweeping down from the North gradually occupied the lands of central Europe, and pushed the Celts towards the peripheries both Eastwards but especially to the West, to the extent that for several centuries the Romans were engaged in a continuous struggle to hold back the “barbarian” avalanche.

These continuous wars on all fronts would in fact contribute to the collapse of the Roman Empire, which meanwhile had opened its door to Christianity; which would then gradually be assimilated by the barbarian peoples from the North and East.

Around 400 AD, the Roman legions would be forced to withdraw to the continent under the weight of the Anglo-Saxon invasions. These would continue for several centuries and meet with strong opposition from the Welsh and Scots.

The islands that for many centuries had been occupied by Celtic tribes, and which for the last few centuries had been dominated in part by the Romans, would now undergo invasion by the Germanic peoples, who over time would assimilate a good number of the indigenous tribes of the central and southern parts of the larger island and, at the same time, open the way to the spread of Christianity.

In around the year 400 of the Common Era that Christianity begins to spread throughout Ireland, introduced there by the Briton Patrick, and it is not until three hundred years later that the Viking invasions begin.

From then on continuous battles would be waged between Irish princes and invading Vikings, wars that would see now one Irish chief then another gaining the upper hand, and respectively now the Irish then the Vikings. These battles of tribe against tribe, and Irish versus Vikings, would culminate in the battle of Clontarf in 1014, although struggles between the warring factions would continue.

But if on the British island the invaders had managed in part to Germanize the conquered, in Ireland it would be the indigenous people who would absorb the invaders, and by this means the race would continue to be transformed, without however affecting the main principles and characteristics of the Irish people.

### 3. The first modern colony

The years 1169-74 marked the initial phase of the English invasion. Wars, guerrilla warfare, revolts and the ensuing blood baths; betrayals, expropriations, robbery, sackings and general destruction follow one after the other and become more acute after England severs its ties with Rome. And the Cromwell period was no better, from which we recall the Drogheda Massacre, in which the survivors from that battle, including many priests, were put to the sword.

This long period lasts until the year 1800.

A few remarks are relevant here: 1) everything shows that the initial collision between Germans and Celts in Britannia gave rise to a distinctive race; 2) the English, though ruthless in their dealings with the Irish, had been at war with the Scots and Welsh for centuries but had managed to partially assimilate them; 3) their industrial and capitalist development was favored to the extent that Ireland was viewed as, and exploited as, a colony, from which it drew meat, dairy products, wool, and proletarians for its factories and as cannon fodder in its wars.

Well knowing the terrible consequences of England's eight centuries of oppression in Ireland, Marxism hoped that this national question would be resolved by freeing Ireland from the military and political grip of England.

### 4. Riding the wave of the American and French revolutions

A more detailed study of the political and economic events involving Ireland and England will be published in due course, but for now it suffices to say that the possibility Ireland had to attain full independence was obliterated by two major events: the slaughter which followed the rebellion of the United Irishmen at the end of the eighteenth Century, and the Act of Union with England in 1800.

During this period the struggle was conducted by both the landed and mercantile sectors of capitalism, whose interests conflicted with the imperial interests of England. The thirteen colonies, which would become the United States of America, would see their rebellion crowned with success, but Ireland would once again suffer the tragic consequences of its geographical position, so close to England.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 1801, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland was officially proclaimed. (Wales was already unified in 1240 and had submitted to the English Crown in 1283; Scotland on the other hand was united with England in 1707, although the two regions still retained, at least in part, their original Celtic languages). The London government abolished the autonomous Irish parliament and made the country still more dependent; although 100 Irish members were admitted to the House of Commons and 32 to the House of Lords.

The struggle continued and in the 1820s the watchword became “Repeal of the Union”. But these nationalistic movements were led by the Irish liberal bourgeoisie, whose main purpose was to use these agitations to exert pressure on the English government and induce it to make minor concessions to the Catholics but to favor the Protestant capitalists and landed proprietors, for the most part of English and Scottish origin.

Hundreds of thousands of Irish people are set in the motion, stirred to rebel, but unfortunately they are led by unscrupulous men who just use them for their own political ends.

That common front of two centuries before, the union of agrarian and mercantile interests, would soon be broken, it having had among its disastrous consequences the famine of the 1840s. But the potato blight masks the effects of developing industrial capitalism, in the wake of which vast swathes of agricultural land in the British Isles were abandoned, in large part due to the repeal of the Corn Laws. But what in England was a financial calamity became in Ireland, across the whole of the island, a death sentence, along with an industrial revolution which was restricted to Ulster alone.

Another 50 years would be needed before the land question was tackled in the south of Ireland, but meanwhile Ulster’s industrial development had locked it into England’s economic machinery. This tight economic link with the British Empire allowed Ulster to access a much larger market than could be expected from a national protectionist economy that not yet fully developed.

If the last two centuries are regarded from a purely economic point of view, the tragic events that ensued can be given a materialist explanation: it is not really about religious, tribal or sectarian differences, but a struggle between divergent economic interests.

## 5. Marxism and the National Question

Marx and Engels were always convinced that in order to resolve, in a dialectical way, the problems of oppressed peoples the international unity of the working class was necessary, and Ireland’s situation today, like those of many other nationalities around the world, shows just how right they were.

Marxism hoped that the question of national self-determination in Ireland would be resolved in such a way as to allow the unembellished class struggle to proceed unencumbered by the national struggle. According to Marx the achievement of Irish independence would be as a dagger directed at the heart of the English bourgeoisie, and would contribute to clearing the way to the revolution in England itself; even if after independence England and Ireland might reunite in a federation.

Marxism has on the other hand always scorned nationalism as an end in itself. For Lenin the question of national self-determination was of vital importance in combating reaction and imperialism, but that didn’t mean national independence was an end in itself. Citing numerous examples Lenin made clear that the right to national self-determination wasn’t a matter of abstract justice but depended on the capacity of the local bourgeoisie to win independence. An example was Sweden: it wasn’t enough for the representatives of the Swedish workers to vote in the Swedish parliament for Norwegian independence; the Norwegian bourgeoisie had to be able to constitute its own parliament and then attain independence on its own.

The example of the Ukraine was given by Lenin as a model of how to examine the key problem. Russia dominated the Ukraine; so might not the action of the proletariat have the effect of aggravating the national feudal or bourgeois oppression? Certainly not, says Lenin, the proletarian movement must combat national oppression otherwise it would not only reinforce reaction but would also be effectively accepting the divisions that imperialism imposes on the workers’ movement. National self-determination for the Ukraine, certainly! But the criminal division of the workers’ movement between the Russian and Ukrainian nations, never! Marxism has never accepted the national division of the workers’ movement not only because in a material sense the workers’ do not have a country (*Communist Manifesto*) but also because national borders are a legacy of the prehistory of the human race and will disappear with Communism. For us Marxists proletarians (along with the oppressed and the dispossessed) in Ireland are our brothers and sisters, and it is their fate that interests us. We do not share with the bourgeoisie the notion of “our country”; we intend to pursue our international class interests, organized in one party to accomplish a planet-wide revolution.

But what if the national bourgeoisie is incapable of performing its historic task? Does the honor of bringing it to completion *on behalf of* the bourgeoisie then devolve to the proletarian movement, postponing until later, that is until afterwards, the transition to the struggle for socialism? The answer to this question is that the proletarian movement must accelerate its struggle to fill the void left by an ineffective bourgeoisie *but without restricting itself to the bourgeois phase*.

In Russia Lenin realized that the bourgeoisie was incapable of bringing about the democratic revolution, and that this gave the proletariat the opportunity of leapfrogging the phase of bourgeois political power and fighting for a socialist State straightaway. In a similar vein, if the Irish bourgeoisie was incapable of winning national self-determination, the task of the proletariat, struggling in defense of its own interests, was to prepare for the *double revolution*. The proletariat doesn't need to wait until the bourgeoisie has installed itself in power before it starts to fight its own revolution because the struggle for socialism is sparked off by the rise of the industrial bourgeoisie and wage laborers, and wherever it has the strength to do so the proletariat takes power *on its own behalf*.

Marxism, therefore, only favored the completion of the bourgeois democratic phase so that the struggle going on in society between the national bourgeoisie and its proletariat could get underway, and not out of any kind of respect for the myths of democracy and liberty. The events of 1848 clearly showed that there was no other way the proletariat could go than struggling for its own interests. Referring to the uprising in Cracow in 1846, Marx made some important points in a speech on 22 February 1848, on the occasion of its 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary:

There are striking analogies in history. The Jacobin of 1793 has become the Communist of the present day. In 1793, when Russia, Austria and Prussia divided up Poland, the three powers produced the constitution of 1791, which had been condemned unanimously because of its alleged Jacobin principles.

And what had it proclaimed? The Polish constitution of 1791! Nothing other than a constitutional monarchy: legislation placed in the hands of the representatives of the country, freedom of the press, freedom of conscience, public judicial trial, abolition of serfdom, etc. And all this was then called pure Jacobinism! Thus you see, gentlemen, that history has moved on. The Jacobinism of those days has today become, as far as liberalism goes, the most moderate imaginable.

The three powers have marched with history. In 1846 when by incorporating Cracow in to Austria they confiscated the last remains of Polish nationality, they gave the name *communism* to what they once called Jacobinism.

Now, what is the communism of the Cracow revolution? Was it communism to have wanted to restore Polish nationality? This is as much to say that the war waged against Napoleon by the European coalition to save nationalities was a communist war, and that the Congress of Vienna was made up of crowned Communists. Or was the Cracow revolution communist because it wanted it set up a democratic government? Nobody will charge the millionaire citizens of Berne and New York with communist leanings.

Communism denies the necessity for the existence of classes; it wants to abolish all classes, all class distinctions. The revolutionaries of Cracow wanted only to abolish political distinctions between the classes; they wanted to give equal rights to the different classes.

But, briefly, to what extent was the Cracow revolution communist?

Was it perhaps that it tried to break the chains of feudalism, to turn tributary property into free property?

If one asked French proprietors: "Do you know what Polish democrats want? The Polish democrats want to have the kind of property ownership which you already have", the French proprietors would answer, "They are quite right". But if you say, with M. Guizot, to the French proprietors: "The poles want to abolish property as you instituted it by the revolution of 1789 and as it still exists in your country". "What!" they will shout, "they are revolutionaries, Communists; these scoundrels must be trampled down!" (...)



Let us go further back. In 1789 the political question of the rights of man included the question of free competition.

And what then happened in England? In all the questions from the Reform Bill until the abolition of the Corn Laws, did the political parties fight about anything except changes in property rights, questions of property, social questions?

Here, in Belgium itself, is the struggle of liberalism with Catholicism anything but the struggle of industrial capital with large landed property?

Divisions exist among the ruling class in the various countries over the question of democratic reforms. Those already in power are conservative in their outlook and bitterly hostile to reforms. The new wealthy classes, who contest them for power, put forward their demands as reflecting the interests of the nation as a whole. But, as soon as the new lower classes made their voice heard, the ruling classes as a whole and the entire bourgeoisie suddenly discover a new found solidarity and lash out instinctively against the workers, against the poor and the dispossessed, who are silenced, often in a bloodbath. This was the indisputable lesson of the 1848 revolution in France and every other bourgeois revolution.

We will quote Marx once again, from an article in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* of 29 June 1848, ‘The June Revolution’.

*Fraternité*, the brotherhood of antagonistic classes, one of which exploits the other, this *fraternité* which in February was proclaimed and inscribed in large letters on the façades of Paris on every prison and every barracks – this *fraternité* found its true, unadulterated and prosaic expression in *civil war*, civil war in its most terrible aspect, the war of labour against capital. This brotherhood blazed in front of all the windows of Paris on the evening of June 25, when the Paris of the bourgeoisie held illuminations while the Paris of the proletariat was burning, bleeding, groaning in the throes of death.

This brotherhood lasted only as long as there was a fraternity of interests between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Pedants sticking to the old revolutionary tradition of 1793; socialist doctrinaires who begged alms for the people from the bourgeoisie and who were allowed to deliver lengthy sermons and compromise themselves so long as the proletarian lion had to be lulled to sleep; republicans who wanted to keep the old bourgeois order *in toto*, but without the crowned head; members of the dynastic opposition on whom chance imposed the task of bringing about the downfall of a dynasty instead of a change of government; legitimists who did not want to cast off their livery but merely to change its style – these were the allies with whom the people had fought their February revolution (...)

None of the numerous revolutions of the French bourgeoisie since 1789 assailed the existing *order*, for they retained the class rule, the slavery of the workers, the *bourgeois order*, even though the political form of this rule and this slavery changed frequently.

It is necessary to divide the capitalist era into two periods, which are however not neatly separated by a wall, but connected by numerous transitional links. The first period is during the decline of feudalism, which is gradually replaced by the bourgeois democratic system which drags onto the political stage vast mass movements involving all classes of all nationalities. In the second period the capitalist States have completely developed, and the clash between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie gradually assumes greater importance.

The proletariat esteems and places above all else *the union of proletarians of all nations* and it examines every national demand from the point of view of the workers’ class struggle. It is, therefore, against the bourgeoisie of the oppressing nation *but also* against the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation.

From *Factors of Race and Nation*, Part 3, chapter 7:

Polemical deformations, old and new, have brought about confusion between the programmatic internationalist position of the communist proletariat and the formally national nature of some of the first stages of its struggle. Historically, the proletariat only became a class and only came to have a political party within the national framework; likewise, it engaged in the struggle for power in a national form, to the extent that it tended to fight the State of its own bourgeoisie. Even after the proletariat has conquered power, this power may, for a certain amount of time, remain limited to the national arena. But none of this detracts from the essential historical opposition between the bourgeoisie, which aims to constitute bourgeois nations, presenting them as nations ‘in general’, and the proletariat, which rejects patriotic solidarity and the nation ‘in general’ since it needs to construct an international society, while fully understanding that the demand for national unity is useful up to a certain stage, but always as a bourgeois demand.

In the chapter entitled “The International and the Question of Nationalities” it is noted that:

A series of interesting debates within the General Council of the First International and under the personal leadership of Marx provide the facts enabling us to correct errors of principle on the question of the historic struggles of nationalities. The tendency to ignore these struggles instead of explaining them from the materialist point of view is a manifestation of particularistic and federalist positions derived from utopian and libertarian theories that Marxism had jettisoned, rather than being evidence of an advanced internationalism.

And again it is explained, in the chapter “The Imperialist Epoch and Irredentist Leftovers”:

In the epoch of bourgeois revolutionary wars of independence and the formation of nation States there are still many cases of lesser nationalities being subjected to States of another nationality, even in Europe; nevertheless, the proletarian International must reject every attempt to justify wars between States for reasons of irredentism, unmasking the imperialist purposes of every bourgeois war, and calling upon the workers to sabotage such wars from both sides. The inability to put this into practice has brought about the destruction of revolutionary energies under the opportunist waves that accompanied the two world wars; and if the masses do not abandon the opportunist leadership in time (social democratic or Cominformist) it will result in another war, thus allowing capitalism to survive its violent and bloody crises once again.

We could continue with a hundred other citations, but we will leave that to future articles pertaining to the national and racial question.

## 6. Marx and Engels on Ireland

In a letter from London in 1843 a young revolutionary, Engels, wrote:

People who have nothing to lose, two-thirds of whom are clothed in rags, genuine proletarians and sansculottes and, moreover, Irishmen, wild, headstrong, fanatical Gaels. One who has never seen Irishmen cannot know them. Give me two hundred thousand Irishmen and I will overthrow the entire British monarchy. The Irishman is a carefree, cheerful, potato-eating child of nature. From his native heath, where he grew up, under a broken-down roof, on weak tea and meagre food, he is suddenly thrown into our civilisation. Hunger drives him to England. In the mechanical, egoistic, ice-cold hurly-burly of the English factory towns, his passions are aroused (...)

But in England the Irishman saw a great deal, he attended public meetings and workers' associations, he knows what Repeal is and what Sir Robert Peel stands for, he quite certainly has often had fights with the police and could tell you a great deal about the heartlessness and disgraceful behavior of the 'Peelers' (the police). He has also heard a lot about Daniel O'Connell. Now he once more returns to his old cottage with its bit of land for potatoes. The potatoes are ready for harvesting, he digs them up, and now he has something to live on during the winter. But here the principal tenant appears, demanding the rent. Good God, where's the money to come from? The principal tenant is responsible to the landowner for the rent, and therefore has his property attached. The Irishman offers resistance and is thrown into gaol. Finally, he is set free again, and soon afterwards the principal tenant or someone else who took part in the attachment of the property is found dead in a ditch.

That is a story from the life of the Irish proletarians which is of daily occurrence. The half-savage upbringing and later the completely civilised environment bring the Irishman into contradiction with himself, into a state of permanent irritation, of continually smouldering fury, which makes him capable of anything. In addition he bears the burden of five centuries of oppression with all its consequences. Is it surprising that, like any other half-savage, he strikes out blindly and furiously on every opportunity, that his eyes burn with a perpetual thirst for revenge, a destructive fury, for which it is altogether a matter of indifference what it is directed against, so long as it can strike out and destroy? But that is not all. The violent national hatred of the Gaels against the Saxons, the orthodox Catholic fanaticism fostered by the clergy against Protestant-episcopal arrogance – with these elements anything can be accomplished. And all these elements are in O'Connell's hands. And what a multitude of people are at his disposal! The day before yesterday in Cork – 150,000 men, yesterday in Nenaph – 200,000, today in Kilkenny – 400,000, and so it goes on.

A triumphal procession lasting a fortnight, a triumphal procession such as no Roman emperor ever had. And if O'Connell really had the welfare of the people in view, if he were really concerned to abolish poverty – if his miserable, petty *juste-milieu* aims were not behind all the clamour and the agitation for Repeal – I should truly like to know what Sir Robert Peel could refuse him if he demanded it while at the head of such a force as he now has. But what does he achieve with all his power and his millions of valiant and desperate Irishmen? He is unable to accomplish even the wretched Repeal of the Union; of course solely because he is not serious about it, because he is misusing the impoverished, oppressed Irish people in order to embarrass the Tory Ministers and to put back into office his *juste-milieu* friends. Sir Robert Peel, too, knows this well enough, and hence 25,000 soldiers are quite enough to keep all Ireland in check. If O'Connell were really the man of the people, if he had sufficient courage *and were not himself afraid of the people*, i.e., if he were not a double-faced Whig, but an upright, consistent democrat, then the last English soldier would have left Ireland long since, there would no longer be any idle Protestant priest in purely Catholic districts, or any Old-Norman baron in his castle. But there is the rub. If the people were to be set free even for a moment, then Daniel O'Connell and his moneyed aristocrats would soon be just as much left high and dry as he wants to leave the Tories high and dry.

That is the reason for Daniel's close association with the Catholic clergy, that is why he warns his Irishmen against dangerous socialism, that is why he rejects the support offered by the Chartists, although for appearances sake he now and again talks about democracy – just as Louis Philippe in his day talked about Republican institutions – and that is why he will never succeed in achieving anything but the political education of the Irish people, which in the long run is to no one more dangerous than to himself.

This letter from Engels, who was barely 23 years old at the time, gives a good idea of what the situation in Ireland was like in 1843. Over the ensuing years both he and Marx would become increasingly interested in the Irish problem as a whole, developing with dialectical criteria the importance of the struggle for national independence from the centuries old Anglo-Saxon rule.

## 7. Extermination and the Industrial Revolution

A glance at the population statistics shows us the extent of the tragedy that struck Ireland around the middle of the nineteenth century (see chart on next page).

Even today the combined population of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland is little more than four and a half million inhabitants!

During the three years of bad harvests between 1845 and 1848, which particularly affected the potato crop, around a million Irish people died and around the same number again were forced to emigrate. (The potato, originally from Central America, was introduced to Europe as a rare plant of interest only to botanists. From 1663 however, following a terrible famine, it became widely used in Ireland as a food plant).

Meanwhile in Northern Ireland (Ulster) the British industrial revolution linked the fortunes of the Protestant bourgeoisie – secessionist only a few years before – to that of the Empire. But the English colonialist policy also succeeded in winning over the Protestant part of the working class, thus creating an indissoluble split at the heart of the proletariat. Getting the Protestant workers to identify with the interests of their bosses undoubtedly contributed to religious sectarianism, which was also accompanied by economic privileges, all of which was influenced by the Orange Order, a creation of the colonial aristocracy in 1795 (named after William of Orange, the Protestant *condottiere*, who defeated the Catholic James II and grabbed the throne of Great Britain in 1688). This organization, with its inter-classist structure, was extremely active in fomenting sectarian discord between the Catholic and Protestant proletariat.

## 8. From the Eighteen to the Nineteen Hundreds

From the trauma of the famine, which had given the Irish definitive proof of the ruthless oppression of imperialism and the big landed proprietors, there arose in the seventies the republican Fenian movement, committed to the use of force to free Ireland from foreign domination.

The long struggle for independence, which inevitably meant open confrontation with England, experienced a revival at the end of the nineteenth century, when the Irish Nationalist Party succeeded in taking advantage of the rivalry between the two parties of the English ruling class, the Conservatives and the Liberals. The Irish MPs, led by Parnell, decided to support the Liberal Party, which had promised Home Rule, that is self government, to Ireland.

In the 1886 the English Liberal government, after being pushed into it by the Irish MPs, took the decision to propose limited autonomy for Ireland and introduced the Home Rule Bill. The Protestants of Ulster, supported by the Conservative Party, opposed the measure with such violence that the government fell. The bill would go to be defeated in the House of Commons on numerous occasions, both owing to the defection of reactionaries in the Liberal Party and, naturally enough, the opposition of the Conservatives.

From the 80's onwards the latter began to systematically exploit the religious disagreements between Catholics and Protestants, to the reflection of real economic differences between the North and the South of the country. It was Lord Randolph Churchill who decided to "play the Orange card" in Belfast in 1886, exploiting religious differences in order to push the Protestant minority into defending their economic links with England. This was in effect a recognition that England could no longer hope to dominate the whole of Ireland and it had to get ready, when necessary, to hang on to only part of it.

The policy of fomenting religious conflict was one of the main causes of the decline of Charles Stewart Parnell, the last *Protestant* leader of the struggle for a united and independent Ireland. The collapse of his Irish Nationalist Party caused the question of a united and independent Ireland to be postponed, whereas the struggle for land reform meanwhile gathered pace throughout the Island, laying the basis for a Catholic landowning class and breathing new life into the campaign for self-rule.

Following the failure of the parliamentary road, and the death of Parnell, extremely popular leader of the Irish MPs in Westminster, there reappeared on the political scene organizations committed to obtaining independence by more radical methods.

The Liberal Party would see further Home Rule bills blocked, until finally in 1914 the law was passed, although disagreements still persisted within the English bourgeoisie: some wanting to grant independence to Ireland, others preferring to go to war rather than relinquish it. Winston Churchill was at the time the spokesman for the current which favored total Irish independence, and in 1912 he even went to Belfast to try and convince the Protestants of Ulster to place themselves at the head of the Home Rule movement, but his advice remained a dead letter.

In fact there existed a real danger in Ulster of a rebellion against the law, to the extent that Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, would later affirm that “if Belfast had got it into its head to put up armed resistance, my navy would have reduced the city to rubble in 24 hours”. As far as Churchill was concerned, good servant of the Empire that he was, any resistance had to be crushed, and he certainly wouldn’t have hesitated to crush any rebellion in Ulster had it broken out; just as he had shown he knew what to do when faced with workers’ strikes and agitations. And the prospect of the law on Home Rule being enacted would indeed bring the country, in the period up to the Summer of 1914, to the brink of civil war. Only the outbreak of the First World War prevented an open confrontation between the Irish Volunteers organized in the South and the Ulster Volunteers, led by Edward Carson in the North. But the war merely postponed the inevitable.

Irish population, early—mid 1800s

1801	5,319,867
1811	6,084,996
1821	6,869,544
1831	7,828,347
1841	8,222,664
1851	6,623,985 (!)
1861	5,850,309

## 9. Bourgeoisie and Proletariat in Ireland during the First World War

During the agitations and strikes which preceded the First World War, the official organ of Sinn Féin regarded the strike as an unpardonable sin. Arthur Griffith himself would condemn the independent workers’ movement and pour hatred and acrimony on the revolutionary leader James Larkin: he simply couldn’t stand the fact that Larkin put class before nation. Later he would have the satisfaction, when the war broke out, of seeing many of the “internationalist” leaders of the English working class suddenly becoming ultra-jingoist.

In 1913 Griffith formulated the following positions:

Sinn Féin is a national, not a sectional movement, and because it is national, it cannot tolerate injustice and oppression within the nation. It will not, at least, through my voice, associate itself with any war of classes or attempted war of classes. There may be many classes, but there can be only one nation. If there be men who believe that Ireland is a name and nothing more, and that the interest of the Irish working man lies not in sustaining the nation, but in destroying it, that the path to redemption for man-kind is through universalism, cosmopolitanism, or any other ‘ism’ than Nationalism, I am not of their company (...)

“I trust no man will tell me he loves all humanity equally well, for I know that the man who loves all humanity equally well can love nobody in particular. I know that the man who loves all his neighbour’s children with his own is a bad father (*Sinn Féin*, November 1913).

The concept of the “Free Nation” which Griffith puts forward is largely based on his study of Hungary as a model, along with the economics of Friedrich List, a German bourgeois economist who advocated protectionism as a means of developing a national economy. But independent national economies, if such a thing exists or indeed ever existed, do not appear out of thin air. A national economy can only be held together by a State which guarantees the continuity of the relations of production against internal social attacks and foreign bourgeoisies; and for a State to arise, there must be some basis for it in the first place. But once the process is underway the State exercises its au-

thority in defending the economic interests of the new ruling power, which means also clamping down on those who prove a threat to the new order.

As regards the contiguity of nationalist aspirations and the counter-revolution in the “Free State” of Eire, we will cite two famous people. The first one, referred to earlier, is Daniel O’Connell, an eminent nationalist during the early part of the nineteenth century who, as James Connolly tells it, found himself talking to an Irishman breaking stones by the side of the road. In reply to the latter’s question O’Connell couldn’t deny that in a future independent Ireland he would still be breaking stones. The second, and more explicit example, concerns Arthur Griffith, the founder of Sinn Féin and “theoretician” of the nationalist movement at the beginning of the twentieth century: in which capacity he declared that Irishmen should be willing to work for less money for the privilege of living in their own country. It comes as no surprise then that the local bourgeoisie was extremely enthusiastic about this part of the national creed, and that subsequently Griffith would be one of the authors of the treaty with the United Kingdom which led to the formation of the Irish Free State.

## 10. The Revolt in Dublin

In 1894 various trade unions, which had hitherto acted independently, came together to form the Irish Trades Union Congress. From 1908 to 1913 the workers’ movement grew steadily stronger, confronting difficult periods of crisis with strikes and agitations; and at the same time there arose the Irish Labour Party. Meanwhile in 1905 Sinn Féin (“Ourselves Alone”) was founded, a party that proposed that Irish MPs withdraw from Westminster and form a parliament in Dublin, in open defiance of English law.

In 1914, under the leadership of James Connolly, the Irish working class, despite persecution from the English police, engaged in an all-out struggle against the imperialist war.

In an article from July 1916 entitled “The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up”, Lenin would write: “A blow delivered against the power of the English imperialist bourgeoisie by a rebellion in Ireland is a hundred times more significant politically than a blow of equal force delivered in Asia or in Africa”.

And further on he continues:

It is the misfortune of the Irish that they arose prematurely, before the European revolt of the proletariat had had time to mature. Capitalism is not so harmoniously built that the various sources of rebellion can immediately merge of their own accord, without reverses and defeats. On the other hand, the very fact that revolts do break out at different times, in different places, and are of different kinds, guarantees wide scope and depth to the general movement; but it is only in premature, individual, sporadic and therefore unsuccessful, revolutionary movements that the masses gain experience, acquire knowledge, gather strength, and get to know their real leaders, the socialist proletarians, and in this way prepare for the general onslaught, just as certain strikes, demonstrations, local and national, mutinies in the army, outbreaks among the peasantry, etc., prepared the way for the general onslaught in 1905.

In March 1916 a Congress was held in America, attended by around 3,000 Irish people who were living there. The congress approved a resolution which demanded independence for Ireland and laid the basis for an organization which adopted the name Friends of Irish Freedom.

Among the working masses another organization was developing: the Irish Citizen Army, a workers’ militia tasked with protecting proletarians from attacks by the police. Over the same period inter-classist organizations arose: in Belfast there was the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), formed by unionists to defend continued membership of the British Empire by force; on the other side, the Irish Volunteers.

During the world war the nationalist movement was by-and-large silent as regards the struggle against England was concerned, mainly because Home Rule had in effect been conceded. But there were two tendencies that pursued an active course during the war. The first, associated with Roger Casement, viewed Germany as a source of support and assistance, above all by supplying arms (in much the same way that some would look towards Nazi Germany

during the Second World War): in this scenario Germany would have been assured of support from an independent Ireland in its war against England, but Ireland would simply have exchanged one master for another.

The second tendency, whose principal exponent was Connolly, saw that the hated England was in difficulties, and proposed there was an opportunity to mount a successful rebellion throughout Ireland.

The insurrection, the Easter Rising of 1916, will be long remembered in the history of the Irish people for the brutality with which it was put down. The insurrection was mainly confined to Dublin due to the Irish Republican Brotherhood pulling out at the last minute. By taking the British occupying force by surprise, the rebels were able to seize a section of Dublin. Bravely holding out despite their isolation, and faced with a force of 20,000 soldiers, the rebellion was put down amidst much slaughter. After a parody of a trial the leaders of the Easter rebellion were executed by British firing squads: to Connolly, with an ankle wound, was extended the favour of tying him to a chair before shooting him.

Connolly had particularly stood out due to his advanced ideas: unification of the class struggle with the struggle for national liberation in order to form a *socialist republic*; for this it was necessary to expel the British army.

Another key intuition of his was that if Ireland was divided (a proposal already making headway at the time) it would have tragic consequences for the proletariat in Ulster and throughout the Island: the unity between Protestants and Catholics within the workers' movement was already fragile, and with an Ireland divided between North and South an "orgy of reaction" would be unleashed.

## 11. Towards a National State

With the war over, the struggle for Irish independence broke out again with renewed vigor, and the reaction of the London government was to attempt to drown any attempt at revolt in blood. The atrocities of the *Black and Tans* and the more refined terrorism of the *Auxiliaries* only further inflamed the struggle for independence. Irish towns and villages put to the torch, ambushes in the countryside, individuals executed in the streets; arrests, internments and hunger strikes; the secret war between the British Intelligence Service's notorious 'Cairo Gang' and Michael Collins' network, all were every day events in post-war Ireland.

In 1918, with the war over, the general elections held throughout the United Kingdom saw Sinn Féin capture 73 of the 105 Irish seats in the House of Commons. Military defeat – electoral victory.

On 21 January 1919 the *Dáil Eireann*, the Irish parliament was formed, composed of democratically elected representatives. It would ratify the bourgeois constitution of the republic and make a declaration of national independence. A democratic program was adopted and a cabinet nominated, courts were established and the IRA was placed under the control of the Minister of Defence.

Finally the London government began secret negotiations, eventually arriving at an agreement, according to which a separate parliament was offered to the 26 counties, on condition that special status was granted to the six counties in the North. The basis for this had already been set out in the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, which proposed separate parliaments for the two parts of the Island.

The British government had to make some further concessions before the conditions were achieved for a truce on 11 July, 1921, following which all Irish prisoners had to be released. Negotiations for a form of independence for Ireland in which the centre and south would become a Free State also got underway. The Treaty with London provided for elections to a Parliament in the South, which would have its own army, the National Army, and a police force. As a matter of fact in 1922 the formation of the National Army got underway when the armed formations of the Volunteers who had fought against the English were still in place. In the new army there were both raw recruits and experienced veterans, the latter of disparate provenance, but mainly former members of the American or British armies, or Irish formations.

## 12. Ulster

To backtrack a little: in September 1919, a British military proclamation had declared the *Dáil Eireann* illegal, all republican newspaper had been banned, and the English had unleashed a reign of terror which lasted until the truce in July 1921. During this period the division of the country had been imposed by force of arms into a pseudo-

independent State in the south (self-governing, linked to the person of the king of England, but with a government and army of its own, member of the Commonwealth) and a province of the United Kingdom (Ulster) in the north.

The key point is that Eire, with its 26 counties, remained a predominantly Catholic and agrarian region, and was the poorer of the two. Ulster on the other hand, in the north, with 6 counties, was predominantly Protestant, more heavily industrialised, equipped with a very efficient port, and it remained linked to the United Kingdom of Great Britain. The destiny of Ireland was mapped out and the proletariat had been divided and defeated. Defeated, but not broken!

Connolly's intuition had proved correct, the English bourgeoisie had managed to divide Protestant and Catholic proletarians and set them at each others' throats. But the creation of British Ulster also protected the interests of the unionist bourgeoisie concentrated in the North of the country, with its strong ties to English imperialist interests which had existed since 1800.

The inter-classism of the Orangeist ideology had managed to tie the Protestant working class of the North, in a position of material privilege with respect to the Catholic minority, to the interests of the local bourgeoisie. From the start Ulster was thus based on open religious discrimination, in which religious sectarianism was of course merely a distorting mirror, concealing the true face of imperialist class rule.

The power held by the unionist bourgeoisie in the Stormont parliament and government gave the unionist bourgeoisie complete control over the material conditions by which the Protestant workers could be separated from the Catholic workers. To be Protestant meant you would be prioritized in the allocation of housing and jobs. Being Protestant therefore meant you were unionist, identified with Great Britain and the ruling class, and nurtured feelings against Catholics very similar to those of poor whites in America against Afro-Americans. The inherent sectarianism embedded within the structure of the State would subsequently be reinforced and protected by laws on public order which were among the most repressive in the world.

The Special Powers Act of 1922 gave the government of Northern Ireland extraordinary powers against subversion. Amongst these powers were those of arrest without warrant, thereby abolishing legal defence; prohibition of meetings and political publications, internment without trial and for indefinite periods; the death penalty for the possession of firearms and explosives, and the flogging of prisoners and confiscation of their belongings. On the military level there was a heavily armed police apparatus composed exclusively of Protestants deployed, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), who were Ulster's real police force, and an armed corps of Orangeist volunteers called the B-Specials, who supported the unionist party; and then there were the Orange Lodges themselves, social organizations whose task was to arouse Protestant political fervor by keeping a sense of Protestant superiority alive at the base.

Those who belonged to the Catholic minority became like the blacks in the Southern States of America, deprived of political representation, repressed by liberty-destroying laws and discriminated against as regards housing, education and above all employment.

### 13. Bourgeois Counter-Revolution in the South

But the Treaty did not meet with the unanimous approval of the Irish Republicans, in fact the division of Ireland that this entailed would cause major disagreements. For some months the new State in the south was paralyzed by the conflict between those who supported the Treaty and those who intended to continue to fight for its extension to the North. It was actually Arthur Griffith, one of the founders of Sinn Féin and a signatory of the Treaty, who urged Michael Collins, another signatory, to get the new State and army organized in order to silence any potential opponents.

For a brief period the two sides, composed of former comrades, appeared reluctant to settle their differences by violent means, but this situation couldn't last for long. Any State worthy of the name needs to prioritize the economy, protect public safety and disarm anyone who opposes it, and the new State of the 26 counties was no different from any other. Open confrontation between this national State and its opponents therefore became inevitable.

The Irish Republican Army, as the forces which had fought the British were known, would split down the middle. Those who adhered to the Treaty with England gathered around the Government, with Griffith as President,



while those who wanted the fight in the North to continue, until Ulster was included in the new Irish State, remained outside the new State.

The headquarters of the anti-treaty side was based in the Four Courts in Dublin. In order to enforce the boycott of Belfast businesses, a policy which had been resumed by the anti-treatyists following the IRA split, a local garage was raided, and the organizer of the boycott was then arrested in retaliation. The rebels replied by seizing a General of the National Army. In the meantime, the anti-treatyists had seized other key points in Dublin. Collins was furious and demanded that the situation be resolved immediately. The following day, on June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1922, the rebels received an ultimatum to surrender. At midnight the response of “No Reply” from the rebels was sent back. At 4am the next day the bombardment of the Four Courts and surrounding area by the National Army began, with artillery borrowed off the English. It continued for three days, resulting in heavy losses among the besieged. For Cathal Brugha, veteran republican fighter, it was another 1916. Many preferred death to being captured by their former comrades, others were taken hostage.

Four of these hostages were in fact shot by firing squad soon after in retaliation for the shooting of a member of the *Dail*, an execution proposed and approved by the Free State cabinet. Four prisoners were chosen, Rory O’Connor, Liam Mellows, Joseph McKelvey and Richard Barrett and they were all executed the following morning. There wasn’t even a parody of a trial. The four represented, it was said, the provinces of Ireland: Leinster, Connaught, Ulster and Munster, but, above all, they were killed because they knew too much. It was a declaration of war against anyone who intended to rebel against the State, and it showed that it wasn’t just the British who could oppress the Irish. A wave of arrests followed, often conducted at dead of night after the style of the old occupying forces. Some of the prisoners, such as Harry Boland, were shot “while trying to escape”.

The civil war then spread, village by village, into the countryside. Flying columns were formed to deal with the rebels – and it was on one of these incursions that Collins was killed in an ambush. All-in-all the number of actions against former comrades-in-arms was considerable. The bourgeois State had to be defended by its own bourgeoisie. It must establish order!

And was this sequence of events any different from the experiences of other bourgeois revolutions? Not that much! As always, once the bourgeois revolution has been carried out the only revolutionary potential that remains is that of the proletarian struggle against the bourgeoisie regime.

Since 1923 Ireland has been full of internment camps of one kind or another – both in the North and the South. Despite their differences there has been a convergence of Belfast’s, Dublin’s and London’s interests in ensuring that any opposition to the existing States is combated and defeated.

The ruling class in Ireland has its own form of self-determination and they intend to keep it that way.

If there is anything else we have to add on Eire, let us remember it is still equipped with special courts, internment camps, laws that criminalize offences against the State, censorship, etc. Not bad for the “Free State” that Arthur Griffith envisaged!

So how do we judge the Irish Civil War of 1921-23? Is there still an incomplete Bourgeois revolution that needs to be concluded? Is the national unification of Ireland an inevitable stage which has to be accomplished before anything else can be done?

## 14. A Nationalism “Betrayed”?

An argument still used by Sinn Fein and the like today is that the nationalist aspirations were “betrayed”, with the Constitution of 1798 and the Declaration of the Dail of 1919 referred to as perfect examples of unfulfilled democratic principles. Old fallacies that need to be challenged.

In every country the bourgeoisie has always issued stirring slogans about liberty, democracy and national unity in order to inflame the passions and spur on the people, and in particular the proletariat, to fight their battles. In the struggle against feudal absolutism and imperialist domination, up to a certain point, it was right for the working class to form a common front with their bourgeoisie to fight the common enemy; but this was only until the opposing interests of local bourgeoisie and proletariat had caused the class struggle to break out *within* the “nation”, splitting it in two. Every bourgeois revolution has followed the same path, from the French Revolution – with Napoleon

clearing the streets of Paris with volleys of grapeshot – to the proclamation of the Irish Republic and the subsequent Civil War. The bourgeoisie does not “betray” democracy as such, but defends class rule as personified in the State, which represents and defends the national economy on which the classes are founded, and whose interests remain in perpetual contradiction. It is not individual choices which bring about changes of this kind, rather they are the product of centuries of human history, and in the final analysis of the struggle and suffering of numerous generations of workers. The bourgeoisie, for all its talk of liberty and national harmony, is as much a prisoner of circumstances as the feudal barons who fought to defend their despotic regimes.

As soon as a bourgeoisie takes power it has to organize its State, protect property, develop laws, raise a police force and army, and, against the interests of the proletariat, function like the State that was just overthrown. Soon opponents are thrown into gaol, hostages are taken, special courts without juries and internment camps set up, etc.

No-one can deny that the Irish State known as Eire is just such a State. In fact as regards certain legal measures such as the Offences Against the State Act (1939), Special Courts, etc., Eire has been a pioneer, introducing innovations which the authorities in Ulster imitated shortly afterwards. This common interest of the two States is in fact reflected in the Anglo-Irish agreement, a bourgeois form of United Ireland in which the population is kept on a tight rein. Thanks to the marvels of bourgeois democratic rule, the whole Island is now under the strict control of the Police/Garda.

But of course within the bourgeoisie, both during and after its revolution, there have always been differences and disputes about how far the revolution should go, and this has led to intense in-fighting among the nationalists. It is this violent conflict which gives rise to the illusion of a “betrayal” by the bourgeoisie. Certainly there are individuals, disowned and expelled by the bourgeoisie, imprisoned and sometimes killed, for whom these events are sadly all too real, but the new ruling class as a whole is quick to establish a solid sense of community of purpose. The notion of discipline within the ranks of the bourgeoisie, and its declaration of war against the working class, are symptoms of the counter-revolution.

## 15. Social Struggle under Threadbare Banners

Religiously motivated disturbances would continue into the thirties and become particularly acute.

During the disturbances in the early seventies new political tendencies of both “right” and “left” would appear. On one side the RUC with the Reverend Ian Paisley, who during the fifties was the leader of the extremist anti-Catholic movement, rooted among sectors of the workers and organized around the Free Presbyterian Church; on the other a campaign for the peaceful creation of a united Ireland.

These tensions did not lessen after the formation of the Labour government in October 1964, although both Northern Irish reformers and Labour MPs had expected initiatives in favor of the Catholics. But the reformist projects of the Labourites were not realized and the resulting deadlock drove many to adhere to the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) founded in February 1967. This extremely respectable association with a predominantly bourgeois membership, though supported by the “left”, obtained nothing from Stormont with its exquisitely constitutional protests; and nor was it supported in any way by Westminster. Up until the clashes in Derry in October 1968, every initiative taken was opposed by the local unionists. In this situation there arose a new “left-wing” group, People’s Democracy, founded by young intellectuals.

Although O’Neill, with his ‘liberal reform’ policy had become Prime Minister of Ulster, the situation remained tense and there followed a series of clashes between the RUC and the Reverend Ian Paisley and his followers on one side, and the Civil Rights Movement and People’s Democracy on the other. On 17 April 1969 Bernadette Devlin, candidate for People’s Democracy, was elected to Westminster as an Independent. O’Neill would resign in the same month.

In July and August the annual Protestant parades became detonators of violence: the RUC and B-Specials invaded the Catholic zones of the city, resulting in seven people killed, 400 wounded, and 500 houses damaged or destroyed. The conditions for an English military intervention could hardly have been more propitious.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> August 6,000 British troops arrived on the streets of Londonderry, an intervention made for two main reasons: 1) because Stormont had lost control of the State; 2) because this allowed the Labour Government to maintain its reformist position whilst at the same time safeguarding the structure of the Northern Irish State.

The Labour government showed yet again that if push came to shove “citizens’ rights” were not high on its list of priorities. The Catholic minority no longer had any illusions about whether or not the Labour party supported the unionists.

In this situation the Provisional IRA was born. The old organization, successor of the historical IRA, had not guaranteed the defense of the Catholic ghettos in August 1969. On the walls the mocking slogan IRA = I RAN AWAY appeared. Republicans became split between “Official” republicans of the left, who supported change by constitutional means, and the “Provisionals” who supported national unification by means of armed struggle.

The fundamental similarity between the objectives of the Labour Party and of the Conservative Party, their common preoccupation with safeguarding the capitalist-imperialist structure, is borne out by the support the Conservatives gave to the Labour Party throughout the period under consideration.

From 1969 to the time of writings, this situation of complete political deadlock, given the hardening of London’s position, which ever more openly protects the Ulster Unionist Anglo-Protestant groups in Ulster, has shifted the struggle almost exclusively onto the military plane.

In fact, after 1969, the Irish question was transformed into a war with periodic truces. By 1984 the death toll had risen to 2,400, with more than 20,000 wounded. Repression, assassinations, internment camps, torture, the notorious ‘H Blocks’, entire districts transformed into battlefields, barricades in the streets, the RUC patrolling in armored cars, such is the desolate scene that Belfast has presented for the last 15 years. Moments of particular tensions resulted from the death of Bobby Sands, an IRA volunteer held in the Maze prison, where he was allowed to die of hunger, followed by nine of his comrades.

The hunger strike in Ireland has often been used in modern times. Connolly, arrested during the Dublin Lock-out, would resort to it after he was imprisoned for refusing to recognize the courts. In 1917, during the upheavals of that year, many of those arrested again refused to recognize the jurisdiction of the courts, and went on hunger strike when denied political status. In September of that year, Thomas Ashe, a commandant during the Easter Rising, died after force feeding, leading to massive protests.

But the hunger strike has an even longer tradition, not just as a political weapon but as a method whereby a person of low rank sought justice, in a judicial controversy, when faced with someone of higher status.

## 16. Armed Irredentism

In May 1983, on the initiative of the *Fine Gael* leader and *Taoiseach* of the Irish government, Garrett Fitzgerald, all the Catholic and Protestant political parties of the two Irelands were invited to attend a New Ireland Forum to try and arrive at a solution to the conflict. Sinn Féin, was not admitted since, or so it was claimed, “The Forum is only open to those who decisively reject violence”. Meanwhile the Protestant and loyalist unionist parties in Ulster also refused to take part, maintaining that the Dublin government shouldn’t be meddling in the matters of a British territory.

Without the war’s two main protagonists the Forum continued to sit for a year and eventually formulated some proposals for “possible” solutions. The end objective which was put forward was, of course, a united and independent Ireland composed of the thirty two counties; but two “transitory” solutions were also put forward: a federal State; and a ‘joint authority’ for the six counties of Ulster.

Sinn Féin, the IRA and the Irish National Liberation Army rejected these solutions, and so did the loyalists and hardline Protestants. As for the Thatcher Government its response became known as ‘Out, out, out’: a unitary State was out; a federal Ireland was out; and joint authority was out.

This just exasperated the situation and served to reinforce the military campaign of the IRA, receiving sustenance, it would seem, from Irish supporters in America. Thus we arrive at the IRA bomb which demolished the Grand Hotel in Brighton, forty five kilos of gelignite, intended for Thatcher but from which she made a lucky escape.

The Provisional IRA/Sinn Féin is formed from a union between the militants of the North and the traditionalists of the South and its objectives are as follows: a commitment on the part of the British to withdraw from Ireland once and for all; official recognition by the British people of the right of the Irish people to decide their own future; amnesty for all political prisoners held by the British. Sinn Féin doesn't call on the population in the six counties to unite with the State of the 26 counties, but wants to substitute the two States with a "democratic socialist republic" of the thirty two counties!

## 17. From the Bullet to the Ballot

Towards the end of January 1989 a conference of Sinn Féin, the political wing of the Irish Republican Movement, was held in Dublin to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the calling of the Irish Parliament (Dail) in 1919. The importance of this meeting lay not in its condemnation of imperialism and foreign capitalists (as if the local capitalists were not just as bad) but in the turn inaugurated on the strategic plane. It signaled a hegemony of the political wing of the Provisions over its military wing, and the debates are very similar to the ones which tore the IRA apart a couple of decades ago.

The last twenty or so years has seen the direct involvement of British military and intelligence forces in the six counties of Ulster. It was the Labour Government of Harold Wilson, aware of the inadequacies of the Protestant ruling elite in containing the unrest among the Catholic population over civil rights, which sent in troops in 1969, under the pretext of protecting Catholics from the brutality of the notorious 'B' Specials.

But who was there to protect the Catholics from the British Army? In fact the role of the British Army became evident massacre of Bloody Sunday in 1972, when it opened fire on a demonstration. Since then a reorganised Provisional IRA has stepped up its campaigns against the British Government, not only in Northern Ireland but also in Britain, Germany, Holland – anywhere they felt they could strike back.

Northern Ireland had become more and more an armed camp riddled with informers, surveillance operations, divided areas partitioned by massive fences, with almost every conceivable counter-insurgency device being used. England, the inventor of concentration camps during the Boer war in South Africa, has little to learn from anybody else about such techniques. It is in Ulster where all the latest theories on anti-guerrilla operations are tested, a massive training ground for the Army.

Unable to successfully strike against the occupying forces, the IRA targeted civilian support industries, everything from builders to removal firms which serviced the Army units, as well as off-duty police and part-time soldiers. The bombing campaigns therefore impacted more on civilians than the military, which were harder to get at. The deaths piling up on both sides eventually led to the elimination of the hard-core elements of the IRA active service units, which only managed to offset its losses by provoking the invader even more, thereby fuelling and keeping the hatred alive.

The furor following the shooting of three IRA members in Gibraltar last year highlights the problems for both sides. The IRA wanted a publicity-grabbing event which gave the war an international resonance whilst the British Government wanted to demonstrate its determination to stop the terrorists, who were gunned down in the streets of a British colony in front of witnesses. The methods which had been used in the rural areas of Ulster were now shown in all their brutality before the wider general public. The State will stop at nothing to counter any attempt to challenge it, and using its long experience derived in all parts of the world, it will attempt to wipe out any attempt at armed resistance.

The campaigns in Ulster involving "softer" targets, that is, civilians and non-active security forces, and the killings of the members of Catholic and Protestant members of para-military groups (often described as "sectarian killings") raises the question of why those particular people were killed. Corruption, bribes, protection rackets, sectarian "God Fathers" on the Protestant and Catholic side, makes it always open to question why such-and-such an individual was killed and in whose interests.

It was against this background that the statements of Sinn Fein were important. Gerry Adams, the President of Sinn Fein, has criticized recent operations which had led to an "exceptional and regrettable level of civilian casualties" and warned that if they continued it would lead to an undermining of morale amongst republican supporters.

The vice-President, Martin McGuinness, announced that the IRA had disbanded a unit in Fermanagh “because the killing of civilians is wrong”. A few days before, the Provisional Republican paper *An Phoblacht* printed an interview with a spokesperson of the IRA’s leadership, who confirmed a unit had been disbanded and disarmed for killing a former policeman.

In commenting on the unfortunate consequences of civilian deaths, the IRA was making it clear that it would be subordinating itself to the political requirements of the movement. “As I said, we realize that we have a responsibility to correct the problems and refine our activities so that they do not hinder but complement efforts to build a broad-based front against imperialism.... Having said all that, it is our intention to encourage the climate for radical politics in Ireland and to assist that process”.

The strategy of the Provisionals was for many years presented as that of a rifle in one hand and a ballot box in the other, symbolizing of its intention to fight on both fronts at the same time. It is now clear that the political side will have preference from now on. The political strategy was expressed by Adams as a recognition that they could not win by themselves. He further declared that “elitism and dogma is finished” – in other words, everything is up for grabs.

Overtures had already been made to the Protestant side and assurances given that their interests would be taken into account. The only way Ireland could be reunited was with their cooperation.

Such an assurance was certainly not given at the last moment, but was part of a change in strategy that had been underway for some time. At a Public Meeting in Dublin on January 19<sup>th</sup>, a declaration of struggle for “Irish Unity” was reaffirmed not only by Sinn Féin, but also by the hopelessly opportunist Communist Party of Ireland. A leader of the CPI stated that the achievement of a democratic program “clearly represented the radical mood of the times”.

A statement at this meeting was read out on behalf of Adams which condemned the Fianna Fail Government:

Their self-seeking opportunism, their reactionary economic and social policies, their moral conservatism and their open and active support for British imperialism are in stark contrast to the policies and programme adopted by the First Dail (...). A million and a quarter people have emigrated from the 26-county State in the last 70 years. One million of the population lives below the poverty line. Unemployment continues to rise and the weak, sick and poor are increasingly victims of the Government.

The conclusion that Adams arrives at is that the Irish nation, in order to overcome all the problems that the Eire government cannot tackle, must have sovereignty over its own economy.

Whilst not wanting to prevent anyone from criticising the ruling class in Eire and its actions, we cannot let the illusion of national control of the economy pass without comment. One fundamental aspect of capitalism is that it is invariably subject to crises, and that there are no remedies that do not involve depressions, wars, poverty, unemployment and immense suffering for the working class.

If large nations, including the United States, cannot avoid the ever-deepening crisis of capitalism, does Adams really think that a unified Ireland could do better? In or out of the Common Market, Ireland (divided or united) will continue to be a prisoner of the uncontrollable crisis of the world market. The only way the problems of the poor and oppressed in the 26 Counties will be brought to an end, there and everywhere else, is to abolish the capitalist property owning economy, that is, to establish Communism.

## 18. Conclusion

The State of Ireland would gradually detach itself from England and in 1937 it adopted a new constitution, and changed its name to Eire. During the Second World War it remained neutral, and in 1949 it left the Commonwealth.

The conflict however remained unresolved in Ulster, with the Irish Republic continuing to press its claim on the six counties.

Ireland is today a very youthful country (more than 50% of its population is under 25) but there are few job prospects. This contradiction was solved in the past by means of direct emigration to the English speaking countries, but nowadays this way out is largely blocked because Britain, given its circumstances, no longer has the job open-

ings it once had, while the United States, Canada and other countries are putting up ever stricter barriers to immigration. What is more, the irruption onto the social scene of masses of young people with serious economic problems could seriously undermine the ideological hold of the Church; which might create not insignificant tensions and induce them to instinctively take to the straight and narrow path that leads to radical social transformation.

The Republic of Ireland today, with an area of 70,273 km<sup>2</sup>, has a population of around 3 million inhabitants and an average density of 43 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>; 2.7 million are Catholic, most of the rest are Protestant. Ulster, with an area of 14,130 km<sup>2</sup> has around 1,500,000 inhabitants and an average density of 109 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. (The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has a density of 236 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>); little more than a third are Catholics, the rest are Anglicans and Presbyterians.

This shows that whereas the Republic is mainly agrarian and Catholic, the more highly developed North is mainly industrialized and Protestant. And here we have the reason why British imperialism has always been reluctant to make any concessions as regards Northern Ireland.

Today Sinn Féin feels the situation has become more fluid. If at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the military and economic power of England appeared indestructible, things have changed a lot since then. The British economy is in serious decline – indeed for the first time in centuries it has become a country that is predominantly an importer, rather than exporter, of industrial goods! Who knows, maybe in the not distant future the six counties in Ulster will become such a burden that it might suit England to simply get rid of it. But if such a case arose, under what conditions would it occur? What would it need to bring the Protestants in the North around to the idea? To what extent would the economy of Eire have to be transformed to be able to include the industrial zone of the North?

It is no longer in the realm of science fiction to consider the possibility that a federation with the old enemy could be created, just as Marx proposed more than a hundred years ago! Naturally the Common Market would dilute the phenomenon to a certain extent, but an economic federation is still a federation. Poor Mr Griffith!

Maybe those who still dream of a unified Ireland, and who think it is the answer to all of the problems of those living on the island, should meditate on the possibility that the miracle will happen; that Gerry Adams and the other members of Provisional Sinn Féin will manage to convince the Protestants and London to reach an agreement. This would involve conditions that would be difficult to stomach, such as a secular State: the separation of the Catholic Church from the State would cause a lot more discontent among the bourgeoisie than the union with Great Britain, and in such a case one can imagine the measures that a Unified State of Ireland would have to take to maintain the peace. How many ex-comrades in arms would be hunted down, oppressed, imprisoned or killed this time? Who would be the new Michael Collins (deserving of the nickname of the Irish Pilsudski) who would take the war everywhere in the name of order?

However the prospects for a united Ireland are different to what they were two centuries ago. Today we have a crumbling social system which is dumping all of its problems onto the poor and exploited. There is no longer any room to create free and independent States; the world now consists of blocks of States in fierce competition among themselves for a share of the world market. Within this framework, what would the role of a united Ireland be, even if it was provided with an industrial base? Which weaker country would it choose to oppress or invade? In the past Eire, insofar as it was a small agrarian country, was able to build a façade of neutrality, but it's a different case entirely when you have to fight it out in an ever shrinking world market.

And if there was a war, which countries would Ireland side with? Over the last fifty years, the country's neutrality has been guaranteed in practice by England and the United States, but the question arises whether a unified Ireland would allow its defence to rest on this foundation. Maybe one of the requirements for unification to be conceded would be joining NATO. So, Mr Adams, it is highly probable that instead of resolving problems unification would aggravate them.

Certainly we do not deny the terrible oppression that exists in Ulster, or that the Catholics, descendants of the Irish race, have been subjected to ferocious, vindictive attacks by the Orangeists, and we are not going to condemn anyone for combating oppression. But if the Irish Catholics are oppressed, Catholic proletarians are doubly oppressed; and proletarian Catholic women thrice oppressed. However, we will continue to underline the falsity of the national objective for the Irish working class.

In Ireland as well, in the absence of the class struggle, with its incapacity to draw the overwhelming majority of the disinherited and oppressed behind the proletariat in its fight for its immediate and historical objectives, we can expect only individual reactions, and a relapse into nationalism.

On the other side of the Irish sea the English working class continues to support the imperialist aspirations of its own bourgeoisie, which in itself involves a renunciation of its own struggle to free itself.

The formation of a united Ireland is not something we aspire today. If it should happen, the proletariat will only find it has a new enemy.

It is therefore to the unification of the relentless fight against the bourgeoisie in both parts of the British Isles that we dedicate our work.

We will conclude with some final remarks on the Irish question.

1. – The Irish question today is set against the backdrop of one bourgeois State, Great Britain, oppressing another equally bourgeois State, the Republic of Ireland. The material premises for our tactic of the double revolution have therefore been historically superseded.

2. – Nevertheless, a communist party in Great Britain should still call upon proletarians there to fight for the defeat of the imperialism of its own bourgeoisie, by including in its program the separation of Ulster from the English State and an end to the perpetual, centuries long siege in the provinces of the north.

3. – The current movement which wants to separate Ulster from Great Britain and reincorporate it into the Irish nation no longer has any possibility of success given the consolidation of the capitalist State in the Republic of Ireland and the acceptance of the regional compromise on the part of its ruling classes; who now consider the unleashing of an anti-English and anti-Protestant civil war as a threat to domestic social peace and as something that must be avoided.

4. – The Catholic parties and their armed movements, who have harvested the discontent of the poor classes of the North and the South with a national democratic program, have no further reason for existence except as the expression of the reactionary interests of the lowest strata of the Catholic bourgeoisie and as a national and ecclesiastical way of containing the energies of the militant proletariat.

5. – The proletariat must organize as an autonomous class, expressing this through the formation of its international communist party and through its own economic class organizations. It must reconstitute the first vanguard groups, as they appear in the various national contexts, into one global structure, ready for the future struggles that will be unleashed by the universal crisis of capitalism.

6. – Were the communist party present on the island with a following, it would call on proletarians to abandon the present inter-class organizations and set up armed and disciplined structures for the defense of their class against the English regular and irregular forces, acting for themselves and de facto proxies for the cowardly republican Catholic bourgeoisie.

The English proletariat missed its appointment with revolution in the first post war period, both because it lacked a consistent revolutionary party and due to the opportunist and reformist trade union leaders. As a result Irish proletarians were unable to count on support from the proletariat of the ruling nation in their bid to win their class independence.

Millions of Irish proletarians live in England, the United States, Canada, Australia, etc., and they could be the source of a future proletarian internationalism if they don't allow themselves to get dragged into the same old reformism and opportunism.

The most rotten of the drugs the proletariat is exposed to, more pernicious than morphine or cocaine, are the various religions. In every clime they serve as a cover for imperialist and bourgeois exploitation. In Ireland there is Catholicism and Protestantism; in Poland, Italy and all of the Latin countries the Catholic priest holds sway; in Lebanon and the Middle East there are the Jews, the Arabs of various sects, the Christians, etc.; in the Persian Gulf, the Shiites and Sunnis; in India – well let's not even go there – while from America "new" drugs are exported, by the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and so on and so forth.

What the proletariat needs to do is organize itself into an autonomous class, expressing this by means of its international revolutionary *communist* party; which prepares a solid theoretical and programmatic foundation, and

which organizes the first vanguard units in the various national spheres by bringing them into conformity with a centralized global organization, prepared for the struggles ahead that are bound to arise within this dying society.

For that to happen young proletarians, whether or not they happen to belong to one of the many minorities (Istrians, Corsicans, South Tyroleans, etc.), will need to walk away from their individualist, anarchistic conformism, walk away from the opportunism of the myriad small sectarian groups, and make their contribution to the realization of the true *formal* communist party, precursor to the great international *Human Nation!*



## The Economic and Social Structure of Russia Today: Part One – Struggle for power in the two revolutions

“Struttura economica e sociale della Russia d'oggi”, in *Il Programma Comunista*, no 10, 1955 to no 4, 1956

(continued from issue no. 46 of *Communist Left*)

### 12 – The Made Up Theory

We have dwelt on the artificial antithesis between two theories, the “old” and the “new”, on the “questions of war, peace and revolution” pleaded in the (official) *History of the Bolshevik Party* published in Russia.

The author of the *new* theory on “revolution in one country” is supposedly Lenin, whereas the *old* theory, typical of the old Marxists, is “simultaneous revolution in all civilized countries”.

We have not said whether this theory is true or false, just that it is a complete *fabrication*, and that no one ever supported it. The old theory coincides with the new. Marx established these points and Lenin defended them. Marxists (excluding those who refer to themselves as such but do not believe in revolution) have *always*

supported the revolutionary attack *even in one country*, as a political strategy, as the struggle to take power.

As for the transformation of the social structure into *socialism*, which using an expression no less theoretically false than the others is called the *construction of socialism*, whereas it should be called the *destruction of capitalism*, it has always been considered both feasible and possible *even in one country*. But under two conditions, set out in crystalclear fashion by Marx and Lenin. Firstly: that the capitalism in the country concerned is fully developed; secondly: that the victorious proletariat in that country is cognisant of its role: as the bringer not of peace, but of war!

There is no other theory *of war, peace and revolution*. The *new* theories, with one cooked up for every generation, are all of them, Muscovite “History” included, *counter-revolutionary*.

To demonstrate this we will quote again the passage which invents “the old theory”, and invents the invention of Lenin, who is systematically downgraded from died-in-the-wool Marxist militant to idol for altars and monuments.

“This theory [of Lenin, who, as we reported, according to the text, laid the basis for it in 1905 in his work “Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution”, thereby threading one more pearl onto its string of historical and theoretical gaffes: how do you found a new theory for an “out of date” problem which refers to Germany in young Marx’s time, and France in Babeuf’s time? According to these counterfeiters, Lenin supposedly expatiated on how to construct *socialism* by means of the *democratic* revolution, as though he were the worst ultrarightist] this theory differed radically from the idea that was widespread among the Marxists of the *preimperialist* period when Marxists maintained that socialism wouldn’t be able to achieve victory in just one country, but would triumph contemporaneously in all civilized countries”.

We won’t repeat here our critique of the definition *civilized*. If the adjective *civilized* had been replaced with *capitalist* (referring to the economic structure) or *democratic* (referring to the political structure), the expression might be less devoid of intrinsic meaning but would be equally misleading. These “Marxists” simply never existed. Marx was undoubtedly a Marxist of the preimperialist period. And so? Either Marx is stupid and Marxism is stupid, or within Marxism, a theory born in 1840, the laws of the imperialist stage of capitalism (n.b. *stage* not *separate period*) are already set out. Lenin in fact didn’t produce them as a *secretion* of his brain, but by applying the doctrines found in *Capital*. Just read it and you’ll see. Referring to the events of the imperialist stage he gave a further demonstration of our theory of capital, and showed again that it excludes peace between states and classes, and that, just as at its first dawning, the closing of the capitalist cycle will be dominated by the flames of social catastrophe and a general explosion of violence.

Tell us their names! That kind of Marxist never existed. We will go further: nor that kind of generic socialist either!

## 13 – Countries and Revolutions

Ever since it appeared in its utopian-idealistic form socialism wasn't thought of as international; or even national! It was thought of as socialism in one *city*, in Plato's *Republic*, in Campanella's *City of the Sun*, in Thomas Moore's *Utopia* (literally "no place"), in Cabet's *Icaria*, in the country of the absolute sovereign of the great French utopians, enlightened among his subjects, in Owen's cooperative factory, in Fourier's Phalanstery, or if you like, in Benedict's mediaeval monastery. So was it really Lenin, you bunch of idiots, who put out this stuff as a "new theory"?

This first naïve but noble socialism is considered by its builders – and they actually did build it – firstly as an act of opinion, then of will, transmitted to the people by the wise leader, or even by the great king. Clearly no one would subordinate it to a coincidence of these waves of enlightenment in the minds of people in various countries at the same time; even when socialism was utopian it was envisaged within set frontiers, and in the most evocative of these social "projects" the existence of the military strata, the standing army and the defence of the chosen country against the envious enemy, is considered permanent; a concept due more to inertia than being actively maintained, although some ingenious minds, such as the mighty Saint-Simon, managed to get beyond it.

The transition from Utopianism to Marxism occurred not because the notion of socialism was refined and subjected to a "rethink", but due to the appearance of capitalist production. Marxism founded its doctrine and programme mainly on the work it did on England. This *one* country, and it really was just *one country*, provided a framework for proving that a socialist economy, at a certain stage of commercial-industrial development is not only possible and feasible, but an implacable necessity; the condition for it no longer technical-productive and economic, but just historical, that is, that the ancient bonds, relations of production, and property are shattered and swept away and overcome by uncontrollable productive *forces*, not by brilliant advances in the realm of *opinion*.

When therefore the theses on the capitalist economy and the more general ones on historical materialism arose, they arose thanks to the dynamics of English society in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The socialist programme arises not as a millennial prophecy but as a possibility based on already acquired conditions, but only in ONE country: in the strict sense England, without Ireland, where the bourgeois agrarian revolution was still expected, and minus most of Scotland.

At the dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century France is fully bourgeois but not completely capitalist: France is not an island, but the engine of Europe; its historical task is to extend the flame of the Great Revolution to the west. Only between 1831 and 1848 does the proletariat begin its epic struggle, which is still not constructing socialism, but spreading the revolution eastwards: let us consider the audacious hypothesis that the Paris workers had won in 1848; far more pressing than the task of destroying capitalism at home would have been a revolutionary war against reaction in Europe: still in a broad sense we have the historical problem of the *Two Tactics*, and not yet the question of whether a socialist France was possible. But for historical reasons, which has nothing in common with the same necessity of waiting for there to be the economic conditions for socialism across the Rhine, across the Danube or across the Alps.

## 14 – Back to the Roots: The *Manifesto*!

By 1848 however, in the year communism comes of age, we have what they derisively call "the communist Bible": the *Manifesto* of Marx and Engels. The question of the proletarian revolution is already fully and insuperably posed: not only is there no trace of simultaneous revolution in all countries, the idea attributed to the oldtime Marxists, but the socialist revolution in one country is clearly proposed. And not only is it proposed and allowed, it features throughout the whole of the powerful unitary construction, and nor could it be otherwise.

In 1893, in his final years, Frederick Engels dictated the preface to the Italian edition of the *Manifesto*. Well then, in this short preface there are some historical passages, like the one stating: The *Manifesto* does full justice to the revolutionary part played by capitalism in the past. *The first capitalist nation was Italy*. And Engels dates the transition from the feudal Middle Ages to the modern era to 1300, to Dante's time.

However, he returns to the situation in 1848, and in recording how from Milan to Berlin and to Paris it was the workers who were first on to the barricades, and in highlighting this trait of European "simultaneity" in the revolution as a war involving all classes, he adds the significant words: "only the Paris workers, in overthrowing the gov-

ernment, had the very definite intention of overthrowing the bourgeois regime. But conscious though they were of the fatal antagonism existing between their own class and the bourgeoisie, still, neither the economic progress of the country nor the intellectual development of the French workers had as yet reached the stage which would have made a social reconstruction possible. In the final analysis, therefore, the fruits of the revolution were reaped by the capitalist class”.

From this we can draw various corollaries – apart from usual one we touched on earlier, of the colossal foolishness of engaging in an antimediaeval struggle in Italy in 1945, or indeed ... in the 1955 Sicilian elections. Six and a half centuries of horrendous errors. The first bourgeois metropolis, more than anywhere else was in Sicily: the Palermo of Frederick II.

In 1848 Engels thinks the socialist transformation of the economy is not possible in ultrabourgeois France! He, who had traced out the sure prospect of it from his youthful studies of the English economy!

Therefore the damn *construction* of socialism was viewed by the oldest Marxists as something that occurred in one country, and no need for Lenin to discover it in 1905 or 1914.

In addition: was the struggle of the Paris workers pointless then? Never! Engels says that the capitalist exploitation of the revolution led to the national formation of Italy and Germany, and he mentions that Marx used to say that the men who suppressed the Revolution of 1848 were its testamentary executors.

Therefore the notion of the proletariat fighting for the capitalist revolution, which *has to* fight for it, and which should do so if in a position to choose, is also not something Lenin invented in 1905.

What history reserved for the French workers in 1848, it reserved for the Russian workers in 1917: Lenin saw it and theorized it decidedly in advance; the facts of history highlight it today with dazzling clarity: fighting with a developed class organization, and socialist party consciousness, in a proletarian revolution, whereas the outcome of the revolution is the installation of capitalism.

However we will call once again on the content of the *Manifesto* in this regard, well known though it is.

## 15 - Harmonic Structures

Need we recall the “systematics” of our historical codex? The first figure to appear on the scene is the bourgeoisie, about whom their worst enemy writes an incomparable “chanson de geste”. The bourgeoisie scours and conquers the world, shakes secular institutions to their very foundations, unleashes huge forces in the realm of human activity, and in diabolical fashion summons up its gravediggers, the proletariat.

The classic enunciations on the “organization of the proletariat into a class, and consequently into a political party” apply to the national framework of “one country”. There is in fact the famous observation: the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle, though in form rather than substance. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie.

This famous thesis is then further emphasised in the no less wellknown sentences which follow the passage about workers having no country: “Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy [interpreted by social traitors as universal suffrage!], must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself as the nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word”.

These words, frequently discussed and greatly distorted at the outbreak of the first world conflagration, succinctly sum up the Marxist theory of power and the state. The bourgeoisie had the goal of constructing the national state – the proletariat has as its aim neither the permanent construction of the state nor of the nation, but, since it has to grasp the weapon of power, and of the state, precisely when it has only gained the collapse (“at first”) of its own bourgeoisie and its own bourgeois state, it builds its own state, its own dictatorship, and constitutes itself as the nation, i.e., it defends its territory against external bourgeoisies, while waiting for them, in their turn, to be overthrown by the proletariat as well.

All this, therefore, is already contained in those first tabulations of how the revolution would come about, working out the hypothesis of the victory in one country as the *rule* not the *exception*, and the theory of it existed from the dawn of Marxism.

How otherwise to read what for a century philistines have been reading back to front, that is the final programmatic part: “The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class; and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible”?

This though is just the beginning of “entirely revolutionizing the means of production” which requires “despotic inroads” and “economic measures that are insufficient and untenable”. Old stuff, for sure. But that is precisely what we need to demonstrate: that the theory of the taking of political power and the transformation of society is not a new theory but an old one. How else could the text have continued than: “These measures will of course be different in different countries”?

And would not the Manifesto add a list of them for the most advanced countries, relevant to the 1848 period?

And how else could the final chapter trace out the prospects, nation by nation, of the revolutionary conquest of power if not by basing them on the concept, which drives everything, that the revolution could begin in any country where the development of production had formed a modern proletariat, and even in Germany before England and France because Germany was on the eve of a bourgeois revolution “with a much more developed proletariat, than that of England in the seventeenth, and of France in the eighteenth century”?

## 16 – From 1848 to the Commune

After the disastrous defeat in 1848, the proletarian conquest of power in the European countries became a more distant prospect. In the long period that follows bourgeois nations and States are established in a series of wars; the proletarian parties become less important, and Marxist policy focuses on the wars that lead to the defeat of the reservoirs of reaction, namely Austria, Germany, France and above all and in every phase Russia, something on which we have elaborated at great length.

The new arrangement arises out of the magnificent episode of the Paris Commune. This time the proletariat not only undertakes to overthrow the national bourgeoisie, it actually does so, though faced with two enemies, the victorious Prussian army, and the armed forces of the recently republicanised bourgeois State.

Here the memorable Marxist analysis in the classic works stands out: You wanted to understand the proletarian revolution, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the socialist state? Here’s the first historic example: the Commune!

In taking the side of the Commune, did Marx, or any one of the Marxists at the time, ever dream of condemning it because the proletariat in the other capitals of Europe, and especially in Berlin, didn’t take action, as happened in 1848, since clearly the German army would intervene against the socialist State in Paris if the bourgeois forces of France were not enough?

Was there not already a theory of the revolution in one country; a theory, moreover, which was unique, and which had arisen at the height of the *preimperialist* phase of capitalism? And did not this theory describe the first steps of the social transformation, raised in its classical form by Marx, and by Lenin, following in his exact footsteps, in his wellknown decrees and edicts?

What Marxist, even from less ardent tendencies, ever disavowed the Commune, or suggested it lay down its arms, on the grounds that to have a revolution in France you needed to have one in the whole of Europe?

There were two different positions in the First International at the time, the Marxist and the Bakuninist ones; two “versions” of the Commune, and both unreservedly praised the revolt, its brief lifecycle, and its glorious fall, and the disgrace and shame of the “civilized” regimes.

Neither of these currents can be linked to the *made up* theory of the contemporaneous revolution in Europe.

The libertarian view is that the Paris Commune wasn’t a political *State*, but was responding to the myth of the local commune which, within its narrow compass, liberates itself by rebelling against state tyranny and social oppression by establishing a selfsufficient collective of free and equal individuals. It is on record why we Marxists consider this, at best, a dream; but we mention it here in order to rule out the idea that this wing of the socialists (socialist anarchists they used to be called) ever believed in the notion of simultaneous revolution: far from it in fact; for them revolution need not even take place on a national scale, but could be on a city, municipal or communal level.

A few years later they would fight to establish anarchy in Spain and in some of its provinces, tortuously asserting that they had neither armies nor States, before succumbing to the inexorable critical demolition of Marx and Engels.

But whatever mistakes they made, not even there can we find supporters of the idea: no to revolution, unless in ten countries at once.

We have then the orthodox, Marxist, version of the Commune, the version which pours scorn on the manipulators of fables and halftruths, and deserving to be called *Leninist*.

The Commune isn't just the twicesieged municipality of Paris; it is France, the French proletariat finally formed into a class, which on the banks of the Seine raised the banner of its constitution as the ruling class; which erected the revolutionary State of the French nation. Not a nation in the bourgeois sense and against the German nation, but in the sense that with its cannons it tried to cut off the traitor Thiers from his seat of control over the whole of France; and shedding, in pursuit of this objective, the freely given blood of red Paris, even knowing – as the indigent executioner advanced – that the workers in Berlin, Vienna and Milan hadn't picked up their rifles.

It is the theory which in its blazing splendour becomes white hot history; and after the final volleys against the wall of the Père Lachaise had fallen silent, it would become the patrimony and content of the world revolution, its victorious conquest, and it will continue to exist in the general consciousness of Marxists that, one day, from a first victorious national Commune, there will arise the progressive, unstoppable incineration of the world of capital.

## 17 – Social-democratic Revisionism

It was in 1900 that Lenin's hated enemies came up with a "new theory" that claimed to be Marxist, a modern version of Marxism; and with this they prepared for the catastrophe in 1914, which according to the fraudsters in Moscow induced Lenin to overhaul all of Marxism's previous statements on War, Peace and Revolution.

While in the workers' camp Bernstein and all the others are elaborating a gradualist reformism – itself not new, but rather a horrible concoction of the heresies which Marx fought against his entire life, of the Prussian state socialists, of Lassalleism, of French social radicalism, of English trade unionism, and so on – the bourgeoisie is meanwhile elaborating its theory of war and peace, relying on the myth of disarmament, arbitration and universal peace. This old stuff too had already been battered by Marx's hammer blows, when following 1848 he took on the bourgeois radical left, Mazzini, Blanc, Garibaldi, Kossuth and such like, and well we know with what furious indignation he saw them off.

Legalitarian revisionism dismantles the Marxist vision one bit at a time. First of all it throws out insurrection, violence, arms, and the dictatorship. For a brief period a denicotinized "class struggle" is allowed, although it is forced to take place within the bounds of state legality, through winning elections and seats in the political assemblies. The model for this is German social democracy, a monstrous electioneering machine, not above making reprehensible use of one of Frederick Engels' final utterances: that its distance from power could be calculated from the statistics on the increasing number of votes it obtained. But Engels also correctly observed that once a certain line was crossed, capitalism would resort to terror!

We don't need to repeat here our critique of this tendency and the prospect it held out: majority in parliament, legal socialist government, a set of progressive laws that attenuate the exploitation of the proletariat and bourgeois profits until a gradual transition from capitalism to socialism is set in motion: nor need we recall how bit by bit, in France, Belgium and elsewhere, the class struggle itself, on paper, was bartered away by accepting the entry of the workers' parties into bourgeois cabinets as minorities; thereby founding what would be known as ministerialism, possibilism or Millerandism. The Second International condemned it – in peace time – but shamefully threw open its doors to it when war broke out it, unleashing the anathema of Lenin. He couldn't know that the Third International would also eventually allow and extol such participation not only in war but in peace, the only justification being that it might suit some Nenni or other.

But whatever we may think of this august gathering, can we find amongst them any of these mysterious preimperialist Marxists, who supposedly wanted to conquer power in all of the civilized countries on the same day?

Evidently if the taking of power no longer derives from armed action, action in the streets and the collapse of the very foundations of capitalism, but happens as a result of an increase in the number of "socialist" votes cast instead,

it matters not at all whether the glorious day of a socialist *premier* being elected to power happens everywhere on the same day or not. In fact you can be sure that it will happen in an extremely unsynchronised way and nothing will prevent dozens of regimes, whether they be 100% capitalist, 10% socialist, or 20% so, etc, from living alongside one another, smiling at one another, arbitrating with one another, disarming one other, awarding Nobel prizes to one another, giving Picassos to one another, across the borders.

Not even in this camp then do we find anyone who is against the *building* of socialism in one country. For if it is to be built bit by bit, by means of laws passed by the bourgeois state, and merely by changing the party that heads it, the requirement of European simultaneity is no longer something anyone need aspire to; and nor did anyone for that matter, ever.

## 18 – Only the Opportunism is New

It was not Lenin, but the renegades castigated by him who used the turning point of 1914 to devise a *new* theory of war, peace and revolution. And they would leave barely a single word of the *old* theory, of Marx's unique theory.

Marx said the proletarian revolution is accompanied by civil war between classes and the overthrow of the State – they denied it.

Marx said that war between states would only come to an end with the fall of capitalism and never by means of a general accord between the bourgeois states. They denied it.

Marx said that wars between capitalist and precapitalist States could contain matters of interest to the proletariat and it should participate in them, but that after 1871, within the sector of western capitalism, every army is ranged against the proletariat and this is opposed to all European and intercapitalist wars. They denied both the first and second idea and said that in any war between two States the proletariat must support its “own side”, however unlikely it is it will be defeated. They were pacifists as long as there was no war, prowar as soon as it broke out.

Lenin restored the processes of peace, war and revolution to the important position they had always held within Marxism. And, as had always been stipulated by Marxism, he called for defeatism and proletarian rebellion everywhere, unilaterally and in one country too, on the battlefield and on the historical course opened by the civil war of 1871.

He didn't generate a new theory, but wanted to throttle the new theory of social-patriotism.

When from this historic and powerful work of restoration of the not old, but unique, doctrine, they wanted to make arise, as something original, the obvious strategy of attacking the bourgeoisie also unilaterally on the national terrain, as enunciated in the *Manifesto* and in all Marxist texts, amongst which those on the Commune, for Lenin sacrosanct and fundamental, as indeed are hundreds of his own writings; and when this not new thesis was translated into the notion that without a revolution in Europe you could have a social transformation in a communist sense in Russia, the allseeing midwives of the Kremlin attempted an outright substitution of the infant, attributing to the person they considered the Little Father of the revolution in Russia an obnoxious bastard; they didn't turn him into the destroyer of an outdated theory of nonexistent old Marxists, but the destroyer of a theory which he himself, on the backbone of the general system, had promoted in a truly ingenious way, the essence of which was: in a revolution that doesn't spread beyond Russia, the proletariat will have to take power, but in order to accomplish the democratic revolution and favour thereby the advent and development of the capitalist system of production, which can only be overthrown when there has been a victorious proletarian revolution in other European countries.

A theory which Lenin constructed with truly astounding thoroughness, whose truth he would see confirmed; which he would never repudiate or retract.

And it is pointless to insult him by insinuating, with outright falsifications, that he did so, given that history has shown he was right about the subsequent phases, which occurred in the order he said they would.

## 19 – The Socialist Transformation

The question of the transition of Russia from the republic controlled not by the bourgeoisie but by the victorious proletariat, with a social programme of nationalization of the land and state control of industry, to a socialist economy, is not in its right place if posed at the moment the much earlier problem of liquidating the war arose. When the

Second International collapsed the prospect for Russia (even before Lenin learned of the betrayal of various socialists there) appeared no more favourable than it had been before the war. Up until 1914 Lenin was relying on the Marxist workers' movement in the more developed countries to shorten the course of capitalism in Russia, which by now, it was believed, could not be avoided. But when the mighty German social democracy succumbed to opportunism, along with the other big parties in the industrial countries, it became increasingly unlikely that an anti-Tsarist democratic revolution in Russia would be followed by a proletarian revolution in the European countries, which would have rendered the socialist transformation of Russia a less distant prospect.

At this key turning point in 1914 we saw how Lenin recapitulated the programme in the *Seven Theses*.

In Russia, work intently for the country's defeat, the collapse of its army and its dynasty. The programme that follows remains the same: do not govern with the bourgeois and pettybourgeois parties, but run the republic with the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasants. Socially such a republic will nationalize the land, bring in the eight hour working day, set up a state bank and put into effect other measures achievable within the confines of capitalism.

In Europe: struggle to eliminate the opportunists, organization of a new proletarian International, new groups and parties to lead the defeatist struggle against the war. Wherever possible, the attempt should be made to take power under the rallyingcry of the proletarian dictatorship of the communist party.

Only after the war had brought about at least a partial collapse of bourgeois power in Europe would it be possible to address the problem of the socialist transformation of Europe and its support for economic and technical evolution in Russia.

Thus the question of how to make Russia alone socialist wasn't posed at the moment official history assumes it was by Lenin and posed for the first time and for the first time resolved in a positive outcome: how to build socialism in a Russia emerging from feudalism and surrounded by capitalist countries.

Similar shifts in Lenin's thinking will require an explanation later on, and *explain them we will*, namely: at the moment Tsarism fell; on his arrival back in Russia; in the struggle for all power to the one Bolshevik Party; in the period after the conquest of power, to that of the first economic measures and the fundamental shift represented by the New Economic Policy (NEP), this as well nothing "new", to the extent it was never referred to as such by Lenin.

The very fact of having invented this conversion of Lenin outside of historical time and its appropriate context, of having sneakily brought it forward, demonstrates the false position which underpins the entire policy of the Russian State, after the death of Lenin and the well known events enucleated from the situation.

## 20 – Power and Economy

As this question of the socialist transformation in relation to a conquest of power in a noncapitalist country has to be posed in general terms, we need to explain it better in order to avoid any serious misunderstandings, and, as always, we need to pay attention to the distinction between the economic and political aspects of the transition from one mode of production to another.

Our resolute defence of the thesis that we never expected to see in Russia a *working* socialist economy, production and distribution, given its social structure and its feeble economy after the war, may shock some readers who might see in it echos of the opportunist position which for years on end hurled slanderous accusations against the Bolsheviks.

According to Marxism the transformation of the economy of a country into a socialist one cannot get properly underway unless its predominant features are largescale industrialisation, big business capitalism, a generalized market economy, and the commercialization of all of its land and products. When these conditions are met, the transformation is not gradual and spontaneous, but, as stated by Marx, Lenin and the revolutionary left, it will not happen without the political revolution, in other words, the violent overthrow of the capitalist state and the founding of the new state of the proletariat, with the Marxist Party clearly at the head of it.

To guarantee the socialist transformation, triggering this political struggle and conquering power is therefore not enough.

However, just as it would be wrong to say that by means of a simple political coup, a putsch of the Blanqui type, we can introduce full socialism in New Guinea, it would likewise be wrong to exclude those situations where we should take power even in the full knowledge on that basis alone the socialist transformation will not take place.

Therefore, those who said: “Bolsheviks! Without the revolution in Europe you will not build socialism” were not wrong. But that wasn’t what the philistines said. They said that as the communists were unable to guarantee the socialist transformation, they should *not* take power, even if – as history would bear out – they had the capacity to do so; they should instead delegate power to other classes and parties, or at any rate they should support, and put themselves at the disposal of, a Lvov or Kerensky provisional government.

But the Russian communists did not reply that they wanted – and had to – take power because it was the means to make Russia, even on its own, socialist. At that time they weren’t even dreaming of that. They had, and proclaimed to the world, a different set of historical reasons, far more wideranging than the problems of the future Russian economy. It wasn’t a race to administer Russia as if it were a *big farm* or *manufacturing trust*. It was a race to expel from power and overthrow political and class forces which would undoubtedly have postponed indefinitely the future Russian and global socialist transformation, further destabilised the country’s contingent economy, and exposed Russia to the serious threat of counter-revolution, not in the sense of keeping a Kerensky or a Miliukov in power, but in the sense of abandoning power to the reactionary governments emanating from the imperialist countries in the German or the AngloFrench bloc; or even to the resurgent forces of tsarism, which would have reared its head again in its classic role as policeman of the democratic revolution in Russia, and of the proletarian revolution in the rest of Europe.

The only party which had a clear vision of these developments, which was able to face up to these dangers, and which made the impotence and progressive betrayal of all the other parties abundantly clear was Lenin’s. The communists in all countries applauded it when it took all power into its own hands, invited it to keep a firm hold on it, and did all they could to parry the blows of its thousand and one enemies. They didn’t ask it to build socialism, but they did expect – less so the petty bourgeois exiles – to *be shown* how socialists should *live*.

And the Russians would have been bound to ask the same of the Europeans. It came, preceded by another clear request: overthrow capital where it is fully mature, take power, proclaim the dictatorship as an intrinsic historical task of the proletariat, of it alone; of the Communist Party.

## 21 – Production and Politics

But if no immediate prospect of socialist production is in sight, and you have to grit your teeth and witness, as though it were new, the capitalist form spreading, is not economic determinism contradicted by the fact is that a socialist political power rests on an economy that is not yet socialist? The argument is a specious one. For a start a genuine socialist economy, once it has emerged from capitalist and mercantile forms, has no need to generate powers, socialist or otherwise: on the contrary, it does without them.

Anyone who gets bogged down in this difficulty has entirely failed to understand the great historical polemic on the dictatorship. We would not be telling the anarchists that the State and dictatorial violence will be needed after the overthrow of the bourgeois state, if we were unable to demonstrate that in a far from brief period in the superindustrialised countries themselves, the proletariat will be the governing, politically dominant class, while yet remaining economically in large part an exploited class.

The superstructure of the capitalist mode of production equates with the inertia that exists in the ideology and behaviour of both the capitalists and of those they oppress. It will disappear very slowly, and the revolutionary government has a duty to suppress it.

The precise formula is not that the superstructure of state power differs according to the form of production (absolute monarchy for feudalism, liberal republic for capitalism and so on) but is that established in the pages of the *Manifesto*: the state is an organ for the domination of one class by another.

The following two situations are therefore plausible: capitalist state which guarantees the domination of the bourgeoisie over the workers; and socialist state which having only just started to eliminate the capitalist mode of production, ensures its destruction by being the organ of the domination of the force of the proletariat over the re-



maining exploiters. These situations are followed by a third: no more exploiting or exploited class, socialist mode of production, no more state.

If a mode of production, like the Russian one, is for the most part feudal with capitalism established in a few spots, history has realized a case in which the control and rule of a state held by proletarians alone is dedicated to the complete eradication of the feudal mode and does not yet attack the capitalist one; and it is not possible to say when such a conjunctural period will end, it being determined and influenced by all the diverse productive structures in the various countries of a highly complex zone.

But clearly such a period cannot go on indefinitely, and as a matter of fact a time limit was set on it by both Marx and Lenin: it was the time the *impure* Russian revolution would take to spread to a *pure* European one, which both thought would be shorter.

The component parties in the same international may historically be handling an impure revolution on one side, and a pure (developed socialist) revolution on the other, or just revolutionary action against the bourgeois powers that haven't yet fallen. This relation of forces must reach a point where the equilibrium is broken: and reached it was, tipping in the direction of counter-revolution.

## 22 – Infamy and Philistines

But it is really too much to have to put up with those infinitely hypocritical objections to Russian communism disguised as accusations of violation of Marxism. They shout that the terrorist dictatorship of the Bolsheviks was ferocious and unjust using the theoretical pretext that the latter was unable to uproot all bourgeois relations. But if it had done so, how much louder they would have screamed!

In fact those who were scandalized by the communist dictatorship in Russia were those who were scandalized, with the renegade Kautsky at their head, that we wanted to apply it in Europe, ready for rapid socialist transformation though it was.

In reality the arguments were not about the negative aspects and backwardness of the Russian economy, but about a loathsome subjection to bourgeois ideologies, to limitations of bourgeois origin which the proletariat was supposed to impose on itself. We were told we should wait until capitalism was in full bloom, because then the number of workers would be such that the path of persuasion and of the class idyll would lead to a nonviolent victory. It was therefore in the name not of hastening to reach socialist society, but of the “absolute value” of the democratic principle and bourgeois idealism that it was claimed the Bolsheviks had stopped trampling on the parties which, for example, had more votes than them in the “freely elected” constituent assembly.

Now, the condition on which the Bolsheviks could have kept their Marxist credentials intact, and hung on to power in Russia for much longer – although certainly not for ever – was by continuing to declare, as Lenin had always done without pretending otherwise, that they were still *unable* to build socialism.

And their credentials certainly remained intact on the hundred and one occasions when, in successive waves of genuine revolutionary action, they throttled the openly counter-revolutionary forces and stifled the ignoble caterwauling of the defeatists. Because not only did they prevent an even more unfavourable and counter-revolutionary situation existing today, but they confirmed the teaching that the sermons and mindbending conjurations of bourgeois prejudice won't necessarily be powerful enough to stop the hand of the proletariat once it is up on its feet; and that material power need not be subjected, before its inexorable deployment, to the censorship of its treacherous adversary, which with power in his own hands would not consider giving it up for a single second or give a damn about human life, unless it is his own.

*(to be continued)*

## **From the Archive of the Left: Programme of Action Presented by the Left Minority from the P.C.d'I**

Third (Communist) International

5th Congress, June-July 1924

### 2021 Introduction

The draft “Programme for Party Action” presented by the Italian Left at the Fifth CI Congress in June/July 1924 was unwillingly published in the Communist Party’s daily paper, “L’Unità”, and only on December 30, 1925. The “centrists” in the party leadership had kept it hidden, and would gladly have done without publishing it: no document presented by the Left at the Fifth International Congress had appeared in the party press.

With regard to the text of the document, we must premise that we cannot guarantee the extent to which the form in which it was published (translated from French by the Direction) respected the original in its accuracy. Let us not forget that the comrades of the Left had repeatedly pointed out and complained about the lack of correspondence in the publication of their texts and documents; for example the report of the Como Conference which appeared in “Lo Stato Operaio” was not faithful, and at the 5th CI Congress there was even mention of translations provided by “Italian experts”. Be that as it may, its essence remains unchanged.

Already at the Como conference, the Left had expressed the need for a clear “Programme for Party Action” because the Communist Party, led by comrades of the centrist tendency, no longer had a clear tactical approach.

At the Fifth Congress, four “Action Programmes” were presented for Italy by the various currents within the party. Naturally, the one drawn up by the Italian Left was not approved; a fifth was, resulting from the combination of the others. Thus, by its very origin, not of synthesis but of compromise, the document adopted was anything but an “Action Programme”, leaving the way open to different possibilities, without specifying anything and excluding anything. As opposed to the one presented by the Left, which contained precise and detailed directives.

The elaboration of this programme of ours took place in a particularly critical situation for the revolutionary workers movement, both nationally and internationally.

Fascism had been in power in Italy for more than a year and a half, and had moved on to a vast legal persecution of the Communist Party; the latter’s leadership had moved over to the centrist tendency (Gramsci, Togliatti, etc.); in June 1924, the Matteotti murder had taken place.

In the same month, the Fifth Congress of the International opened in Moscow. Historiography generally presents it as the congress of the “turn to the left”. Indeed, there was a shift, but in the sense that by then the International was swinging in one direction and out of the other: a so-called shift to the left merely heralded a subsequent shift to the right. Hence our longstanding, repeated and unheeded requests to “base organisational centralisation on the clarity and precision of tactical resolutions and on the exact definition of the methods to be applied” (from the Project of theses on tactics presented at the IVth Congress of the CI).

We will not make an in-depth analysis of the Fifth Congress here, but we will mention some of its aspects which do not characterise it as a leftwing turning point. We will overlook the fact that practically all the speeches, both by “right wingers” and “left wingers”, did not fail to attack and distance themselves from the Italian Left, which was certainly not by chance.

What interests us are the imprecise and chaotic tactical directives; it was said what a watchword did not mean, without saying what it did mean. There was talk of workers’ and peasants’ government, of the formation of mass parties and thus of mergers between parties, coopting leaders of other organisations with retention of rank, noyautage within other parties and the formation of communist fractions, sympathiser parties, etc. A whole series of practices that would inevitably lead the Communist International to degeneration. For our part, we denounced the fact that the International was directed with too much elasticity and too little precision in political and tactical matters.

It is no coincidence that at the Como conference we warned that “certain audacities, which until yesterday we could accept because they were the work of a genius like comrade Lenin, we must now reject as dangerous for the communist movement and for the proletariat (...). We think that the International must review its entire tactics: few formulas are needed, but they must be clear, precise and not open to misunderstanding (...) In short, we are asking the Comintern for a precise formulation of its programme, statute and tactics” (Como Conference - Report for the Left Tendency).

In Italy, for example, there was too much insistence on an unfeasible project of fusion with the Socialist Party with the aim of extending the influence of the Communist Party on a wider stratum of the proletariat or even on its majority. All the activity that followed – as well as leading to nothing because the Socialist Party had no intention of joining communism: if it had wanted to, it would have done so in Livorno – paralysed all the practical action of the party at a particularly crucial moment in Italian political life, when the proletariat instinctively turned towards the communist party, recognised as the only consequent opponent of the bourgeois dictatorship, in both democratic and fascist guises.

But there is more. If the merger had unfortunately taken place we would have had not the conquest of the proletariat to communism, but the entry into the party only of the leaders of social democracy. One essential fact seems to have been forgotten by the leadership of the International: the difference between a party and an army. In a party membership is voluntary, as one joins one can leave, there is no forced discipline that can bind the members to the leaders. Proletarians do not join the Communist Party in order to follow the leaders who move from one party to another; they join the Communist Party when and insofar as they recognise it as the only political organisation capable of truly defending their immediate class interests, and which can lead them to revolutionary victory.

In this respect, the position of the Left was clear. “It is well known that the socialist party has a greater number of politically organised than we do. And it is indisputable that without the proletarian forces which are still under the control of the PSI, the victorious action of the proletariat is not possible, and on the other hand the forces which follow the anarchists and the syndicalists, although their value is greatly exaggerated, cannot be neglected. Much remains to be done, therefore, to lead the great mass of the proletariat onto the terrain of the struggle against the bourgeoisie for the overthrow of its power and the realisation of the proletarian dictatorship” (Report of the CC to the 2nd National Congress, Rome 1922).

How then to win over these proletarians? “All bourgeois parties have proletarian members, but we are especially interested in the social-democratic parties and the syndicalist and anarchist currents. In the face of these movements, an incessant criticism of their programmes must be carried out, demonstrating their insufficiency for the effects of proletarian emancipation. This theoretical polemic will be all the more effective the more the communist party can show that the criticism it has long made of these movements in accordance with its own programmatic conceptions is confirmed by proletarian experience. For this reason, in polemics of this nature, the disagreement between methods must not be disguised, even for the part that does not refer solely to the problems of the moment but reflects the further development of the action of the proletariat (...) In order to attract proletarians who belong to other political movements, the Communist Party cannot follow the method of forming within them organised groups and fractions of Communists or Communist sympathisers (...) The harshness of the polemic and struggle against the socialist parties will be a first-rate element in bringing those workers back onto the revolutionary terrain” (Rome Theses 1922).

There was therefore a clear difference between the tactical approach of the Italian Left and that proposed and followed by the International.

But in Italy the communist party, now led by the “centre” fraction, as was amply proved on the occasion of the Matteotti murder, was unable to take a decisive class initiative; it did everything and the opposite of everything, even beyond the limits set by the International.

On 10 June 1924 Giacomo Matteotti, a democratic socialist MP, was kidnapped and killed by a gang of fascist killers. It soon became clear to everyone that responsibility for the crime went all the way up to the highest levels of the Fascist hierarchy. This was the most critical moment for the existence of the Fascist government: the entire opposition demanded Mussolini’s dismissal and within the Fascist party itself, which was not prepared for such an event, there were serious splits and desertions; everyone rushed to abandon the ship they believed was sinking. The regime was faltering and its fall was expected at any moment.

But here too, as Mussolini had predicted, there were two types of opposition: the democratic and the (supposedly) communist. The democrats made it a “moral issue”, the country’s social harmony was to be restored by abandoning terrorism and violence. For the communists, on the contrary, it was “a question of class struggle, a crude but necessary consequence of the capitalist offensive to defend the Italian bourgeoisie” (Report on Fascism - V congress). The Communist Left reiterated once again that the party’s task would be to appeal directly to the working masses to overthrow not only the government, but also and above all the capitalist state.

The centrist party leadership, believing it could exploit the interclass Opposition for revolutionary purposes, embarked on the parliamentary democratic adventure that took the name of “Aventino”, after a speech, as grandiose as it was silly, by the social democrat Turati: “The only elected representatives are in the Aventine of their consciences, from which no enticement can remove them until the sun of freedom rises”.

On 26 June, about 130 opposition deputies gathered in the “Sala della lupa” in Montecitorio and decided to suspend parliament until the government clarified its position on the Matteotti case.

When spontaneous strikes had already broken out in a number of cities, the Communist Party launched the proposal for a general strike. But it found itself alone, abandoned first of all, as was natural, by the liberal and democratic parties and groups, afraid to appeal to the masses, but also abandoned by the General Confederation of Labour and by that massimalist Socialist Party so courted by the International.

The CGL carried out open firefighting by “inviting” “the confederate organisations, the leaders and the working masses to remain calm so as not to compromise the development of events with particular and inconsistent initiatives” (“Battaglie Sindacali”, 12 June 1924). The maximalist socialists were not to be outdone, by issuing a peremptory order not to compromise, by means of the strike, the development of a battle that their parliamentarians considered already won.

The strike was then proclaimed on 27 June: the CGL called on the proletariat to abstain from work for... 10 minutes! “Confindustria and the fascist unions joined in and officially participated in the action, thus making the protest lose all meaning as class action” (Report on Fascism - Fifth Congress).

The indecision of the Party, which had not been able to adopt a decisive tactic, vacillating awkwardly between a return to mass action and support for the action of the bourgeois oppositions, led to the spread among the proletariat of “the opinion that it had let slip the good moment to wipe out fascism”. As the centrist Scoccimarro himself, at the Fifth International Congress, had to admit.

The Party Central had made a serious mistake by leaving parliament to take part “in the first meetings of the Aventine, while it should have remained in parliament with a declaration of political attack on the government and an immediate stance against the constitutional and moral prejudice that represented the effective determinant of the outcome of the crisis in favour of fascism” (Lyon Thesis). If the Communist Party ever wanted to leave parliament, it could have done so, “but with its own physiognomy and only when the situation allowed for an appeal to the direct action of the masses”.

In our report to the Fifth Congress on Fascism we said: “All eyes are on the Communist Party, which speaks a language quite different from all other opposition parties. It follows that a totally independent and radical attitude to both fascism and the opposition will enable us to exploit the developments underway to bring down the gigantic power of fascism”.

We had therefore indicated the need to reorganise the industrial workers into the red unions, to reconnect the city workers with the agricultural labourers, to work out forms of organisation for the peasant strata, including tenants, smallholder farmers etc.

Just when all the Oppositions feared that the masses might start moving and expected the Crown to take the initiative in sacking fascism, when the strike had been sabotaged by the trade unions and the “workers” parties and the Communist Party could have recovered from its initial lurch, once again the Communist Party made an unforgivable mistake by proposing to the bourgeois-democratic parties the establishment of the AntiParliament. “Rather than destroying parliament, another, more “honest”, more “legal”, “better” Montecitorio would have been baptised” (“Either revolutionary preparation or electoral preparation”).

The proposal of the AntiParliament was harmful because it “presented the masses with the illusion of an AntiState opposed to and waging war against the traditional state apparatus, whereas, according to the historical perspec-

tives of our programme, the only basis of an AntiState can be the representation of the producing class alone, i.e., the Soviet.

“The word of the AntiParliament, resting in the country on the workers’ and peasants’ committees, meant entrusting the AntiState of the proletariat to exponents of capitalist social groups, such as Amendola, Agnelli, Albertini, etc”.

“Apart from the certainty of not arriving at such a de facto situation, which could only be called betrayal, the mere presentation of it as the prospect of a communist proposal means a violation of principles and a weakening of proletarian preparation” (Lyon Theses, 1926).

In less than a year, the new leaders of the Communist Party had gone “from the extreme of parliamentary abstentionism of prodemocratic inspiration to the opposite extreme of excessive parliamentary zeal of ultrademocratic inspiration”.

This position was clearly outside the directives of the International, which “never contemplated proposals to distinctly bourgeois parties” (Lyon Theses). If ever there was a situation in which it made sense to practise the tactic of revolutionary parliamentarianism, it was that. “Had one gone to parliament? One had to stay there at the risk of being truncheoned, exposing both the “government of murderers” and its cowardly “opponents” of the last hour. Had the tactic of revolutionary parliamentarianism been adopted? Let them at least practise that courageously, instead of falling back on a new cowardly version of reformist parliamentarianism”.

Once they had taken that path, they should have followed it to the end, without missing the opportunity to use the parliamentary tribune, deserted by all, to launch the call to struggle to the proletariat. But the leadership of the Communist Party, and the Comintern in particular, were moving decisively in the opposite direction.

The implementation of the AntiParliament was born and died in the wishes of Gramsci, Maffi and HumbertDroz. It was the “Pelican” (HumbertDroz) himself who set out the new tactical recipe in a report to Moscow. “After an exchange of ideas [with Gramsci and Maffi, ed.] we more or less agreed to propose to the oppositions to continue boycotting the parliament. We could join this boycott by transforming it into a parliamentary assembly of the oppositions opposed to the fascist parliament. We shall propose an immediate programme for this parliament that must be carefully studied. Formation of popular militias to disarm the fascists, a possible invitation to the people to refuse to pay taxes to the fascist government until working class freedoms have been restored”.

From this report to the leaders of the International, which cannot be accused of tactics, since it is addressed to comrades and not to adversaries in order to “lure them in”, it is clear that all the criticisms made by the Left to the party’s central committee were correct, that is, that the proposal was for nothing other than the constitution of a true democratic and legalitarian parliament.

It was nonsense, we said, “to set the parliament of the Oppositions against the fascist parliament, which tomorrow will be the genuine expression of capitalist power and which will have to be denounced as such, above all in order to combat the democratic plague for which it will boast of having consensus instead of the coercion on which fascism is based” (Letter to comrades of the Left, 2 November 1924).

The position of the Left was that they should return to parliament to use it as a propaganda platform, since this was the tactic decided at the 3rd Congress of the International, and even from there conduct a fierce attack on fascism and antifascism. “It is necessary to go to parliament and conduct there a violent attack against the oppositions followed by a no less open and explicit attack against the fascist government, fully posing the problem of the overthrow of the bourgeois regime in Italy: while declaring that the hour of insurrection has not yet come”.

The comrades of the Left had no illusions, they knew very well that their proposals would never be accepted by the International. In fact, a series of coded telegrams from Moscow ordered them not to reenter parliament: “The communist group must not reenter parliament if the oppositions reject the communist proposal. We do not consider such blackmail to be fair” (22 October 1924).

Of course, all this back-and-forth manoeuvring was completely ignored by the party’s base, whose reactions the centrists most likely feared. In a report to the International in November 1924, Togliatti, after saying that the rightwing fraction was practically nonexistent, added: “The two groups around which the party is gathered are the centre and the left. It is not possible to say at this moment what the ratio of forces is. In the recent federal congresses the party generally approved the resolutions of the Fifth Congress [...] but this approval cannot be considered as a

definitive shift because the great masses have not yet become aware of the real divergences between those directives and the attitude taken by the Bordiga group”. This report by Togliatti is extremely clear precisely because of what it does not say: how can a party leader not know the orientation of his base? He does not know it who prefers not to know it, precisely because he knows it!

Moreover, the statement that the mass of members had not become aware of the divergences between the positions of the centre and those of the left is a clear confession that the new leadership was hiding the party’s new tactical direction from its members. This would have been a difficult task, as the centre fraction had no tactical direction of its own. In fact, the federal congresses, to which Togliatti referred, we wrote in the Letter to the Comrades of the Left, “were organised [...] with a truly curious system which deserves to be defined as Giolittian rather than dictatorial. The power of the congresses to pronounce on political problems varied according to whether it was possible to foresee the direction they would take. When it was possible, the vote was promoted for the approval of the present Central, in other cases only the approval of the directives of the Fifth Congress, or the famous minimum of the invitation to Bordiga to join the Central. When, as was the case in the most important congresses, leftwing motives prevailed and were able to show their prevalence, the congresses were not able to vote on any issue under the pretext that it was purely informative. The sibylline manner in which the reports are made proves the misery of the obvious game I have mentioned”.

One can therefore understand Togliatti’s admission that the approval of the resolutions of the Fifth Congress could not be considered as adherence to the policy of the centrist party leadership.

Parliament, which had last sat on 13 June 1924, reopened on 12 November. Two days earlier, on the 10th, Gramsci, Gennari and Maffi took another step towards the Aventinians. “Only the categorical refusal of the “oppositions” to adhere to the initiatives, albeit democratic, of the Communist Party of Italy, convinced the Gramscian leadership to accept the theses of the Left, by returning to Montecitorio, and it is no coincidence that on November 12, 1924, an exponent of the Left, a member of the old Executive deposed in 1923, was called to give the audacious “return” speech in the Chamber, amidst shouts of threats and raised fists: Luigi Repossi, just as it is no coincidence that the first speech in the new legislature was given on behalf of the party, on 14 January 1925, by another “abstentionist” (who had not yet capitulated to Moscow), Ruggero Grieco (...) to reaffirm his commitment to the rule of law (...) to reaffirm the communist principles of class struggle, the violent conquest of power and the proletarian dictatorship” (Either revolutionary preparation or electoral preparation).

“The reentry into parliament in November 1924 and the declaration of Repossi were beneficial, as the wave of proletarian consensus showed, but too late. The Party Central swung for a long time and was only decided under pressure from the party and the Left” (Lyon Theses).

The new centrist leaders of the party were based on an erroneous perspective of the situation, as we can well understand from Gramsci’s report to the CC in August 1924 (published in “Lo Stato Operaio”, 21 August 1924), they were already giving the working class as defeated: “The situation is “democratic” because the great working masses are disorganised, dispersed, pulverised into the indistinct people”. It was stated that the Party’s essential task was the “conquest of the majority of the workers and the molecular transformation of the foundations of the democratic state”. It is therefore clear that the preparation of the class for the overthrow of both fascism and bourgeois-democratic antifascism was completely alien to the Centrist logic; on the contrary, it based its expectations on the victory of the forces organised in the Aventine.

The purpose of this presentation is to describe the political and social situation, inside and outside the party, which determined the necessity for our Left current to present the “Programme for Party Action”.

We have mentioned that the Fifth Congress of the International approved another document with the same heading but with the opposite orientation, which left the road open to different possibilities, without specifying anything and excluding nothing.

To analyse this document in depth would require a long, but not very useful, dissertation. Here are a few quotes from it that confirm what has been said about centrist tactics.

“The party must seize and use every opportunity, even those offered by the propaganda of the Constitutional Opposition, to weaken and crush fascism (...) and thus force the Constitutional Opposition to take more vigorous

action or to throw away the mask of its complicity with fascism”. Why? Was it preferred that the bourgeoisie adopted an antifascist mask?

The Party “must never, in order to safeguard its independence [?], allow itself to be isolated from the great masses in movement against Fascism and thus lose the possibility of leading and guiding them. It must learn to manoeuvre between these numerous rocks in order to remain in close contact with the masses”.

It speaks of leading against fascism those great masses in movement which Gramsci had described as disorganised, dispersed, pulverised into the indistinct people.

But the serious statement is the other one, that the party should learn to manoeuvre. Here we have manoeuvring, situationism, tactics, what was defined as “Leninism”, when it was nothing more than opportunism.

On the other subjects, such as the political united front, tactics with regard to the Socialist Party, the possibility of fusion with it, Bolshevization, etc., we will not dwell here.

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With regard to the “united trade union front”, the draft “Programme for Party Action” presented by our comrades is extremely clear. And we proudly affirm that the Communist Party led by the Left was the first among the parties of the International to propose it and to put it into practice. And with great profit both in the unification and extension of the struggles and of the communist influence on the proletariat.

Because the conquest of the masses is not achieved only through propaganda, or only by launching passwords, in the manner of the centrists, but by taking part in and stimulating all the actions to which the proletariat is driven by its economic and social condition.

In order to achieve this conquest, the Communist Party of Italy has always opposed the tactics of leaving the trade unions led by the reformists and since its foundation it has agitated within the class the proposal of the fusion, at national level, of all the existing trade union organisations. The communist initiative broke against the wall formed by the union of social reformists and “revolutionaries” of various kinds (maximalists, anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists). The campaign for a united front by the trade unions and the spontaneous mobilisation of the working class forced the leaders of the large national unions, in spite of themselves, to go along with this pressure from below and form the Labour Alliance. This although the trade union leaders, social reformists and false revolutionaries, sabotaged the proletarian united front and the class struggle by all means, the social-democratic bonzes even went so far as to offer to collaborate with fascism.

The expression found in Point 5, according to which, until the trade union struggle had found the possibility of a freer development, for the elections in the workshops the party would have to support common lists of the red organisations, in a bloc with the parties that refer to the working class (left republicans, unitary socialists, maximalists and also anarchist trade unionists), is not in contradiction with what is stated absolutely in Point 3 above: “any political “cartel” (...) is absolutely excluded, whether it is a matter of national central bodies or local organisations”.

No form of single political front was therefore allowed. It must therefore be understood that the single front advocated even then by the Communist Left was only and exclusively that of the trade unions.

At the time when the “Programme for Party Action” was written in 1924, the reconstruction of the trade unions was very complex: fascist dictatorship, open passage of the social-democratic trade union leadership into the field of reaction, impotence or cowardice of the leaders of the other organisations.

It was necessary to start all over again: from reconstituting the elementary trade union organs of the class, in opposition to those of the regime’s unions, which were then fascist. This was the specific aim of the blockade proposed in Point 5, which was extended only to parties with a working-class following that had traditionally supported the formation of class unionism. It was not a political bloc, but a union bloc, local and temporary, strictly aimed at the elections in the workshops and until the struggle and union organisation had found their ground again.

Instead of parties, at another time we would have spoken of a blockade of the respective union committees. But in that situation of disintegration of the class organisations, did their union committees still exist?

After all, the communists have always proposed common actions to the proletarian forces framed in the organisations of the most diverse parties, while, with their practical activity, demonstrating that only the communist programme and organisation can lead the proletariat to its emancipation.

## **Programme of Action Presented by the Left of the PCd'I.**

June-July 1924

### **1. Evaluation of the Situation**

Fascism, in the full extent of its development, represents an attempt to unify the political action of the different sections of the privileged classes (industrial, financial, and commercial capital, large landed property) in order to preserve the bourgeois regime and combat revolutionary forces.

In its first stage, whilst taking advantage of the success of the counter-revolutionary manoeuvres of the left-wing bourgeois governments, fascism had the character of a mobilization of the middle classes – supported by the state and the bourgeoisie – and a militaristic organization of the forces of these classes for the sake of committing violent and terrorist actions against the proletariat and its organizations.

After the defeat of the working class due to the combined maneuvers of democracy and fascism on one hand and the impotence of the old Socialist Party on the other, fascism, having developed a vast political organization but lacking any program of social renewal, installed itself into power by means of a compromise with the traditional ruling class while brutally getting rid of most of the traditional personalities and political cliques.

The conquest of power and its exercise by fascism was achieved through the crushing and dispersion of the proletariat, the overwhelming majority of which, however, continued to despise fascism. During the first stage, the middle classes and arguably a section of the peasantry preserved the illusion that the fascist movement was the realization of their common interests, but the actions of the fascist government gradually drove these classes to disappointment, discontent, and opposition.

The Matteotti affair suddenly revealed, due to the intervention of sentimental reflexes, the scale of the discontent reached among the middle classes and pushed the proletarian masses towards courageous resumption of open class struggle. The fascist government has come out weakened, and the decline of fascism appears markedly accelerated.

It is possible that Fascism, which preserves its political and military organization in an almost intact state, may allow itself to be dragged into violent reaction, but it's much more likely that it will be led to use leftist political methods, by a large part of bourgeois public opinion. Thus we should expect a new development in Mussolini's policy towards a bourgeois coalition government, which will end up including the reformist party. The middle classes will remain in an uncertain position between their seeming satisfaction and the small concessions that they'll be able to get from such a government. The proletariat, which, in the event of a new reactionary wave, will see its offensive return postponed but not definitively prevented, will probably from now on succeed in imposing its freedom of organization and action to an ever-increasing extent. Everything suggests that the possibilities for action of the Communist Party of Italy will be considerably enlarged.

### **2. Attitude of the Communist Party of Italy towards Fascism**

The Communist Party of Italy will sustain its propaganda, its polemics and its agitation against the currently ruling fascist government, based on an in-depth Marxist critique.

The Party will never disguise its intent to overthrow the bourgeois dictatorship using revolutionary violence, whether that government is organized in a fascist form or hiding behind the democratic facade. This refers not only to theoretical criticism but also to every political demonstration and slogan by and from the Party. [Eight lines are omitted "for obvious reasons", most likely due to references to illegal or military action].

### **3. Attitude Towards the Opposition Parties**

We divide these parties into three groups:



a) The bourgeois opposition (democratic liberals, e.g. Nitti, Amendola, Albertini, Agnelli, Meda, etc.) which must be attacked and unmasked as a force for bourgeois preservation, wanting to repeat the counter-revolutionary measures of classical Giolittism;

b) The parties and groups of the middle classes and peasants (left and center-left of the Italian People's Party, the Peasants' Party of Italy, the movement of D'Annunzio, of the Free Italy, of the "Liberal Revolution", the right of the Italian Republican Party, etc.), of the leadership of which, virtually with no exception, we must affirm the total helplessness and cowardice as concerns the struggle against fascism, and in the defense of the interests they are supposed to defend. It is therefore necessary to expose – especially with the oldest movements – their record of collaboration with the policies of bourgeois governments, during and after the war. Through direct and open critique we must highlight the causes of disappointment of social strata rallying around these movements, and denounce their impotence because they do not dare bring their opposition to fascism outside the realm of legality and social pacifism. Struggling against this fatal illusion and the danger that it may infect the proletariat, the need will become increasingly evident for the revolutionary, anti-fascist struggle to be led by the proletariat and for this struggle to be subordinated to the vision of its class dictatorship. The dictatorship of the proletariat is the only alternative that can be opposed to the fascist, bourgeois dictatorship – which also suffocates the less fortunate elements of the middle classes;

c) Those parties which are related to the working class despite lacking a revolutionary program and revolutionary tradition (left-wing Republicans, Unitarian Socialists, Maximalists, and even Anarchic-Syndicalists). Even towards these parties, the Communist critique and polemic will prove that they can never lead the proletariat to victory and that the whole history of social struggles in Italy amounts to a condemnation and liquidation of their bourgeois and petite-bourgeois tradition, no less than the tradition of democracy (to which they are more or less connected). Our polemic towards these groups must be relentless and highly energetic. We must take advantage of all of our opportunities and experiences to oppose tendencies that push for a false unity consisting of advocating for the formation of a big workers' party which brings together the different political schools, or even a block of these parties constituted with the aim of creating a proletarian General Staff.

Any political "cartel" with the parties of these three groups is absolutely unacceptable, whether they be central and national decision-making bodies or local organizations. The Communist Party will adopt, taking advantage of all opportunities, the tactics of the united front by appealing to the unity of proletarian and semi-proletarian forces on the grounds of organizations of all kinds, existing or emerging, inside of which the struggle of the political parties is brought. This activity, together with our direct appeals to militant workers and proletarians sympathetic to other parties, will apply in the immediate future to the masses following the parties of the third group and (after some preparation) also to the left of the People's Party and the Peasants' Party. In the face of the rapid development of the situation towards the instability of the regime, a tactic of this kind will also have to take into consideration the social strata that are currently gathered behind the parties of the second group. This tactic tends towards the unity of the workers and peasants and even petty-bourgeois masses under the control of the Party, and its success is related to the progressive liquidation and demolition of the opportunist and semi-bourgeois parties in question.

#### 4. Particular Issues Regarding Relations with the Maximalist Party

Among the opportunist groups, the Maximalist Party is the most dangerous – especially during a period of uncertainty – because it is based on a combination of demagogy and idleness. This party must be openly denounced as an enemy of the proletarian cause. The reputation of its name and its newspaper must be pushed towards a definitive liquidation. With this in mind, it will not be accepted to the International as a sympathetic party and the International will not form the dangerous illusion that a left-wing fraction resides in its bosom; neither shall the International officially nor unofficially endorse such a misconception.

#### 5. Work Inside the Trade Unions

To solidly and rapidly extend its influence over the masses, the Communist Party must conduct intense agitation for the reorganization of the workers' movement, and to reconstitute its network of trade union functions, through

the communist shop group (made up by comrades and workers that aren't in the party and that aren't members of other parties), up to the National Communist Trade Union Committee, that must not be just a party office, but the center for a communist fraction of the workers' movement. For the elections in the workshops, the party will form a bloc with the parties of the third group (in the sense that it will support shared lists of red organizations) until the struggle inside the trade unions finds the possibility for freer development. The Party will seize a favorable moment to propose both national red union unity and an alliance of unions on the basis of common demands. Whether or not it will be necessary to apply the tactics of the "trade-union left-wings" in order to overthrow the reformist leaders of the Confederation of Labor will be shown by the situation and by how much influence the Confederation will hold over it. If the possibilities of trade union work are less than what is presumed in the earlier proposition, the Party will have to concentrate its activity and work on its systematic link with the workshops in order to form not only an internal apparatus but also a network for maneuvering the great masses.

## 6. Work Among the Peasantry

Since the organization, propaganda, press and electoral and political influence of the Party already extend to urban centers as well as to the countryside, it is a question of intensifying our agitation for the communist agrarian program with the means we already have at our disposal by demanding that this work be carried out by every organ and member of the Party. In order to extend this activity in a convenient way, it is necessary to count on the reorganization of the agricultural workers' unions and the leagues of sharecroppers and small tenants. As far as small owners are concerned, the question of the Peasants' Party must be placed on the agenda. In no way should the formation of an autonomous political party of small owners be encouraged, but rather the organization of an association – elective in form – to defend the economic interests of the peasants should be created, and we will penetrate this association to push for the united front.

## 7. Organizational Questions

Illegal and legal party work will continue in accord with the already-acquired experience of the party. An internal connection system that allows at least one consultative representation of the peripheral party organizations, alongside the central executive apparatus, will be studied. The agrarian section of the party will be reorganized. It will be necessary to organize the press and to guarantee greater resonance in the politics and agitation of the party among the masses. The funding of the press and propaganda – an excellent means of connection with the masses, even when chances of acting are extremely limited – will be better organized. Greater attention will be paid to aiding the politically persecuted.

The Third Internationalists (Terzini) will immediately enter local organizations. A general review of Party members will take place immediately and will be conducted with particular attention to the newcomers, nevertheless with the latter's participation. The Terzini will not occupy any place in the central organs. They will only participate in elective bodies and will only be nominated as officials to fill posts that are not of an individual character.

## Summaries of the Party's two latest General Meetings

### The International Party Meeting Announces Communism Against the Lies and Infamies of the Difficult Present Hour

*Video-conference meeting, 25–27 September 2020 [GM 138]*

Being able to meet in general meetings a large part of the comrades, who know each other, connect with each other and tune into our international work better and better, is a very small achievement in its size, but certainly important, perhaps decisive, in the social war of the working class towards communism.

We Marxist materialists – who know how little individuals, and our own selves, are worth – are, however, aware of the strength of social doctrines and the active presence of parties in the class struggle, and in particular of the role of the communist party, the critical conscience of the working class and of its destiny, and the governing body of the necessary and decisive revolutionary clash.

The party, an anticipation of the communist future within bourgeois society, is both the organ of battle and the highest form of human coexistence. Our work in the halls of general meetings, and in the ranks of the party in general, is how best we can turn our individual outrage, will and energy to the great cause of communism.

More than a century later we consider ourselves to be the continuers of the glorious tradition of that world party which was the Third International in its early years, which had already been the International Association culminating in the Paris Commune, the world organs of that working class which has always proclaimed itself to be with no fatherland, ever since the Communist League, even before the Manifesto of Marx and Engels described it as such. We are working on the reconstruction of that world party which the class so urgently needs and which it will itself seek out and extend with generous forces. This is certainly an immense task ahead of us, which will be opposed by the bourgeoisie in all countries, with all the instruments of force and ideal and theoretical corruption of which it makes ample use.

But we communists are favoured in this respect because we alone have a true, realistic, scientific knowledge of the historical laws that describe the concrete clash between the opposing classes and subclasses, and to a good extent we can foresee events and their reactions in response to the attitudes that the party will assume in succession.

Compared to the political expressions of the bourgeois classes, we also have the great advantage that, just as our communist aim is unitary and not torn apart in an internal opposition of class and class interests, so can our party be unitary in its programme and internal workings.

This programme of orthodox communism will radiate into society and the world, driven by an objective and mature social and historical need. We offer our militia to this programme, which exists before us, to which we hold tightly to, putting our feelings and our forces at its disposal.

This material fact therefore excludes – except in the case of a serious degeneration – the emergence within the party of a conflict of opinions that cannot be resolved by studying and deepening that preexisting programme and our more than centuriesold and coherent party tradition, which has only had discontinuities in the difficult cycles of the international social war of the proletarian class.

Thanks to the impersonality of the programme, within the party we have been able to rid ourselves of all the prejudices of the democratic game and of the majority solution to conflicts, which are inevitable in the movements, in the thinking and in the sick psychology of the bourgeoisie itself. The party's theses are all already written. And it will be able to formulate and confirm them even better, when necessary in the future, only through the orderly and convergent work of its militants.

At this general meeting too, we were therefore able to devote its full ten hours, over two sessions, solely to our concerted communist work, without unnecessary waste of time.

We must once again acknowledge the great commitment of the comrades who worked hard to organise the meeting and those responsible for the numerous reports, difficult studies in which they applied themselves at length, all of which were admirable for their correspondence to the evaluations and theses of our school and all of which were

necessary to corroborate the party's baggage of certainties and orientation, destined to lead tomorrow the worldwide wave of workers rising up for the last political revolution in history.

*Contents:*

**Saturday session**

1. Introduction of the Party Center
2. The CPd'I and the Civil War in Italy
3. The Party's trade union activity
4. Origins of the Communist Party of China
5. The succession of modes of production
6. Social movements in Ethiopia
7. Report of Venezuelan comrades
8. On the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat

**Sunday session**

1. Course of the economic crisis
2. The military question: The October Revolution
3. The race riot in the USA
4. The Hungarian Revolution of 1919
5. Rosa Luxemburg in the party press
6. The formation of the Indian nation

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Communism lives on through our uncorrupted revolutionary science and in the tenacious and organic work of our party, alongside the proletariat, which will recognize itself in today's battles and in its international emancipatory insurrection

*Video-conference meeting, 29–31 January 2021 [GM 139]*

Marxism is the presentation of a theory of history which, from the description of how the society of capital was born and evolves, with its material approach to communism, and with its everwidening and deepening crises, arrives at the hypothesis of the ineluctable political revolution of a numerically growing working class which in all countries comes to overthrow the power of the holders of the means of production.

This hypothesis of ours will remain only a hypothesis as long as it is not empirically confirmed by history. Even the bourgeois now admit that their society is in shambles, if not in ruins, that it has no future, nor can they imagine any but catastrophic ones. But they deny that the very movement of history leads to communism.

Communists, on the contrary, work on this hypothesis. They have been doing so on scientific grounds since the 1848 Manifesto, and even earlier, on the generous intuitions of the utopians.

But the communist party cannot give anyone, neither its militants nor the class, the guarantee of communism within a given deadline.

It does, however, give the certainty and the proven demonstration that communism can be fought for. It gives its militants this privilege, the great satisfaction and joy of being able to fight for it. This already transports us into the

dimension of communism, certain that to that end one can join a militant group that knows what it wants and what the way to achieve it is, the ageold programme of revolutionary Marxism.

Clamped like a monolith to the single block of a social doctrine that is definitive in all its parts, which is Marxism, the small party of today aspires to be faithfully inscribed in the incandescent flow of the series of formal parties of the working class, successively emerged from the social underground, even if sometimes for a short time. Today we claim and commit ourselves to defending the entire historical tradition of our party.

That tradition rises before us with the grandeur of a mountain range, and could intimidate our few forces, if compared to the might of our great masters, Marx, Engels and Lenin.

But we know that these peaks of science, knowledge and experience are not inviolable for the Party: in the healthy environment of the Party, any group of comrades of normal ability, with passion, time and diligence, can reach the top. Of course what Marx or Lenin could write in a day takes three comrades and three years of work for us, but in the end the party, having made this patient journey backwards in history, can know as much as Marx and as much as Lenin. And perhaps, in some detail, more than Marx and more than Lenin. Obviously never against Marx or Lenin.

Because the working class will need all this revolutionary science in order to overthrow the dying but cunning, treacherous and poisonous bourgeois power, as happened in October in Russia, where the proletarian insurgents, against a multiple front of reactionaries, found ready in the Communist Party all the answers, the right answers, all the teachings about their enemies and how to overcome them in order to clear the road to communism.

This is the meaning of the communist work that we are all learning to do together more and more and which finds a point of connection in these general meetings of ours. After all, communists, as representatives of the working class, are also characterised by the fact that they know how to work more and better than anyone else.

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This general meeting was also held by video link, both for precautions against the spread of the epidemic and for the greater geographical extent of the party. This is a tool that proves useful in getting to know each other and working together with distant groups and individuals.

In the weeks and days leading up to the meeting, some comrades dedicated themselves to preparing the translations of the reports into Italian, English and Spanish, which were then read at the same time, and to providing everyone with detailed instructions for the technical functioning of the meeting.

But it is the commonality of purpose and identity of principles and programme that makes it easy for us to overcome the barriers of language and experience that spontaneously come together in these meetings.

We held three sessions. The Friday session, from 5 p.m. to 11 p.m. Rome time, was devoted to the preparation of the meeting and the reports of the comrades involved in the various party activities. The Saturday and Sunday sessions were devoted to the presentation of reports, each of which lasted approximately 30 minutes. At the end of the meeting we returned to a general recapitulation of our commitments to research, propaganda and intervention outside and in the trade union movement.

### *Contents:*

#### **Friday Session**

- Meeting Preparation

#### **Saturday Session**

1. Introduction of the Center
2. History of the Red Trade Unions International
3. Military aspects of the German Revolution
4. On the concept and practice of Dictatorship: Lenin

5. Report from Venezuela
6. Military question: Civil war in the Russian Revolution
7. The trade union activity of the party
8. The Hungarian Revolution of 1919

### **Sunday session**

1. Course of the world economic crisis
2. The origins of the Communist Party of China
3. An examination of class struggles in Turkey
4. The Hungarian Revolution of 1919
5. Rosa Luxemburg in the party press
6. The formation of the Indian nation

As is the habit, we report below the syntheses of reports presented over the two meetings. Full texts will be published later, in various languages.

- [The Hungarian revolution of 1919](#)
- [The Military Question: the October Revolution](#)
- [Reclaiming Rosa Luxemburg for the Communist Left](#)
- [The concept of dictatorship: in Soviet Russia](#)
- [The formation of the Indian nation](#)
- [The Black Question in the United States](#)
- [Origins of the workers' and communist movement in China](#)
- [The Party's trade union work](#)

## The Hungarian Revolution of 1919

At this meeting we began to expound the chapter on the counter-revolution and betrayal of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party.

The comrade recalled the faltering and weak policy of the Social-Democrats towards the aristocratic and bourgeois classes, who, under the pretext that religion was to be regarded as “a private matter”, prevented the disciplining of the clergy and the bourgeoisie, while the priests in the villages incited undisturbed the peasants to starve the towns and to counterrevolution.

With the exception of a few ministers from the previous government who had been admitted to the best sanatoriums, the aristocrats, officers and in general the bourgeoisie with counter-revolutionary sentiments roamed freely throughout the country, because the commissioner of justice, a social democrat, had opposed any infringement of personal freedom.

In addition to the filth inherited from capitalism that manifests itself in all revolutions, corruption also had a special cause: as a result of the “moderate” implementation of the proletarian dictatorship advocated by the social democrats, the greedy robber elements of the bourgeoisie and especially the petty bourgeoisie had infiltrated various Soviet institutions.

The Social-Democrats found the economic arrangements too radical and sabotaged them wherever they could, thanks also to the mass of former state employees and bourgeois parasites left behind for “humanitarian reasons” in the apparatus of administration and public supply. Supplying the capital with food became increasingly difficult.

The surviving democratic ideology prevented the implementation of decisive measures against the reluctant peasantry. Forceful food requisitions were only made in places where farmers had organised armed counter-revolutions. These, increasingly frequent, were easily repressed.

The counter-revolutionary forces that had risen up against the Hungarian Soviet Republic were then listed: in Vienna, the AntiBolshevik Committee (Antibolshevista Comitét – ABC) had been formed as early as 12 April 1919. A group of old Hungarian political exiles, almost all of whom belonging to the old promonarchist aristocracy, took part in it, the most important of whom was Count István Bethlen, who had declared his willingness to collaborate actively in the cause of eliminating Bolshevism in Hungary. He also agreed to an eventual Allied occupation of Budapest (as long as it was not by the Romanians or the Czechs), and guaranteed the formation of a democratic coalition government that was also open to moderate social democrats like Garami.

In the AntiBolshevik Committee there were also Pál Teleky, Zichy, György Szmercsány, Tivadar Batthyány and Márton Lovász, who since the time of Károly had tried to unite the counter-revolutionary forces of the big bourgeoisie and the landowners. They had the support of a section of the officers led by Gyula Gömbös, who later became president of the council of ministers. The leadership of the clerical reaction and the prelates rushed to support them.

The Committee, favoured by the French military leadership, set up a counter-revolutionary government in Arad (Romania) and carried out illegal activities in Austria (such as robbing the Hungarian embassy in Vienna) and guerrilla actions along the border (attempted penetration into Hungary by an armed group at the Bruck an der Leitha border post).

The Hungarian National Defence Association, which was founded as a veterans’ association on 30 November 1918 and was chaired by Gyula Gömbös, a former army captain, joined this committee. On 22 February 1919, it was outlawed by the Berinkey government together with the PCU. It moved its headquarters to Szeged, where it elaborated an openly antiSemitic and protofascist political programme known as the “Szeged Idea”, becoming one of the nuclei around which Admiral Horthy’s counter-revolutionary armed forces were formed.

The counterrevolution of the big bourgeoisie had given itself its own organisation called the Ebredő Magyarok (the Hungarians Awakening) – which played a major role in the fall of the dictatorship of the proletariat under Horthy’s white terror regime. It also included the so-called intelligentsia, i.e. officials who had fled the territories occupied by the Entente, students and the petty bourgeoisie. They were already active, as mentioned above, with the Károly government to whom they reproached the “exaggerations of democracy”.

The Austrian social democracy also faithfully supported the Hungarian counter-revolutionaries and granted them asylum during the dictatorship of the proletariat and full freedom of action. On top of this the Austrian social democrats were busy trying to divert the Austrian working class from the sympathies it was beginning to show towards the proletarian revolution.

We then went on to describe the attempted putsch of 24 June 1919, when the counter-revolutionaries took possession of the Danube Monitors, armoured river ships, and with them, together with 300 officer cadets from the former military academy, attempted to take Budapest by force of arms. They began to cannonade the Hotel Hungaria, the headquarters of the Councils' government. This attempt was soon crushed, but left many comrades dead on the ground. The Governing Council pardoned the 300 rebel student officers, sentencing them only to corrective social education. The revolutionary tribunal sentenced the thirteen officers who organised the rebellion to death, but even these were pardoned due to the meddling of the Missions and "our" LtCol Romanelli. Kun stigmatised and condemned the events that had taken place at the meeting of the Central Executive Committee on 25 June and urged the firm application of his resolution: "Considering that the application of the dictatorship, besides failing to bring the bourgeoisie to reason, encourages them in their counter-revolutionary intentions, the Central Executive Committee resolves to strengthen the dictatorship in the most complete and decisive manner and asks the government of the Councils that, if necessary, the bourgeois counter-revolution be smothered in blood".

Finally, we read the article with the eloquent title "The bourgeois-socialist plot against Sovietist Hungary" which appeared in "Il Lavoratore", the Trieste organ of the Communist Party of Italy, on 20 September 1921.

The report went on to describe the counter-revolutionary formations, which plotted against the Republic of the Councils, and the armies of the Whites. The largest, as mentioned, was the so-called "Szegeed Government", headed by Gyula Károlyi, with Admiral Miklòs Horthy as defence minister and future regent of Hungary. Formed in Arad, Romania, it was supported by the French southern army, which soon numbered 40,000 men in Szegeed and the surrounding area. Excluding officers it was composed of colonial troops with Senegalese, Malagasy, Annamite and Spahis regiments belonging to the French 76th colonial division. Three other formations had their headquarters in Vienna.

A conspiracy in Budapest was directed by the moderate wing of the bourgeoisie. Kun: "An expression of these tendencies was an "action" project in the first district of Budapest, which aimed at arresting members of the council government and replace it with a "more radical" one. This radicalism, among other things, would have made Ferenc Harrer, the former mayor of Budapest, of the moderate wing of the radical bourgeois party, a central figure in the new government of the Councils (those in the first district planned to keep me in government). Szamuely clearly spoke out against these cowardly blows: "we will not go to the front to fight the external imperialist enemy until we have eradicated the internal enemy". Tibor and I, on the basis of Ottó Korvin's and Ferenc Janesik's report, personally liquidated this counter-revolutionary attempt on the parliamentary premises, organised by a group of adventurers who wanted to bring the troops from the Tisza front to Budapest, set up a new government and open the way for the Romanian troops under the pretext of "putting an end to the bourgeoisie in Budapest".

Marshal D'Esperey, general commander of the French interventionist army on the southern borders of Hungary, had at his disposal 86,000 men of the Royal Romanian troops, 32,000 of the Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian force, 56,000 of the French army, making a total of 174,000 men. Together with the Czech northern army, this brought the total number of troops in the field to 250,000.

The comrade then went on to illustrate the misdeeds of the Italian military mission.

LieutenantCol. Guido Romanelli in Budapest was in fact the only representative of the Entente powers and Béla Kun's only interlocutor. At the beginning of May 1919, Romanelli presented himself in Vienna to General Roberto Segre, head of the Italian Military Mission, who sent him to Budapest with the task of guiding it, since it had recently returned to the Hungarian capital after the breakup of the Entente powers with the Soviet government. At the time of the proclamation of the Republic of Soviets, all the Entente political-military representatives had left Budapest, with the sole exception of the English Lieutenant Freeman, the American Lieutenant Causey and the Italian Mission.

The latter remained in the Hungarian capital throughout the period of the Republic and Kun and his comrades used it to communicate with the marauders of the Entente. It was composed, in addition to Romanelli, by Lt. Col. Munari, Captains Accame and Carbone (who spoke and wrote Hungarian fluently), a few carabinieri, clerks and



couriers, eight in all. Marquis Arrigo Tacoli, political commissar of the Italian delegation, a schemer, lived in Vienna and only came to Budapest for a couple of days. Prince Livio Borghese was also in Budapest, where he carried out unofficial political activities. The whole Italic group, except for the soldiers, was staying at the Ritz Hotel, which was also the headquarters of the Danube Delegation formed by English lieutenant Freeman and American lieutenant Causey of the Food Commission, which we have spoken about at length.

A confidential report from the French military mission in Vienna informed Paris of the commercial collaboration which had been established between the Italians and the Hungarian communists: Magyars from Fiume with Italian passports, together with other Magyars who had arrived in the Adriatic city with passports, negotiated with the Italian authorities, against payment in Austrian crowns, supplies of oranges and textiles from Milan, which arrived in Croatia where traders from Budapest were waiting for them. Fabrics and foodstuffs arrived regularly in Budapest from Italy in trains escorted by Italian soldiers. Rice and coffee were exchanged in the countryside for veal quarters and poultry. Italian lorries travelled without being stopped and searched at the guard posts around the city with the permission of the Soviet government at the Mission, thanks to a clause in the Villa Giusti armistice.

Romanelli obtained from the People's Commissioner for Finance that Italians leaving Hungary to return to Italy could withdraw up to 10,000 crowns from their savings. But the Italian Mission actually dealt mainly with trade, especially smuggling. Our "Ordine Nuovo" of 21 June 1921 reported: "While plotting with the counter-revolutionaries to bring about the fall of the Soviet Republic, it sold arms and ammunition, foodstuffs and manufactured goods to the Soviet government, so that the Hungarian Red Army was largely equipped and provided with provisions from Italy. Now, if we consider that there were also Italian soldiers – and in great numbers – fighting against the Red Army at the Czechoslovak front, then the dedication of our "beloved patriots" springs spontaneously to mind. While, on the one hand, they were making themselves look good in front of the reactionary world by sending Italian troops to fight against the proletarian army, on the other hand they were selling the arms and ammunition that were to be used to fight the Italian troops themselves! (...) The dead that lie unburied on the battlefields certainly do not tell the story of with which lead or machinegun fire they were killed".

It was later ascertained that the members of the "merry Italic mission" had "forgotten" to pay the royal government half a billion lire from this trade.

On 24 June, a handful of students from the Ludovica Military Academy, led by their commander, attempted a putsch by means of a military flotilla on the Danube and the occupation of the telephone exchange. The action failed and the perpetrators were captured. Romanelli insists on reminding Kun and the people's commissars of the Geneva Convention for prisoners of war. Kun replied: "I would like to remind Mr. Lieutenant-Colonel that in Munich, Riga and various other places in the Ukraine and Finland no representatives of the Allied and Associated Powers stood up to protest against the murder of truly innocent people. It did not occur to Mr. Lieutenant-Colonel to be indignant about the fact that hired men fired their cannons and machine guns on the suburbs of Budapest, on hospitals and on the homes of women and children, enticed by the promise of allowing them a great pogrom immediately after their accession to power. Mr. Lieutenant-Colonel's heart only sympathises with those who fight, under false pretences, for the oppression of the workers and the return to their former idle existence. The Government of the Councils, even if it exercises its power with extreme rigour, will always be more humane than those governments that have humiliated humanity with the barbarity of war, that starve people with blockades and shoot at the defenceless masses of the people who protest against oppression and exploitation. I do not believe that the clauses of the Geneva Convention should be applied to counter-revolutionary bandits who prepare new pogroms, who aim to kill women, children and Jews".

At the end of July, with the advance of Romanian troops on Budapest, the Soviet Republic capitulated. On the afternoon of 1 August, Romanelli went to Kun in Hungaria Hotel, offering the Mission's protection to protect his wives and children from reprisals.

At the end of July, with the advance of Romanian troops on Budapest, the Soviet Republic capitulated. On the afternoon of 1 August, Romanelli went to Kun in Hungaria Hotel, offering the protection of the Mission to spare the wives and children of the people's commissars from reprisals and transfer them by rail to Vienna under Italian safe-conduct.

## The Military Question - In the October Revolution

Kornilov's failed attempt in August-September 1917 and the dissolution of Krimov's Cossack forces led to widespread uprisings in the countryside and the occupation of land from landowners. Always harshly repressed by government troops, these pushed the masses towards the Bolshevik programme.

In an attempt to maintain a majority in the forthcoming Constituent Assembly, the government convenes a Democratic Conference favouring representation from cooperatives and local associations, where the SRs are in the majority. The intention is to counter the Bolshevik indication of all power to the Soviets. It concludes confusingly with an indication to form a Preparliament. The Bolsheviks initially participate in it, contrary to Lenin's instructions to address the masses directly for insurrection.

In the elections to the Soviets at the beginning of October, the balance of power was reversed and the Bolsheviks were in the majority, particularly in Moscow and Petrograd. Gradually the Bolsheviks took control of most of the Soviets throughout Russia with the slogan of all power to the Soviets.

The report read out some of Lenin's letters on the analysis of the situation and the feeling of the masses after Kornilov's adventure, now more favourable to political change in Russia. Clear and swift action was required because: "not taking power today means losing the revolution".

7 October: the Bolsheviks leave the Preparliament. Kerensky forms a new government and orders the most revolutionary military units to be moved from Petrograd to the front.

In Petrograd, the Revolutionary Military Committee (RMC) is formed by the military command of the region and the Bolshevik military organisation, which will function as the general staff of the revolution, under the political direction of the Executive Committee of the city's Soviet.

22nd October: the RMC, in response to Kerensky's attempt to remove the most politicised troops from Petrograd, appoints its commissars in all military units, effectively taking control of almost all the armed forces in the city and region.

October 23rd: The Bolshevik CC sets the date for the insurrection, which Lenin says must take place before the beginning of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets because, as a large body is made up of different political tendencies, it would not be able to take a clear and immediate decision, and to confront it with a *fait accompli*.

28 October: the Bolsheviks in Petrograd begin the organisation of the insurrection and entrust its direction to a triumvirate of trusted party members who have some military experience, although none of them is experienced in commanding large, heterogeneous and differently armed units.

The Bolshevik military organisations command a maximum of 150,000 armed men in 62 cities, of which about 25,000 in Petrograd and 12,000 in Moscow. They have light armament with a few machine guns, organised into 10-man squads, 4squad platoons, 3platoon companies and 3company battalions. The most important factories already have their own roughly trained armed organisations.

We know from Trotsky that although the majority of the workers and the garrison are for the uprising, a small minority of cadets and officers are against it; they cannot be convinced but must be beaten militarily.

31 October: in the Smolny Palace, seat of the Soviets, the delegates of the regiments of the Petrograd region approve the armed insurrection. The RMC issues a manifesto in which it denounces the Provisional Government and the General Command of the garrison for having become instruments of the counter-revolution and exhorts the soldiers of the capital to defend the revolutionary order and to obey only the orders of the Revolutionary Military Committee.

4 November: the demonstration of workers and soldiers during the Petrograd Soviet Day confirms the adherence of the revolutionary vanguards to the Bolshevik passwords.

5 November: Trotsky's vigorous intervention at the assembly of soldiers in the Peter and Paul fortress-prison produces their adhesion to the RMC by placing at its disposal the internal arsenal and the cannons that control the city: this sanctions the complete break with the military leadership that supports Kerensky and the Provisional Government.

During the night Kerensky orders the cruiser Aurora to set sail on a training cruise to get the crew away from the capital, to open the bridges over the Neva to separate the workers' quarters from the rest of the city and have them

guarded by cadets still loyal to him, to isolate the Smolny telephones, to seize all the Bolshevik newspapers and to arrest members of the RMC.

In the same morning, the RMC orders two of its regiments to reopen the seized printing presses with arms and the Aurora to remain to guard the city and defend the revolution. Command of military operations is taken over by the triumvirate, which makes the final arrangements. The forces loyal to Kerensky begin to straggle. Incognito Lenin moves to Smolny.

7 November: the report gives the chronology of the most significant military events, which begin at 2 a.m. when the Red Guard occupies the two main railway stations of Petrograd, and ends at 11 p.m. when the cannons of the Peter and Paul Fortress fire on the Winter Palace. Then the RMC forces begin their assault, crushing any remaining resistance and arresting the remaining members of the Provisional Government.

At the same time the Second PanRussian Congress of Soviets begins, now the majority is Bolshevik and left SR, which approves Lenin's appeal addressed "To the workers, soldiers and peasants" for an immediate armistice, for the free transfer of land to the soviets, for the control of production and the supply of bread to the cities and what is needed in the countryside. All power will be handled by the Soviets.

News of the insurrection in Moscow and other cities gradually arrive.

8 November: after the almost bloodless insurrection the RMC takes control and management of the primary functions and needs of Petrograd. In the meantime, the counter-revolution rapidly organises itself by setting up its own Committee for the Salvation of the Country, disowns the Second Soviet Congress and presents itself as the heir of the fallen Provisional Government. It gains support from the old state bureaucracy, the services and moderate socialists.

Kerensky, who has taken refuge in the Pskov Headquarters, agrees with Krasnov, commander of the Cossack cavalry, to launch an attack on Petrograd.

In the evening Lenin presents to the PanRussian Congress the detailed decrees on peace, the abolition of secret diplomacy, the abolition of private ownership of land without compensation and the administration of church property transferred to the peasant soviets.

In Moscow, the local RMC alerts its military formations and breaks off all contact with the oppositions.

9 November: the Soviet government telegraphs its peace proposals to all the belligerent countries.

The 700 Cossacks of Krasnov take up position 45 kilometres from Petrograd; in Moscow the first armed clashes begin. Other cities are controlled by the Soviet.

10th November: the Krasnov Cossacks take possession of the imperial residence of Tsarskoe Selo, near Petrograd, garrisoned by 16,000 soldiers; but they declare themselves neutral, a sign of the disintegration of the army. The RMC organises the defences of Petrograd entrusted to the Red Guard and the workers.

In Moscow, the Junkers occupy the Kremlin, the central post office, the telegraph and the telephones, but are driven back the next day by a RMC counter-offensive.

Krasnov does not receive the necessary reinforcements for the attack on the city and remains at the imperial residence, from which he withdraws in the following days fearing an encirclement.

13 November: in Moscow the RMC resumes the military initiative supported by the representatives of 6 Russian armies in the area, who side with the Soviets.

14 November: negotiations with Krasnov for the surrender of Kerensky, who manages to escape. Bolshevik sailors infiltrate the Cossacks, weakening their morale and discipline. In the afternoon Soviet troops capture the last Cossack outpost; Krasnov and Kerensky's staff are arrested.

In Moscow the Bolsheviks, after having conquered the strongholds of the Junkers, begin to bomb the Kremlin, their last refuge.

15 November: General Alekseev, former tsarist commander-in-chief, begins to organise anti-Bolshevik forces in the Cossack territories.

16 November: the final assault on the Kremlin, taken by the Bolsheviks, begins in Moscow.

18 November: Lenin, as President of the Council of People's Commissars, announces the final victory of the revolution in Petrograd and Moscow.

20 November: radio message to all belligerent powers proposing an immediate armistice. The Bolshevik government orders General Duchonin to begin negotiations with the German command and to suspend all military action.

22 November: the Bolshevik Krylenko replaces Duchonin because he refuses to negotiate with the Germans. The latter frees several generals under arrest, including Kornilov and Denikin. An angry mob of Bolshevik soldiers drag Duchonin off the train and massacres him with rifles and bayonets.

### *The Civil War Begins*

The first three important tasks of Soviet power to be resolved from the very first days were: 1st to extend its area of control as far as possible, above all around Petrograd and Moscow, with a solid territorial continuity in order to be able to help any critical areas as easily as possible; 2nd to defend itself as much as possible from the attacks of external and internal enemies, since as early as 20 November the Cossack ataman Kaledin had declared the independence of the Cossack territories of the Don; to his first call more than 2,000 volunteers responded; 3rd to give concrete answers to the material and political demands that had pushed the exploited Russian masses towards revolution. In addition, they had to deal with the serious problem of food and fuel shortages as winter approached, and counteract the speculators.

The activities of the first weeks were pressing and developed in different areas: internal organisation of the Bolshevik power, the first agreements for an armistice to which only the Central Empires, interested in closing the eastern front to launch all their remaining military power on the still open and uncertain western front, responded. First detachments of the Red Guard are sent to counter the various formations of White Cossacks on the Don, who initially control some important cities.

The Cheka, an extraordinary commission with full and unlimited power, was set up to hunt down and eliminate all enemies of the revolution and in particular all saboteurs and hoarders of food, fuel and various materials. Initially made up of trusted revolutionaries, during the Stalinist period it was used to eliminate the entire old revolutionary guard.

The crisis with the Ukrainian Rada was from the beginning complex because immediately after the outbreak of the revolution in February 1917, a central council (Rada) had been set up in Kiev to manage power over a vast area from the Caucasus to the Urals, which also proclaimed itself independent of the Bolshevik power. It was composed of a socialist majority with a strong nationalist presence and a Bolshevik minority. When the Bolsheviks seized power they announced the birth of the Ukrainian republic while maintaining close links with the Bolshevik power, by establishing an ambiguous policy of double-dealing, obstructing any Bolshevik initiative.

Petrograd sent a “Manifesto to the Ukrainian People with Ultimate Demands to the Ukrainian Rada”, which confirmed the policy of the Bolsheviks of selfdetermination of the peoples oppressed by tsarism, while at the same time accusing it of having disarmed the Bolshevik forces in Ukraine, of having unilaterally recalled Ukrainian troops from the front thereby creating a dangerous military disorganisation, but above all of favouring the transit of counter-revolutionary troops towards the Don whose main formations were led by the former tsarist commanders Kaledin, Kornilov, Denikin and Alekseev.

There were 48 hours for a clear answer otherwise the Bolshevik C.C. would consider the Ukraine to be in a state of war against the Bolsheviks.

The answers were so uncertain that Antonov-Ovseenko was given the task of subduing with arms the forces of the Rada and those of the various formations of the White Cossacks, considering the unclear situation of Ukrainian troops loyal and others opposed to the revolution scattered in a confused manner in Russia and the Ukraine.

Ovseenko’s forces numbered 15,000, slightly less than the enemy’s, which, although much more experienced, were scattered over the vast Ukrainian territories and did not obey a unified command. Kaledin was the main enemy and it was necessary to concentrate the best forces against him.

The former tsarist training officer, Artemievich Muravyov, was appointed Bolshevik chief of staff, who devised a strategy of keeping the cobelligerent groups well separated and facing them separately, thus forming three small independent armies with different objectives: the first, entrusted to Sablin, was to head on Novočerkassk, which had become a kind of capital of counter-revolutionary Cossacks; the second, entrusted to Sivers, on Rostov to annihilate

the Army of Volunteers, feared for its great military experience; the third, led by Muravyov, on Kiev to overthrow the Rada. Bolshevik propaganda was counted on to attract the proBolshevik masses and soldiers to the revolution and thus create a front of internal instability among the counter-revolutionaries.

The movements and military tactics of these three armies were entrusted to the local railway network, which allowed rapid movements and attacks, even at night, of the troops and effective supplies to occupy the most important centres and cut off any possibility of connection between the adversaries. In this way, there was not a single war front but a continuous succession of small but effective clashes.

The first battles started in January 1918, in subzero temperatures, from Char'kov, where a Bolshevik government had been formed.

As the Bolshevik columns advanced, internal contradictions exploded within the Rada, which, in a belated attempt to return to the diplomatic route, decided to demobilise part of its small army and dismiss the antiBolshevik nationalist Petljura as war minister.

At the gates of Poltava, the Rada troops put up a timid resistance on 20 January and most of them deserted and joined the Bolsheviks. Having occupied the city, Muravyov ordered the first harsh repression of cadets and officers loyal to the Rada.

Two days later the Rada declared its total independence as a sovereign state, thus giving itself a chance for a separate peace with Germany, considered the only military power capable of stemming the Bolshevik advance, but maintaining contact with the Soviets in a senseless double crossing. The response from Petrograd was harsh, declaring the cessation of operations against the Ukraine as soon as the Ukrainian government was transferred to the Ukrainian Soviets.

The Rada had overestimated the availability of its troops, but only 1200 managed to reach Kiev to defend it while the 3 Bolshevik columns advanced on the capital; in it the Brovary regiment broke out, arresting its officers and declaring itself for the revolution. These were joined by Bolshevik civilians totalling some 2,200 revolutionaries against whom the Rada counterposed a similar number of better trained troops. In their fighting, the revolutionaries approached the government palace, which called back its most trusted and experienced troops from the front, thus making the Bolshevik advance less difficult.

The revolutionaries' fight in Kiev, after their initial successes, gradually receded due to the lack of supplies and support from Muravyov's troops, who had been held up by the sabotage of a railway viaduct. After a week of hard fighting the revolutionaries in Kiev were defeated, suffering the loss of 1100 of their number, plus summary executions of prisoners. The Rada's losses were also substantial at 900.

On 6 February, Muravyov managed to reach Kiev and drew up a threepronged plan of attack with all the forces at his disposal. After two days of fighting with the use of artillery, the Rada decided to evacuate the most important structures of its government protected by the remaining troops chosen as a rearguard, and head for Zytomyr. The Ukrainian republic had lasted 86 days.

Muravyov distinguished himself not only for his military prowess but also for his ferocious repression of all enemies of the revolution, military, civil and religious, which numbered in the thousands. However, he made the strategic mistake of not pursuing and destroying what remained of the Rada, which reorganised itself with the help of the Austro-Hungarians while waiting for more favourable times for a counter-offensive.

Numerous pockets of White Cossack resistance in the Don and Kuban regions still remained.

## Reclaiming Rosa Luxemburg for the Communist Left

In 1969 *Il Programma Comunista* wrote, in issue 5: “191969: The revolutionary proletariat cries, ‘I was, I am, I will be’”, launching a very harsh and entirely justified criticism against “contemporary commemorators” who dare to transform the comrade Lenin considered to be an “eagle”, and who had never ceased to be a revolutionary, into a pious “dove”, a voice of pacification between classes and between states.

Luxemburg’s life was entirely spent in the struggle for the revolution against reformism and her controversy with Lenin can only be critically judged by revolutionaries, as a controversy between great revolutionaries, and never placed at the service of the worn and bloodsoaked banners of eternal “democratic and bourgeois” principles.

*Il Programma Comunista* also published numerous quotations and passages from Rosa, including the following, which were presented at the Party’s meeting in September, 2020.

In 1963 in “La via maestra”, the following words from her work on The Russian Revolution:

“The party of Lenin was the only one which grasped the mandate and duty of a truly revolutionary party and which, by the slogan – All power in the hands of the proletariat and peasantry – insured the continued development of the revolution.

“Thereby the Bolsheviks solved the famous problem of ‘winning a majority of the people,’ which problem has ever weighed on German Social-Democracy like a nightmare. s bred-in-the-bone disciples of parliamentary cretinism, these German Social-Democrats have sought to apply to revolutions the homemade wisdom of the parliamentary nursery: in order to carry anything, you must first have a majority. The same, they say, applies to a revolution: first let’s become a ‘majority’. The true dialectic of revolutions, however, stands this wisdom of parliamentary moles on its head: not through a majority, but through revolutionary tactics to a majority – that’s the way the road runs.

“Only a party which knows how to lead, that is, to advance things, wins support in stormy times. The determination with which, at the decisive moment, Lenin and his comrades offered the only solution which could advance things (“all power in the hands of the proletariat and peasantry”), transformed them almost overnight from a persecuted, slandered, outlawed minority whose leader had to hid like Marat in cellars, into the absolute master of the situation (...)

“Whatever a party could offer of courage, revolutionary farsightedness and consistency in an historic hour, Lenin, Trotsky and all the other comrades have given in good measure. All the revolutionary honor and capacity which western Social-Democracy lacked was represented by the Bolsheviks. Their October uprising was not only the actual salvation of the Russian Revolution; it was also the salvation of the honor of international socialism”.

In 1963, issue 13, “Democratic cretinism”, from November 20, 1918:

“All the ‘people’, the whole ‘nation’, are to be called upon to decide by majority resolution the further fate of the revolution. This slogan is a matter of course to the open and insidious agents of the ruling classes (...) they want to spare themselves the revolution, the use of force, the civil war with all its horrors. Petty bourgeois illusions! They imagine that the mightiest revolution since the beginning of mankind will develop in such a form that the various social classes will come together, engage in a pleasant, calm and ‘dignified’ discussion with each other, and will afterwards hold a vote, perhaps even one with a famous ‘division’ (...) When the capitalist class sees that it is in the minority, it, as a welldisciplined parliamentary party, will declare with a sigh,

“There’s nothing we can do! We see that we are outvoted. All right, we shall submit and hand over all our lands, factories, mines, all our fireproof safes and our handsome profits to the workers...”

“These profound Marxists have forgotten the abc of socialism. They have forgotten that the bourgeoisie is not a parliamentary party, but a ruling class in possession of all the means of economic and social power”.

In 1963, issue 14, “Parliamentarism or revolutionary struggle”, from 1918:

“Parliamentary majority meant nothing for the defense of bourgeois revolutions. Yet, what was the opposition between bourgeoisie and feudalism compared to the gigantic gulf that has opened today between labor and capital? What was the class consciousness of the fighters of the two camps that faced each other in 1649 and 1789 compared to the deadly, inextinguishable hatred that flares up in our day between the proletariat and the capitalist class? It was not in vain that Carlo Marx illuminated with his scientific lantern the most secret springs of the economic and politi-

cal mechanism of bourgeois society. It was not in vain that all of his behavior, down to the most sublime forms of feeling and thought, appeared in a sensational way, as an emanation of the fundamental fact that it draws its life, like a vampire, from the blood of the proletariat!

“It is the last great battle, which puts at stake the maintenance or abolition of exploitation; it is a turning point in the history of humanity, a struggle in which there can be no loopholes, no compromises, no mercy. And this struggle, which by the breadth of its tasks surpasses all that has been known so far, should accomplish what no class struggle, no revolution has ever achieved: dissolve the deadly struggle between two worlds in a sweet murmur of oratorical battles in parliament and majority decisions.

“Parliamentarism was for the proletariat an arena of class struggle as long as the daily grind of bourgeois society lasted: it was the platform from which the masses, gathered around the banner of socialism, could train themselves in combat. Today we are in the midst of the proletarian revolution, and it is a question of beating the axe against the tree of capitalist exploitation. The bourgeois parliament, like the class domination of the bourgeoisie of which it is the essential political objective, has lost its right to exist. Now the most open, the most naked of class struggles enters the scene. Capital and labor have nothing more to say to each other, they have nothing more to do than engage in merciless handtohand combat, so that the struggle decides who will be thrown to the ground”.

In 1968, issue 14, from Reform or Revolution, 1899:

“It is contrary to history to represent work for reforms as a longdrawn out revolution and revolution as a condensed series of reforms. A social transformation and a legislative reform do not differ according to their duration but according to their content.

“The secret of historic change through the utilization of political power resides precisely in the transformation of simple quantitative modification into a new quality, or to speak more concretely, in the passage of an historic period from one given form of society to another.

“That is why people who pronounce themselves in favor of the method of legislative reform in place and in contradistinction to the conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer and slower road to the same goal, but a different goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new society they take a stand for surface modifications of the old society. If we follow the political conceptions of revisionism, we arrive at the same conclusion that is reached when we follow the economic theories of revisionism. Our program becomes not the realization of socialism, but the reform of capitalism; not the suppression of the wage labor system but the diminution of exploitation, that is, the suppression of the abuses of capitalism instead of suppression of capitalism itself (...)

“The production relations of capitalist society approach more and more the production relations of socialist society. But on the other hand, its political and juridical relations established between capitalist society and socialist society a steadily rising wall. This wall is not overthrown but is on the contrary strengthened and consolidated by the development of social reforms and the course of democracy. Only the hammer blow of revolution, that is today, the conquest of political power by the proletariat can break down this wall”.

In 1971, issue 23, “Continuity of the practical program”, also from Reform or Revolution:

“Our program would be a miserable scrap of paper if it could not serve us in all eventualities, at all moments of the struggle and if it did not serve us by its application and not by its nonapplication.

“If our program contains the formula of the historical development of society from capitalism to socialism, it must also formulate, in all its characteristic fundamentals, all the transitory phases of this development and it should, consequently, be able to indicate to the proletariat what ought to be its corresponding action at every moment on the road toward socialism. There can be no time for the proletariat when it will be obliged to abandon its program or be abandoned by it”.

“Order prevails in Berlin” is the last text written by Rosa. It appeared in *Die Rote Fahne* on January 14, 1919:

“Order prevails in Berlin!” You foolish lackeys! Your “order” is built on sand. Tomorrow the revolution will “rise up again, clashing its weapons”, and to your horror it will proclaim with trumpets blazing: “I WAS, I AM, I WILL BE!”

We reclaim this cry, this certainty. This is the only way to remember Karl and Rosa. Only in this way will the dead of yesterday and the dead of tomorrow rise again. “Whether we live or not, our program will live on”.

## The Concept of Dictatorship - In Soviet Russia

### *The Democratic Dictatorship of Workers and Peasants*

From the dictatorship of the proletariat, examined through Lenin's writings and speeches until 1922, we now take several steps back to examine the concept of the "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants". This form relates to a stage which had passed in the countries of mature capitalism, but which at the beginning of the twentieth century still concerned countries such as Russia, where the bourgeois revolution had either not taken place or had not reached its extreme consequences, with the inevitable redemption of counter-revolution.

We have said that with 1871 and the Paris Commune, the era of the proletariat's alliances with other classes, in view of the bourgeois, antifeudal and antiabsolutist revolutions, had come to an end in Europe. We are certainly not being sophists if we reiterate that for us materialists there is no "absolute" truth, but that the truth is always concrete. The year 1871 is the culmination of a development of world capitalism which, at its height, in Western Europe and North America, is already ripe for socialist revolution, since the bourgeois revolution has unquestionably routed the previous world. The proletarians of these countries can then pose the problem of taking power exclusively into their own hands, and putting themselves at the head of the proletariat and the world communist revolution.

Much of the world was still far away from this point of arrival and of departure. That includes Russia, still semi-feudal and with a poorly developed capitalism. In these conditions it was possible for the party of the proletariat to think of temporary alliances with other classes in view of a complete bourgeois revolution, which, once completed and consolidated, would make these classes mortal enemies. What 1848 had been for Western Europe, February 1917 was for Russia.

Lenin did not accept the conception of the populists, that Russia could even skip the capitalist phase, and reiterated that in Russia there was already capitalism, albeit weak and with a feudal state superstructure. Marx's analysis of capitalism, unlike what the populists thought, was also valid for Russia.

Trotsky, in his "1905" writes: "the revolution killed our "originality". The Mensheviks accused Lenin of not being Marxist enough, since he was concerned with the bourgeois revolution and not exclusively with the socialist one, and the socialist-revolutionaries, heirs of the populists, accused him of being too Marxist, since he did not take into consideration the possibility of arriving at socialism through the peasantry, skipping the capitalist phase.

The concept of revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants then generated misrepresentations, in good faith or not, the outcome of which was the entry into the quagmire of counterrevolution. One blunder was that of Trotsky, who saw in the theses of April 1917 a reversal of Lenin's previous positions, failing to see the continuity with theses already expounded from 1902-1903. Certainly worse was the Stalinist reading which foresaw the possibility and the "decision" to pass immediately to the "construction" of socialism.

No less pernicious was the watchword, in the III International, of "workers' governments", derived from Lenin's revolutionary democratic dictatorship, but used to give life to alliances with "sympathetic" parties. The outcome was that it was impossible to exercise the proletarian dictatorship, that is the dictatorship of the communist party, and the counter-revolution triumphed. It makes no difference whether initially such alliances and mergers, imposed on the communist parties by the International, were mistakes made in good faith. As regards the mergers imposed with "kindred" parties we have said, and we repeat, that even our great Lenin fell into error here.

In Lenin's writing "Two Tactics of Social Democracy", of 1905, he speaks of the necessity of a Russian democratic revolution and of a provisional revolutionary government in which the party, under certain conditions, can participate, in the knowledge that such a revolution will strengthen the rule of the bourgeoisie:

"The final victory of the revolution over Tsarism is the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants (...) It will not, however, be evident that the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants will not be the final victory of the revolution... It will not, however, be a socialist dictatorship, but a democratic dictatorship, which will not be able to undermine (without the revolution having gone through various intermediate stages) the foundations of capitalism (...) Nothing will increase the revolutionary energy of the world proletariat more than this, nothing will shorten its path to complete victory as much as this decisive victory of the revolution begun in Russia (...) The complete victory of the present revolution will mark the end of the democratic revolution



and the beginning of a decisive struggle for the socialist revolution (...) The watchword of the “democratic” dictatorship expresses precisely this historically limited character of the present revolution”.

In 1917 Lenin’s “April Theses” did not deviate from the tactics of 1905, despite the contrary opinion of Trotsky and the Stalinists. Lenin recognized in the Soviet the form taken now, but also in 1905, by the “revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants”. The Bolsheviks were a small minority. A dualism of powers was created between the Petrograd Soviet and the provisional government of Prince Lvov, appointed by the major parties in the Duma, a representative assembly with little power. In May Lvov was succeeded by the socialist-revolutionary Kerensky.

We read in “Communism” No. 21:

“The revolutions in history (...) are three: antifeudal revolution led by the bourgeoisie with the alliance of the petty bourgeoisie – democratic revolution led by the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie – socialist revolution led worldwide by the proletariat alone. Lenin tells us that in this scheme the Russian revolution has concluded the first phase and stopped between the first and second. The task of the party is to make the revolution reach the second phase, but the leap to the third is not yet mature. The dualism of power expressed by the Lvov government and the soviet, is therefore not between the bourgeois dictatorship and the dictatorship of the proletariat, but between the bourgeois dictatorship and the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants (...) In such a situation it would be madness for the party to try to bring down the Lvov government, because it has the confidence of the soviets. The historical and social but also political conditions are not ripe in April for the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, which would be the dictatorship of the proletariat.

“On July 12, the death penalty was reestablished at the front against deserters, the sentences were executed immediately, what had been predicted took place. The party had from the events of July decisive lessons for the future of the revolution. The sudden change of phase, the change of the historical situation, was immediately understood. The necessity to pass from the watchword of the peaceful transfer of all power to the “revolutionary democratic dictatorship” to the subsequent one, already foreseen, of the direct confrontation with the bourgeoisie and the petitbourgeoisie (...). ) In Russia, a historical-political phase that in Europe had lasted fifty years, the so-called phase of “gradual and peaceful” development of liberal-bourgeois democracy, was burned in six months (...) But if it was the proletariat that took power, it could only take it for itself, even if allied with the poor peasants. This means that the Democratic Revolutionary Dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasants would be realized in the political form most favorable to the world revolution of dictatorship of the proletariat and the poor and landless peasants; while the economic tasks to be carried out in Russia remained unchanged: development of capitalism. Does the tactic change? No, the historical phase changes!”

On August 25, Kornilov, commander of the army, attempted a coup d’état by marching on Petrograd to crush the revolution: he was defeated and arrested thanks to the spontaneous reaction of workers, soldiers and sailors, assisted by revolutionary committees of selfdefense and departments of red guards led by the Bolsheviks. That sort of united front against Kornilov is the last expression and manifestation, in the Russian revolution, of the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants. When in the following years, in the International, single political fronts will be proposed again in areas not of double revolution but already fully capitalist, the result will inevitably be the weakening and then the denaturing of the party.

Let us return to “Communism” No. 21:

“That the party would ally itself with the petitbourgeois parties in order to repel a real counter-revolutionary attempt by the old classes ousted by the February revolution had been expected since 1848. The strange, if we want the unexpected, was that after July the Mensheviks and social revolutionaries always had the strength to oppose the reaction, had a revolutionary “regurgitation”. Here is the exception. Lenin relies on this positive inertia to propose the tactics of the historical phase before July, which represents the normal development of the Russian national revolution”.

In the victorious struggle against Kornilov we are still at the Revolutionary Democratic Dictatorship of the workers and peasants.

In the Russia of 1917 the democratic and radical bourgeois revolution was the order of the day, not the proletarian and socialist revolution, for which a fully deployed capitalism was lacking. The compromise proposed by Lenin

in the days following the attempted coup was not accepted by the petty bourgeoisie, which was incapable of carrying out its own revolution. To the proletariat, and its Communist Party, fell the gigantic task of completing the bourgeois revolution, under its own direction and dictatorship. This was done in order to create the conditions for a future development, hoped for as near, towards socialism; and all this while waiting to pass the baton, and the direction of the world revolution, to the western proletariat (starting with the German one) once it had taken power in the countries of more advanced capitalism.

This did not happen, and the fate of the first victorious proletarian revolution in history was therefore marked. We have already said, and we repeat, that as it is not the great men, the heroes, who make history, neither do traitors.

### *The Soviets*

On the nature and functions of the soviets there have been many misrepresentations and from various directions. Our newspaper “Il Soviet”, on April 15, 1919, wrote that

“Sovietism is not a hodgepodge of trade unions (...) but the character of the organism is political”.

At that time in Italy, with the exception of our comrades on the left, very few understood what the soviets were, often mistaken for trade union organizations or for a new and miraculous organizational formula. Only we communists said that the organ of the dictatorship of the proletariat is the Party, and not the trade union or other economic organism, and not the Soviet. We have also said that the Soviet system is not a government of the working class categories, but a government of the working class.

In “The Soviet” of January 4, 1920 we read:

“To maintain that the workers’ councils, even before the fall of the bourgeoisie, are already organs, not only of political struggle, but of the economic-technical setting up of the communist system, is a pure and simple return to socialist gradualism. This, whether called reformism or syndicalism, is defined by the error that the proletariat can emancipate itself by gaining ground in economic relations while capitalism still holds, with the state, political power”.

The State of the proletariat does not derive its organizational strength from constitutional canons and representative schemes. At the Second Congress of the Third International (July-August 1920), in the “Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution”, the right pyramid is affirmed: 1. The party, 2. The soviet, 3. The trade union. The party must influence and direct the soviet.

We read: “When the German communists of the “left” (...) declare that “even the party must increasingly adapt itself to the idea of the soviets or assume a proletarian character” they simply mean that the Communist Party should dissolve in the soviets, that the soviets would be able to replace it. This idea is radically false and reactionary”.

Already in 1905 Lenin saw in the soviets a double function: as a trade union organization aimed at all workers, and as a political organization constituting a provisional government in embryo. The soviets, more than the organ of struggle of the revolution, are the form of revolutionary state power: they are the content of the “democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants”.

The forms of proletarian organization may change: we cannot know whether in the future, besides the party and the trade unions, which are indispensable, there will still be a need for soviets or other intermediate bodies. Certainly they were not a local Russian phenomenon.

In our text No. 5, “Lenin’s Extremism”, the subject is carried out with extreme clarity:

“Lenin’s brief statement is this: ‘In the spontaneous development of struggle the Soviet form of organization is born’. The discussions of this period on the importance of the soviets foreshadow the great struggle of the years 1917-20”. We did not and will not conclude to a miraculous faith in the “new form”, of the type of delivery: the soviet is always right (...). It is well known that the first sentence quoted, on the birth of the soviets from the spontaneous development of the struggle, is used to describe Lenin as the theorist of “spontaneity”, according to which the Communist Party should only wait for the masses to discover or invent the forms of the revolution, without daring to predict them beforehand. Such banality, on the one hand, recalls the way of thinking of Lenin’s fiercest enemies (...) the revisionists (...) and, on the other, that of idealists like Gramsci, who saw Lenin as having thrown away Marxist determinism and invented new forms! The soviets, it will be said, had not been prophesied by any theorist (...)

“The soviets are the form of organization of the proletarian state, and one can also say the constitutional form of the proletarian state (...) We would be in utopia if we described the forms of organization of the future society, of the future state; we are in the theory of scientific communism when we describe the forces of revolution and their relations (...) Theoretically and in principle the constituted state, in our meaning, is an indispensable but transient weapon in history, as are classes and class organizational forms (trade unions, soviets), and only the political party today a class organ can consider itself eternal as a human organ (of sorts). The party is defined by its content, which is its historical doctrine and revolutionary action; other organizations are defined by the form, and can be filled with different content.

“In fact, what are the theses that Lenin reduces to an admirable synthesis here?

1. The Russian struggle revealed the soviet form in history in 1905.
2. The revolutionary Marxists saw in the soviet the organ of proletarian power, while the opportunists tried to subordinate it, and succeeded in many places and times, in order to empty it of content, to claim that it would disappear after the struggle, or that it could coexist in a democratic republic alongside an elected parliament.
3. The formula of power to the soviets shouldn't be given if they are in the hands of the Mensheviks or similar, but only when it leads to the power of the Communist Party.
4. (2nd Congress). In Western countries, soviets must not be artificially formed before the assault on power, precisely because no form is automatically revolutionary.

The soviets express the proletarian dictatorship established in our doctrine before it arose in history (Marx for France 1848 and 1871, in Lenin: “State and Revolution”) because the bourgeoisie and landowners don't have access to their elections. If there were an elective chamber alongside and this formed a ministry, the soviets would be an empty mask.

Here is the discussion of 1905 being verified by the facts of 1917..! The soviet... is to the revolution in which capitalism falls as the constitutional parliament is to the revolution in which feudalism falls. They are the organizing structures of states emerging from the revolution which destroyed an ancient regime. In this clarification we call them forms of state organization, which is a different thing from the social forms or successive modes of production...

The Menshevik and bourgeois vision of the Russian revolution wanted to enclose it in a form of state machinery not unlike that of capitalist countries: electoral democracy.

The Marxist and Bolshevik vision foresaw and knew that the revolution would only stop at the victory of the proletariat, hegemonic over the other poor classes, and therefore with its dictatorship.

In our studies on the Russian revolution we recalled how even before 1903 Lenin proposed the formula: Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasants. In 1917 he arrived in Russia and announced the complete, universal, international formula, the center of the Marxist doctrine of the revolution: Dictatorship of the proletariat.

All of Lenin's work tends to establish that the Russian revolution does not take place according to specific “local” formulas, but that in it, and since 1905, the working classes struggled in the forefront, developing in the struggle a form of their own, the soviet. Though it had been expected for many years as a delayed democratic revolution, the formation of the soviet transfers it into an immediate revolution of the proletarian class, which fills the new form with itself, and therefore makes of it a form which is not interclassist, not democratic, not popular and not populist, but classist. It linked internationally to the vanguard proletariat, guided internally by the Marxist party, and therefore appeared to fill itself with the content which the revolutionary theory had surely foreseen: class power, class state, class dictatorship, goals that history only reaches when the class has organized itself into a party, as written in the Manifesto of 1848.

And it can organize itself into the ruling class, for the destruction of the classdivided society, because power, the state, dictatorship, are functions of the party. We have already seen that another of Lenin's theses, which we have always defended with him against the truly infantile, is that the soviet doesn't exclude the party, as many in Europe believed, but demands its presence and efficiency, because it's a simple form of organization that must be filled with content, and the party is the force of history that alone can bring it.

The first newspaper of the Italian left was “Il Soviet”. It opposed the proposal of many maximalists to found soviets in Italy in 1919. It called for a revolutionary party with a clear theory, and free from opportunists. It argued,

against the immediatist visions, that the soviets were not a network of trade unions or company councils, but the territorial and centralized fabric of the new proletarian state, whose framework had to rise in the phase of insurrection. They were therefore organs of a political nature, but their structure needed the active function of the revolutionary party, for the revolution to win.

And with Lenin, these lessons were drawn from the Russian lessons of history, which fit perfectly with the classical design of our doctrine. Reality provides the forms, but theory provides the content, that is, the forces and their relationship and conflict. In these lapidary passages, if we believe the German version in our possession, Lenin used the word prophecy:

“The contrasting discussions of 19057 on the importance of the soviets prophesied the great struggles of 191720”.

Adhere to Leninism not those who swerve and waver, but those who are not afraid to commit themselves to prophesying the future.

## The Formation of the Indian Nation

The comrade continued his series of reports on the history of India by describing the events leading up to the 1977 elections which saw the success of the Janata Party.

Bangladesh independence in 1971 finally unmasked capitalist India which had long since abandoned the fanciful litany of nonviolence and saw the utopian project of nonalignment, which in the plans of the Indian bourgeoisie would have favoured national capitalism, finally fade away.

On 16 December 1971, the surrender of Pakistani troops established India's regional hegemony, at the expense of its smaller neighbouring states.

Bangladesh itself soon showed anti-Indian tendencies. Although the army was quickly withdrawn, numerous Indian businessmen and merchants travelled to fertile Bangladesh, exploiting the local population.

A few years after independence, on the Ganges, in Indian territory near the border, the Farakka dam was built; it would soon become evident how this monument of capitalist India, useful for the regimentation of the waters of the great river, had radically changed the hydrographic network of the area, leading thousands of peasant families to starvation, and to forced emigration to the slums of the big cities, Calcutta and Dacca.

In March 1972, elections were held in the states. Once again the Gandhi party triumphed, not least because of the prestige of the military victory. As in the past, Indira found herself promising and planning a series of reforms, although still at the head of a party that remained influenced by backward classes, particularly in the endless countryside, and within the Congress.

The euphoria of victory over the Pakistani enemy faded quickly. In addition to the considerable costs of the war, from 1972 to 1975 the unfavourable monsoon rains damaged agriculture. The state was unable to cope with this, not least because of the beginning of the downward phase of global capitalism. A further worsening occurred in 1973 when the price of crude oil quadrupled.

The living conditions of the majority of the Indian population remained precarious. Social reforms were only a vague electoral memory. The attempt to initiate a new phase of land redistribution ended in failure; ditto for the nationalisation of the wholesale grain trade and distribution at subsidised prices.

The umpteenth failure of the reformist policy reflected the dispute over land reforms. It was evident that the ruling agrarian classes continued to exert considerable influence in the ruling party and throughout the state bureaucracy.

Indian capitalism did not take off and poverty increased. Almost half of the population could not meet their normal food needs. The legal abolition of castes had not affected the condition of the Indian peasant pariah. The much vaunted reforms were a failure, most peasants continued to have insufficient land or no land at all, while large estates remained run by archaic methods of production.

The few international subsidies went to farms that were able to invest in machinery, fertilisers, irrigation works and equipment, and storage facilities. While the few modern farms progressed, the conditions of millions of poor peasants worsened, partly because land became unaffordable.

The monsoon remained the arbiter of the fate of millions of Indians, and in the unfavourable seasons, cereal production declined greatly. A tragedy of the modern, torn and improvident bourgeois world: the conflicts between the various states of the Union prevented the floods of the Ganges, Bramaputra, Nurmanda and other minor rivers from flowing into the semiarid regions.

In this scenario, the Indian ruling classes, while vying for control of state institutions, acted united against the common enemy, the proletariat, which in May 1974 raised its head and showed its strength in a massive general strike of railway workers. It was called for pay rises and the observance of the eight-hour day. It lasted three weeks and drew more than 1.7 million workers of every race, religion and caste into the struggle. Episodes of workers' solidarity multiplied in several cities in India, some factories joined the strike and relaunched their class demands.

Faced with the danger, the Indian bourgeoisie did not delay in regrouping and repressing the movement harshly. More than 30,000 strikers were thrown in jail and the police committed several murders of workers and union activists.

For at least a decade, the railway workers had been fighting hard for better working and living conditions, a struggle that was managed by the many official trade unions representing all the government and opposition parties, which therefore, by nature, did not tend towards unity of action. The results were disappointing because of the attitude of the trade union centres, some of which were ready to extinguish the flames of the struggle and marginalise the most combative workers.

The anger of the railway workers led to open rebellion against these unions, which were first openly challenged and fought against and then abandoned. It was the subsequent grassroots union structures, created in a very short time, that allowed the workers to express themselves with energy and determination.

The repression was heavy, a bitter defeat for the entire Indian workers' movement, which struggled to recover. But it was also a valuable lesson that showed the young Indian proletariat the right way to defend itself against the attacks of the bosses and their state: organisations dedicated to the most intransigent struggle and solidarity with their class brothers.

While the railway workers' strike was still going on, a nuclear device was detonated in the Rajasthan desert on 18 May 1974. With this, which they called "Buddha's Smile", India became the sixth nuclear power after the USA, China, Britain, France and Russia, although in the past it had always clamoured for general nuclear disarmament. It was an obvious response to the nuclear threat from the enemy China.

But the nuclear test could not obscure the unresolved agrarian issue and the misery of millions of peasants, coupled with a vibrant labour movement to intimidate the Indian ruling class.

In June 1975, the Allahabad High Court invalidated Gandhi's election four years earlier, accusing her of irregularities. Gandhi reacted with extraordinary powers. All political opponents, including Congressmen, were imprisoned. The self-styled Communist Party of India, supported by Moscow, was excluded from the persecution. Trade union activists were particularly targeted. Total censorship was imposed on the media.

In this heated struggle between the bourgeoisie, it was the subordinate classes, those towards which the emergency regime had in fact been proclaimed, who suffered most. The poor inhabitants were forcibly removed from the Muslim quarter in old Delhi around the big mosque, and attempts were made to impose a senseless birth control policy.

In this political instability, Gandhi was forced to call new elections. The state of emergency was suspended and some of the political prisoners released. The bourgeois forces hostile to the prime minister emerged in a common anti-Congress front, the Janata Party. The Indian ruling class, weak and divided, was thus trying to tamp down a deepening social emergency. The social reform policies promoted during the emergency had frightened the conservatives, the suspension of their democratic freedoms had frightened the bourgeoisie, but above all the social reforms had reached only limited sectors of the immense Indian masses, increasingly impoverished by the development, albeit retarded, of capitalism.

## The Black Question in the United States

### *The Party's Work on Race*

To some coincidence, a group of North American members had embarked on a large project pertaining to Black Liberation and the Proletarian Movement in the United States in May, before the publicized murders and resurgence of Black Lives Matter. The work is to be a thorough investigation of race relations based in the party's writings as well as those of the historic workers' movement. The work has been outlined, a committee formed and recently further solidified, but little formal work has occurred as of yet. The outline currently appears as such:

### *Draft Outline: Black Liberation and the Proletarian Movement*

- Introduction
- From Chattel Slavery to Serfdom and Wage Slavery
- Blacks in the Union Movement: From the Knights of Labor to the IWW
- Blacks and the Socialist Movement: Socialist Labor and Socialist Parties
- The African Blood Brotherhood and American Communism
- The American Negro Labor Congress and the Emergence of the "Native Republic" Thesis
- Communist League of Struggle and Chambers of Negro Labor
- The Revolutionary Workers League and its Rejection of Self-Determination
- Trotskyist Discussions on Black Liberation

This outline, coupled with integration of Party texts, leaves the project anticipating an end total of quite a lengthy amount of text.

Other points of attention for general work on race should be as follows: race being used as a wedge issue, and the populism and ideology of Trump. As a wedge issue, race separates the working class between the Democratic and Republican parties. There is a need to understand this dynamic and not just adopt a more radical version of the leftliberal discussion points, which is likely due to this milieu we draw from. The rightpopulism which is gaining support in the United States working class is more complex than the Democrats and Social-Democrats in the US make it out to be and often, their simplistic rhetoric is driving the growth of right-populism.

### *Slavery, Serfdom, Waged Labor: A Peculiar Institution Born from Peculiar Conditions*

In the fifteenth century, following the lead of the Portuguese explorer Prince Henry the Navigator, Portuguese traders traveled along the west African coast in an attempt to find a shorter route to India. When they encountered the tribal peoples of Africa, the traders saw a tremendous opportunity for profit, and engaged in kidnappings as well as established trade relations with tribal leaders from who they purchased enslaved prisoners of war.

On April 10, 1606, the English King James I would grant the newly founded jointstock Virginia Company of London a royal charter to establish a colony in North America. This was the first time that a jointstock company was given permission to establish a colony rather than giving charters to private individuals, following the failures of the colonization attempts in Newfoundland (1583) and Roanoke Island (1585) by Sir Humphrey Gilbert and Sir Walter Raleigh, respectively. The Virginia Company would establish Jamestown, importing the nascent bourgeois mode of production to North America. The colony had trouble from its inception, with the colonists facing starvation and disease, a consequence of the swampy environment, which had poor soil and high humidity – a habitat that was perfect for disease-carrying mosquitoes, but not so perfect for the poor souls who had the misfortune of living there. By 1610, over 80% of the Jamestown population had died. It took the ruthless military discipline enforced by John Smith, a form of barracks communism imposed by conditions of extreme

scarcity, and the establishment of trade relations with the nearby Native Powhatans, that saved the colony from complete destruction.

In these conditions, replicated throughout the Chesapeake Bay colonies, with high mortality rates and where the land was plentiful but tough to grow crops, there was little incentive for free laborers to move to the colonies and stay on the land. Without a supply of free labor to meet the demand, forced labor would be required. In 1619, the first recorded ship carrying captured Africans to the British North American colonies would arrive in the Colony of Virginia. This was not yet racial chattel slavery, but indentured servitude, a form of temporary contractual serfdom where the laborer would be tied to his master and the land for several years, usually between four years and seven years, and once they had fulfilled their contract they would be freed and granted a few acres of land for themselves. The Africans were not yet seen as “black”, but were rather considered Christians and thus exempt from slavery which in feudal and semifederal Europe was reserved for nonChristians.

The conception of “race” would develop in tandem with the expansion and entrenchment of the system of African chattel slavery in the colonies. In 1640, the African indentured servant John Punch attempted to escape from the Virginia colony to Maryland with two fellow white indentured servants. They would be caught and brought to the General Court of the Virginia Governors’ Council to be sentenced. According to the Council’s judgement:

Whereas Hugh Gwyn hath by order from this Board brought back from Maryland three servants formerly run away from the said Gwyn, the court doth therefore order that the said three servants shall receive the punishment of whipping and have thirty stripes apiece. One called Victor, a Dutchman, the other a Scotchman called James Gregory, shall first serve out their times with their master according to their Indentures, and one whole year apiece after the time of their service is expired by their said indentures in recompense of his loss sustained by their absence, and after that service to their said master is expired, to serve the colony for three whole years apiece. And that the third being a negro named John Punch shall serve his said master or his assigns for the time of his natural life here or elsewhere.

In 1662, the colony of Virginia established the legal principle of *partus sequitur ventrem*, which decreed that the status of the child would be inherited from that of the mother. This made slavery in the colonies a heritable condition, unlike indentured servitude. Thus, the child of an enslaved African woman would be born a slave, and even if the child had more European ancestry than African ancestry, even if European physical traits were much more prominent than African traits, they would be considered an inferior “negro”, this inferiority being the justification for their subordinate position in the social division of labor. The conception of “racism”, of the superiority of the white race over the black race thus developed as the ideological reflection of the confinement of an entire ethnic group of people to the role of a most wretched and exploited class – the “negro slave”.

Over the course of the latter half of the 1600s, the conditions of the indentured servants and small farmers in the Virginia Colony deteriorated, as they faced higher taxes from the colonial government, increased economic competition from other colonies, falling tobacco prices, and more expensive goods from England, as well as poor weather and Native raids. Their situation would only further deteriorate when in 1670, voting rights would be restricted to property owners. In 1676 the farmers finally reached their breaking point, and under the leadership of the wealthy landowner Nathaniel Bacon, thousands of Virginian frontiersmen – small farmers and indentured servants, both white and black, against the orders of Governor William Berkeley, organized into a militia and raided several Native American villages. Alarmed, Berkeley called elections to the Virginia House of Burgesses over the Native American issue but it would backfire as the newly elected House, mostly wealthy supporters of Bacon, voted to abolish property qualifications in voting and limit the governor’s power. Following Bacon’s lead the rebels turned against the governor and his aristocratic supporters and burned Virginia Colony to the ground. Berkeley fled, however barely two months later Bacon would die of disease and the leaderless and disorganized rebellion would be crushed by English troops. Yet despite its brief existence Bacon’s rebellion terrified the bourgeois landowners and hastened the development of racism to divide the laboring classes.

When it was first introduced into the Americas, slavery had a significantly patriarchal character alongside the commercial production of tobacco: the production of means of subsistence for both the slave and the master.



Thus, while brutal, there was a limit to this brutality as the master had an interest in preserving the health and life of the slave for his own sake. However, with the rise of the commercial trade of cotton, slavery would be completely formally subsumed to the international market and thus the bourgeois mode of production. Commercial slavery would reach incomprehensible levels of barbarity hitherto unknown in previous slave societies. In *Capital: Volume I*, Marx wrote:

[A]s soon as people, whose production still moves within the lower forms of slavelabour, corvéelabour, &c., are drawn into the whirlpool of an international market dominated by the capitalistic mode of production, the sale of their products for export becoming their principal interest, the civilised horrors of overwork are grafted on the barbaric horrors of slavery, serfdom, &c. Hence the negro labour in the Southern States of the American Union preserved something of a patriarchal character, so long as production was chiefly directed to immediate local consumption. But in proportion, as the export of cotton became of vital interest to these states, the overworking of the negro and sometimes the using up of his life in 7 years of labour became a factor in a calculated and calculating system. It was no longer a question of obtaining from him a certain quantity of useful products. It was now a question of production of surplus-labour itself.

### *The Great American Problem*

The rise of commercial slavery in the nascent United States was inversely proportional to the decline of patriarchal slavery, particularly in the North where slavery would be banned in Vermont in 1777 and Massachusetts in 1783. The remaining Northern states would gradually outlaw slavery: Pennsylvania in 1780, New Hampshire in 1783, Connecticut and Rhode Island in 1784, New York in 1785, and New Jersey in 1804. The establishment of an independent bourgeois parliamentary republic and the creation of a national market thus provided a powerful impetus to the disappearance of antiquated social forms in the North. Even in the South, there were some movements towards abolition, such as a voluntary manumission movement where plantation owners freed their slaves. Between abolition in the North and manumission in the South, the population of freed blacks would increase from 7.9 percent in 1790 to 13.5 percent by 1810. Unable to compete with wagelabor, slavery seemed to be one foot out the door, and the bourgeoisie seemed relieved that a gradual and peaceful solution might emerge. Yet an invention would change everything.

In 1794, the inventor Eli Whitney would patent a mechanical machine for the separation of seeds from the cotton: the cotton gin. Before its invention, a slave could only process half a kilogram of cotton in a day. With the gin, the slave could now process 50 kilograms in that same time frame. Typical of capitalistic relations of production, a machine that made labor more productive and easier on the laborer would be transformed into a machine for the subordination and exploitation of labor on a monstrous scale. With the increased demand for cotton by the fastgrowing textile industry in Great Britain and the invention of the gin, the plantation system was reinvigorated, as slavery produced the cotton that supplied British industrialization.

By 1840, the South grew about 60 percent of the cotton in the world and provided about 70 percent of the cotton consumed by the British textile industry. Between 1790 and 1860 the slave population increased by 500 percent, transforming the ethnic composition of the North American continent.

The contradiction between the bourgeois mode of production based on free wagelabor in the North and the mode of production based on slave labor in the South would become the defining question of the republic. Either a territory would permit slavery, in which case the large plantation owners would have a massive advantage over small and family farms and reap mas-

Year	Slave Population	Annual Cotton Production Pounds	Prod. per Slave
1790	654,121	1,500,000	2
1800	851,532	35,000,000	41
1810	1,103,700	85,000,000	77
1820	1,509,904	160,000,000	106
1830	1,983,860	331,000,000	167
1840	2,481,390	834,000,000	336
1850	3,200,364	1,000,000,000	312
1860	3,950,511	2,280,000,000	577

sive profits that discouraged investment in the development of industry, or slavery would be banned to the benefit of the independent farmers and industrialists. Market forces, production for production's sake, demanded the continuous territorial extension of both wage labor and slavery and at the same time this economic competition translated to political competition as neither the bourgeoisie nor the slave owners wanted to be outnumbered by the other in Congress. Thus the expansion of American territory brought with it constant political debates over whether new territories should be "free" or "slave" states, debates which masked the clash between irreconcilable class forces. The establishment of a parliamentary republic had resulted in the emergence of two political parties: a "federalist" party in the North which favored policies that increased political and economic centralization such as a stronger federal government and creation of a strong national bank which would benefit the urban bourgeoisie, and an "antifederalist" party in the South which feared the emergence of a financial oligarchy, opposed centralization and favored state autonomy to the benefit of the slaveowners and independent farmers.

American bourgeois democracy thus contained within it the struggle of three great bourgeois classes: the northern urban bourgeoisie, the southern rural slaveowners, and the incredibly numerous small farmers. From the founding of the United States to the Civil War, the constantly shifting balance of power between the two parties would hinge on the small farmers whose contradictory interests: on the one hand the opposition to federal regulations and high finance, on the other hand, the opposition to competition with slavery, would find them first on one side and then the other. As long as there remained territory westwards to expand to the small farmers were the natural allies of the plantation owners as they both sought to cultivate their land independently of the grip of urban financial and commercial capital, however once expansion reached its natural limit at the Pacific coast then the supply of land became limited and thus small farmers were at risk of being squeezed out by the plantation owners who had become too large to compete with. The Democratic Party in the South became dominated by the wealthy plantation owners who had become so powerful that they the South had become their exclusive class dictatorship – the infamous "Slave Power" which the urban bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie and small farmers increasingly feared as a threat to the democracy as this power sought to impose its will over the North and West. The passing of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 caused further alarm as now free states were compelled to aid slaveowners in catching fugitive slaves living in their territories, thus partly importing the relations of production of slavery into the capitalist free states.

At the same time the business ties between the western farmers and urban bourgeoisie strengthened as trade increased and became cheaper and more convenient, a result of the establishment of railroads. Thus the alliance between the pettybourgeois small farmers and the aristocratic plantation owners collapsed, a split that resulted first in the dramatic collapse of the Whig Party in 1854 and the ensuing rise of the Republican Party and then in the even more dramatic split of the Democratic party during the 1860 presidential election into two separate Northern and Southern presidential campaigns resulting in the victory of the Republican Abraham Lincoln. It is an interesting parallel in history that unlike in Europe, in the absence of a former feudal system in America, the class struggles within the propertied classes were not between the bourgeoisie and aristocratic landlords, but between the bourgeoisie and slave owners. Yet this is the confirmation of the Marxist thesis of the political antagonism latent in the division of labor and thus between the city and the countryside which in a young capitalism, before the domination of monopoly-finance capital over land and industry, expressed itself in a vicious parliamentary struggle between two political wings. And just like in every class struggle at an irreconcilable impasse it would erupt into open civil war. Marx, who was reporting on the events as they transpired wrote:

As is clear, the whole movement was and is based on the slave question. Not in the sense of whether the slaves within the existing slave states should be directly emancipated or not, but whether the twenty million free Americans of the North should subordinate themselves any longer to an oligarchy of 300,000 slaveholders; whether the vast territories of the Republic should become the nurseries of free states or of slavery; finally, whether the foreign policy of the Union should take the armed propaganda of slavery as its device throughout Mexico, Central and South America.

The victory of the Union in the Civil War brought with it a revolutionary transformation in the relations of production of the Southern states, as the entire population of nearly four million African-American slaves was emancipated. The class of slave and plantation owners were transformed into bourgeois landowners and were temporarily deprived of political power as the South was put under federal occupation, the rebel state legislatures were dissolved

and the granting of suffrage to freed slaves resulted in Republicans being elected. The most revolutionary political faction of the Republican party, the Radical Republicans demanded the abolition of the plantation owners' political and economic power by advocating for distributing their land to the freed slaves. Land redistribution would have curbed the power of the wealthy plantation owners by ending the dependence of black farmers on landlords and by creating a large black bourgeoisie and pettybourgeoisie which would have been loyal to the Republican party and would have the money to influence politics at the state and national level. Some land distribution was undertaken as a wartime measure under General Sherman, the "forty acres and a mule" which redistributed 400,000 acres confiscated from slave owners to 40,000 freedmen. Yet Johnson's administration would reverse this and restore nearly all the land back to the hands of the plantation owners.

The end of Reconstruction was intertwined with the bourgeoisie losing its revolutionary role, as it turned its attention from breaking down the obstacles in the southern social economy to repressing the nascent proletarian movement which had been unleashed by the end of the repressive Civil War emergency measures which had suppressed trade unions and strikes (enforced by the Union Army) and the spread of wagelabor into the South. It was no coincidence that Reconstruction ended the same year as the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, which the bourgeoisie suppressed with the most savage violence. As industrialization crept into the South, there developed common interests between the Northern bankers and industrialists who had the capital and the Southern landowners who had the land, and who now had a common cause in preventing the unity of black and white workers and poor farmers.

As the historical role of the industrial bourgeoisie moved from reformist to reactionary, the bourgeois revolutionary tasks in the South were unable to be driven to their complete conclusion, as most of the land remained in the hands of the former slave owners, which the state had refused to expropriate, now purely bourgeois landlords. The freed blacks fell into complete poverty and most had no choice but to continue working for their former masters. A relation of production known as sharecropping arose where the white landowner leased the land and tools to the tenantfarmer who after the harvest would divide the proceeds between himself and the landowner. High interest rates and low profit margins kept the farmer perpetually in debt to the landowner keeping him tied to the land and unable to shake loose his obligations. The spread of sharecropping resulted in a regression in the mode of production to a semifeudal level that acted as fetters on the development of the capitalist productive forces: largescale industry on the one hand and wagelabor on the other. The ultimate accomplishment of the bourgeois revolution is the radical reduction of the proportion of labor expended on agriculture and the generalization of associated production with its corresponding propertyless laboring class which are the material bases of communism.

The failure of Reconstruction to emancipate the African-Americans would be accompanied by a political reaction: the rise of Jim Crow. As the plantation owners' land remained untouched, their economic privileges remained and as soon as the federal occupation and Reconstruction ended they began organizing a violent political campaign to restore their political domination over the Southern states.

At the same time a political movement of poor farmers and workers had emerged in the Midwest and South against the industrialists, bankers and landowners, known as the Populist movement. The movement united black and white sharecroppers, impoverished farmers, and rural and industrial workers, organizing them into the "People's Party". Marx had already criticized the class nature and aims of such a movement:

The democratic petty bourgeois, far from wanting to transform the whole society in the interests of the revolutionary proletarians, only aspire to a change in social conditions which will make the existing society as tolerable and comfortable for themselves as possible. They therefore demand above all else a reduction in government spending through a restriction of the bureaucracy and the transference of the major tax burden into the large landowners and bourgeoisie. They further demand the removal of the pressure exerted by big capital on small capital through the establishment of public credit institutions and the passing of laws against usury, whereby it would be possible for themselves and the peasants to receive advances on favourable terms from the state instead of from capitalists; also, the introduction of bourgeois property relationships on land through the complete abolition of feudalism. In order to achieve all this they require a democratic form of government, either constitutional or republican, which would give them and their peasant allies the majority; they also require a democratic system of local government to give them direct control over municipal property and over a series of political offices at present in the hands of the bureaucrats.

The rule of capital and its rapid accumulation is to be further counteracted, partly by a curtailment of the right of inheritance, and partly by the transference of as much employment as possible to the state. As far as the workers are concerned one thing, above all, is definite: they are to remain wage labourers as before. However, the democratic petty bourgeois want better wages and security for the workers, and hope to achieve this by an extension of state employment and by welfare measures; in short, they hope to bribe the workers with a more or less disguised form of alms and to break their revolutionary strength by temporarily rendering their situation tolerable.

However although its political aims remained limited to bourgeois-democratic reforms, and the American proletariat had not yet politically separated itself and its class aims from that of the democratic petty-bourgeoisie, this terrified the utterly reactionary bourgeoisie which feared any independent movement of the lower classes. The Southern ruling class would resort to fraud and violence to exclude the Populists from power and entrench its own power represented by the Democratic party. The most dramatic episode occurred in North Carolina. The Populists had allied with black Republicans to form the Fusion party, which was elected to the state legislature in 1894 and 1896, and the governorship in 1896. The traditional ruling coalition of white landowners and capitalists which was represented by the Democratic party was replaced by the Fusion coalition of black and white industrial bourgeoisie and small farmers. In response, the traditional ruling circles grouped around the Democrats organized a vicious media campaign accusing the Fusionists of attempting to set up a black supremacist society and spread the familiar vile racist tropes of black men being violent criminals and rapists. The Redshirts, a Democratic paramilitary organization, would be used to overthrow the Fusion government and massacre the black residents of Wilmington, installing a Democratic government. Throughout the other Southern states similar events would play out, as extralegal violence and terror were used to enforce segregation, systematically force out Republican politicians, destroy wealthy black communities, disenfranchise black voters and establish a barely disguised oneparty system in the South. Nearly all of the liberal-democratic rights which the black populace gained as a result of the Civil War were lost and the privileges of the ruling white bourgeoisie were preserved against the onslaught of the pettybourgeois democratic movement.

The antidemocratic suppression of the Populist movement was part and parcel with the monopolistic and totalitarian evolution of capital and the state. The destruction of the landowners as an independent class of slaveholders opposed to the bourgeoisie; the ruin of the independent farmers, indebted to the landlord and banker; industrialization and the intertwining of largescale industrial and landed capital through oligarchic finance capital; the rise of cartels, monopolies and trusts, etc. All these factors, linked to the development of largescale industry, had changed the ruling class from being an amorphous and atomistic coalition of bourgeoisie, slaveowners and farmers ruling through democratic assemblies to an interwoven network of industrialists, business executives and financiers merged into business organizations ruling directly through the executive branch, whose bureaucracy is connected to these organizations by a million and one threads. Democracy, as the political form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, became increasingly an empty shell deprived of any real content whose purpose became solely to fool the masses. The genuine differences between the two parties increasingly vanished, and the epic and stormy political debates of the nineteenth century which reflected the divergent interests and perspectives of the ruling classes degenerated into “spectacular and meaningless duels” (as Lenin called it) which serve only to distract and dazzle. In the South, amidst an economic transformation which threatens to shake the stability of the political and ideological superstructure: a rising and politically active black bourgeoisie and pettybourgeoisie, the Populist movement of desperate white and black sharecroppers and a growing and ever more unruly proletariat; the ruling bourgeoisie finds itself threatened by the structures of democracy, and thus the totalitarian evolution of the state can only be secured by ferocious violence which cleanses the state machine of heterogeneous political influences which threaten the ruling economic interests. The bloody racism of Jim Crow directed against black people served a double function in the service of capital: it justified terroristic repression against a significant fraction of the working class, and encouraged white workers to identify their interests with the primarily white bourgeoisie and state. Thus capitalism used race as a means to divide the working class by cleaving it into arbitrary categories and used this as justification to superexploit one of the fractions.

In the span of thirteen years the American bourgeoisie completed its historical function, dialectically transforming from revolutionary to reformist to reactionary, a process in conjunction with the historical role of the European

bourgeoisie. From this point forward the solution to the question of black liberation was no longer unity with the industrial bourgeoisie, but rather with its historical archenemy: the international proletariat – with REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNISM!

*The Black Revolt, Civil Unrest, Class Struggle & The Party's Work on Race*

At the present moment, the social discussion around the Black Lives Matter movement has seemingly overcome all other social or workers' movements in the United States, and to a certain degree around the globe. Black Lives Matter (BLM) as a civil rights movement was born of the response to the murder of Trayvon Martin in 2013. Black Lives Matter was reinvigorated in 2020 by the murder of George Floyd by police, a particularly publicized and blatant murder that finds grim and plentiful company as one part of a harrowingly long list of Black murder carried out by the bourgeois state and its reactionary supporters over the course of hundreds of years.

The new iteration of Black Lives Matter brought waves of newly found energy and activity compared to its past manifestation. This energy was expressed immediately and directly in response to the recent murders, first at the epicenter in Minneapolis, then quickly spreading to the rest of the United States and various places around the world. Widespread property destruction, unhindered Police & Military violence, and seemingly endless strings of protests defined the summer. These qualities were seen ubiquitously across the country, but were concentrated most visibly and intensely in large metropolitan areas nationwide, including places which were the sites of the killings that sparked the movement itself.

At its most incipient moment, the spontaneous movement did reflect some unrealized class character, as well as a brief loss of control over the situation by the bourgeois state. However, these characteristics quickly faded from the forefront to cede to what has ultimately been the true nature of Black Lives Matter from the start, which is an interclassist movement, therefore bourgeois, rather than proletarian. While Black working class people are heavily represented in the movement, as well as the working class as a whole, we as communists know that their numerical majority does not implicitly constitute the working class organizing for itself, for a number of reasons. This movement, the expression of a long persecuted racial minority, has shifted its potential off of the class terrain and into appeals towards the same social order that is the source of the very problems Black Lives Matter wishes to eradicate; namely the bourgeois state and the pure fantasy of liberal democracy.

As a decentralized, nebulous movement with no program or party direction, the demands and the ways to go in the movement, sometimes delirious, often diverge. However, widely repeated appeals are: the criticism of the Trump regime (especially in the form of replacing him with the Democrat wing of the capitalist party in the bourgeois elections), a reform of the justice system, stricter penalties for violent police officers, the containment of systematic racism, the defunding of local police departments, support for Black owned businesses and small businesses, and more. Here the class nature of racist violence is missed, as Black members of the middle class or owning class are not the subjects of this in the way that Black proletarians are. We also must point out that a Black business owner has just as much interest in maintaining property enforcement as any other business. As the prevailing ideology of Black Lives Matter, this pushes the proletariat of every race towards the traps of interclassism and popular progressivism. These middle class appeals to the bourgeois state are not directed by the proletariat, but instead directed with the interest of preserving the present social relations. The inevitability of the social and racial discontent venting itself into the electoral swamp is marked by this: the Democratic Party has as its objective, nothing new, but to bring home as many Black Voters as possible. "Blue" against the tyrant Trump, guilty of giving voice and protection to the white supremacists". From media multinationals, Apple, Nike, Adidas, and others, promises of longterm investment in black communities where they wave the flag of antiracist progressivism in exchange for good business have recently arrived.

These popular claims have also attracted many young white, petitbourgeois, and proletarian youth to the demonstrations, ready to express their solidarity with the cause of antiracism and their discontent with the American picture as a whole. Additionally collaborating amongst the great reformist deliverance is a motley array of socialist-in-name parties, organizations, or antifascist nebulas. As evidenced by the Black Lives Matter protests, the selfdescribed "communist" left in the United States has reached a level of contentment so high and political organization so low, that any form of spontaneous and random social explosion is seen with the most exaggerated perspective and absurd

lack of criticism, characteristics that push them closer to bourgeois progressivism rather than Marxism while the drum of Class Unionism remains unbeaten. Even the less represented, “radical” demand for the abolition or disbanding of the police departments presupposes that the enforcers of capital, and capital itself, can be dealt with separately.

Police officers are a necessary arm of the state and are granted broad powers to enforce laws necessary to ensure the reproduction of the social relations that comprise the capitalist mode of production. Without the repressive apparatus of the state, capital accumulation is impossible, as there is no mechanism by which the bourgeoisie can discipline and forcibly expropriate the proletariat. Without armed enforcers, the law is impotent, and the psychiatrist, mental health worker, social worker, and doctor cannot enforce his will on the uncooperative subject. In the final analysis, the state is a special body of armed men standing above society. If somehow no longer employed by the state, private enforcers will take the place of all of these police so long as the reproduction of capitalism and its state continue on. While the employees of agencies such as public health services do not possess the same capacity for deadly violence or other bodily harm as peace officers, they nevertheless perform a necessary regulatory function for capital. Social workers and mental health workers are capable of removing children from their households and committing people to what amount to jails for the mentally ill or those deemed socially deviant. Although it is obvious that better provision of health and other supportive services for the working class is necessary, within the present mode of production, these services will necessarily center around facilitating the reproduction of laborpower.

In general, those cheering are either unacquainted with the mental health, social work, bureaucracy and the way in which they abuses and demeans their subjects, or simply believe that it is sufficient to abolish the police or create autonomous zones and that this will lead to the revolution, or both. The behavior of the police is a consequence of objective conditions that act to encourage a predatory, violent mindset. Social conditions, indeed, are not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by social conditions. So long as there exists a society divided into two great, antagonistic camps, there exists a need for an apparatus of those in that camp that rules over the other, a state. The increasing need to squeeze more surplus value from the proletariat produces a reaction that must be contained by ever more violent means.

We associate ourselves with the denunciation of the condition of poverty of the black proletariat, violently affected, first, by the ongoing economic crisis of world capitalism, and then, by the Covid19 pandemic – which in the USA has seen about a third of its victims being members of the Black population – which has marked a surge in unemployment, already historically very high in the black communities. We denounce the absence of essential services, particularly in the health sector, the absence of housing and the long standing historical role of racist violence used in the maintenance of class society. However, it is for the reasons of this section that we maintain Black Lives Matter has little to offer the black proletariat, imagination and innovation aside.

### *Labor & Class Struggle*

As mentioned here previously and in our numerous publications, the front of physical state violence is one that exists mutually with the general impoverished condition of the Black and Latine proletarians. With the crisis of Covid, their subjugation is stressed at an even higher level, bringing enhanced suffering without such as any relief. The US state’s response at all levels is directly implicated, as George Floyd was unemployed as a result. Many US-native Black people work in sectors that have been shut down or subject to significant restrictions as a result of the pandemic, and they have not tended to earn a great deal of money in those fields. As a result, while the \$1200 “stimulus” payment distributed in April was likely a boon for them, most of the other relief measures, such as extended unemployment insurance, benefits from which depend upon one’s income from the previous year, are significantly less helpful, and it’s unlikely that more stimulus payments are coming. Being poor, these populations also tend to lack access to quality, affordable healthcare, are subject to more stress, tend to suffer from health conditions that make them more susceptible to complications from being infected with Covid19, and their living conditions exacerbate these problems, tending to be located in morepolluted, highercrime areas, as well as make them more susceptible to infection due to being more densely-populated. None of this exploitation being reducible to mere accident.

Black & Latine workers make up an enormous swathe of the United States working class. This is especially true of the Southern United States, containing 57% of the country’s Black population. However the prevalence of non-

white workers can not be understated elsewhere across the country. Exploitation and oppression of the working class comes coupled with deep and racist impacts on the black working class and other communities of color. The fact that the Black working class has been hit hardest by this capitalist crisis is well obfuscated by the bourgeois media and governmental systems. With myriad economic and social reasons for this passive neglect, these issues highlighted by the crisis cast light on structured racism that exists at the very foundation of the State. In the tightly-packed urban communities and workplaces we examined, the essential workforce is disproportionately comprised of people of color. These essential working class people are made to bear the burden of the capitalist attempts to minimize economic harm, rather than being properly protected by their employers.

600 strikes are reported having occurred in June. Many were “health and safety” Covid walkouts. Most of the 600 were protest strikes – hour or day long walk outs against Police brutality, immigrants, etc. These types of semi-politicized strikes are uncommon in the USA, have not been recouped by politicians (vote Democratic Party!) and can perhaps be seen as a positive sign of the development in the class. There was even a moment of widespread attention directed towards what seemed like an incipient wildcat strike of National Basketball Association players with demands of racial justice. However, this was quickly stamped out and repurposed into a movement to boost electoral energy. One problem with some of these 600 strikes is that many were conducted in cooperation with employers. There is debate within “radical” labor if the employers were closing businesses by going along with workers’ demands or if workers were being coopted by interclass directions of mass movements – such as Black Lives Matter. This is something we need to maintain awareness of. As an aside, we can proudly say The Party was the first outlet to report on a number of strikes before any other publication. Such as a string of grocery walkouts in Portland related to Covid in TCP #23. In general, The North American members of the ICP believe that the Latine and Black sections of the North American working class are important militant centers and the Party needs to develop a propaganda program aimed towards them, especially with regards to Spanish language. The North American version of El Partido has been delayed due to Covid closures and lack of distribution outlets.

## Origins of the Workers and Communist Movement in China

### *The situation in the Far East between 1921 and 1922*

At the Third Congress of the Communist International, referencing the situation in the Eastern countries, the correct approach to the revolutionary struggle already affirmed at the Second Congress was reaffirmed. In the “Theses on the World Situation and on the Tasks of the Comintern” the firm points that should have guided the revolutionary struggle in the backward countries were reaffirmed.

First of all, the impotence of the indigenous bourgeoisie in leading the revolutionary struggle was acknowledged because it was tied by economic interests to foreign capital, a powerful material link that made it docile to foreign imperialism and incapable of leading a real antiimperialist struggle, to which was added the fear of not being able to stop a social movement that was certain to break its class domination.

The second point was the role of the proletariat as leader of the peasant revolutionary movement. This has a twofold significance, because on the one hand it is stated that even in backward countries the proletariat, although numerically still very weak, was nonetheless the only class capable of leading the revolutionary movement and lead it to victory, and on the other hand the peasant masses are identified as the main ally in the revolutionary struggle.

Finally, the necessary link between the revolutionary struggle in the colonies and semicolonies, which saw the young indigenous proletariat spearheading the leadership of the huge peasant masses, and the singleclass proletarian revolution in the capitalistically developed countries is affirmed as a firm point of the world communist revolution.

In 1921, although at the Third Congress of the International the first signs of danger towards an opportunist degeneration regarding the tactics towards the old parties of the Second International had emerged, promptly denounced by the Left, the general line did not undergo deviations from the correct Marxist approach. Only when the counterrevolution had triumphed in Moscow would the International become an instrument of the Russian State’s foreign policy.

Between 1921 and 1922, while in the West the revolutionary attempts of the proletariat had been defeated, Soviet Russia had managed to survive the attacks of the White armies and the armies of their foreign allies and was about to end, victorious, the civil war. The advance of the Red Army towards the East allowed Russia a projection towards the Pacific and a more incisive action towards China, which now, unlike the first years of the revolutionary government, could go beyond proclamations of principle.

The interest of the Bolsheviks towards China had to take into account the context of the country – the lack of a strong central power, divided among various “warlords”, and the division of the country into spheres of influence of imperialisms that maneuvered between the opposing militarist cliques.

It was thought that the Soviet state could take advantage of these antagonisms. But this was not without risk, it could be a contrast between the pursuit of a revolutionary policy, which should have relied on the proletariat and the native revolutionary masses, and the interests of the Russian state that, in search of an ally in the East, would make agreements by granting aid to military leaders. The expedient of using one military clique against another, if it could give immediate results, risked compromising the development of the revolutionary movement because, even if momentarily in struggle with each other, any faction would come to terms with the opponent, domestic or foreign, in order to turn against the proletariat and the peasant masses in order to maintain class domination.

In any case, the rivalries between the warlords in China were only the product of the larger interimperialist clash for the partition of the Pacific countries. The First World War had produced a rearrangement of the political order in Europe, leaving the situation in the Pacific almost unchanged. In fact, the consequences of the war in Europe, which had determined new power relations between all the different imperialisms, and the lack of a redefinition of relations in the Pacific, made the struggle for a new partition an inevitable fact.

The sharpest antagonism in the immediate postwar period pitted the United States and Great Britain against each other for sea supremacy. Britain supported Japan, a possible ally against the United States. For its part, Japan, already hostile to American “Open Door” policy, whose purpose was to prevent any monopoly on China, was alarmed by the naval strengthening of the U.S. in the Pacific and feared their pressure to establish a base on the Chinese



coast. The U.S., fearing a possible alliance between Britain and Japan, proposed a truce of arms for a few years: in July 1921 a conference on disarmament and problems of the Pacific was announced to be held in Washington.

In view of the conference, the Communist International had issued a series of theses in which they denounced the rapacious interests of the capitalist powers and the impossibility of their settlement. According to the International, no agreement could eliminate the basis of rivalry between the powers present in Washington, to which must be added the looming conflict with the defeated countries, but also with the colonial peoples and, finally, with Soviet Russia, “which represents a breach in the system of capitalist states”. The International affirmed that the Washington Agreements would not diminish the contradictions between imperialisms; on the contrary, first Versailles, now Washington, hastened the approach of a next war.

In any case, these powers feared their own proletariat, which was not yet tamed and largely supported Soviet Russia (which, in 1922, hadn’t yet become a bulwark of world counterrevolution), more than its imperial enemies.

The powers of capital had excluded Russia from the Washington Conference, preventing it from using the diplomatic instrument. Russia was not yet a state like any other, for the Communists who oriented foreign policy towards the goal of world revolution were in power. The response to the agreements between the imperialist brigands was a call to arms of all the exploited of the Far East: in January 1922, on the initiative of the Executive of the Communist International, a Congress of Revolutionary Organizations of the Far East met in Moscow.

### *Origins of the CP of China*

On the initiative of the International, the First Congress of Communists and Revolutionary Organizations of the Far East was held in Moscow, in 1922, just over a year after the Congress of Baku, where the cry of battle of the colonial and semicolonial peoples against imperialist domination had been raised in a common struggle with the proletariat of Western countries. The Congress saw the participation of delegates from the main countries of the Far East: China, Korea, Japan, India, Mongolia, Indonesia and far east of Soviet Russia. Only one half of them were communists, the others belonged to nationalist revolutionary organizations, such as the Kuomintang in China.

The Congress stood in opposition to the Washington Conference, where the major imperialist powers had gathered to attempt to resolve their differences in the Pacific and find a compromise to continue the exploitation and oppression of the eastern peoples.

In the face of the rapacious interests of imperialisms, the Communist International extended a hand to the oppressed peoples in the East, affirming the solidarity of world communism and the proletariat of the most capitalistically developed countries with the national-revolutionary movements of the Far East, with which it was necessary to establish a close link in the struggle for world revolution. In the perspective of the International, the Congress of the Workers of the Far East was of great importance: “The Communist International understands with perfect clarity that the union of the advanced proletariat of Europe and America with the awakening of the working masses of the East is an absolutely necessary fact for our victory”, as Zinoviev stated at the opening of the congress proceedings.

One of the most important reports to the Congress was given by Zinoviev, who outlined the international situation, the results of the recent Washington Conference, and the tasks of the International. With the end of World War I, interimperialist disputes had shifted from Europe to Asia, so that in the immediate future the Asian and Far Eastern question became a priority in world politics. The dispute between the imperialisms in Asia made the revolution in the oppressed countries of the Far East a matter of fundamental importance: Asia became, therefore, not only “the pivot of world politics”, but also “the pivot of the entire liberation movement of the proletariat and the oppressed nations”.

Because of the backward capitalist development in the countries of the Far East, with the exception of Japan, the conditions for a socialist revolution were not yet ripe, but the development of a national revolutionary movement directed against imperialism was a very real possibility. It was a question of coordinating and uniting the struggle of the oppressed nonproletarian masses of the Far East with the industrial and agricultural proletariat of Japan. The revolutionary movement in the Far East was then to be linked to the struggle of the proletariat of the Western countries that participated in the oppression and exploitation of those peoples. Essentially, the Theses of the International that had been adopted at the Second Congress were reaffirmed.

After Zinoviev's report, the work of the Congress continued with sessions dedicated to each country. The three reports devoted to China illustrated the general situation of the working class, as well as the economic condition of the country. A delegate of the Kuomintang was also allowed to speak, focusing on the political situation in the country; the representative of a women's organization also spoke.

After these reports Safarov presented a report on the position of the Communists in the national and colonial question and on the collaboration between Communists with the national-revolutionary parties. There it was stated how world capitalism needed colonial robbery, the most important prop of imperialism. As already stated by Zinoviev, the Far East, which had remained on the margins of imperialist competition, had become the target of the great powers, eager to grab its huge reserves of raw materials and exploit cheap labor. This made impossible the liberation of colonial and semicolonial countries through conciliation with the great powers.

While in Europe capitalism had played a revolutionary role, transforming the peasants into proletarians, in backward countries like China it did not develop industry – on the contrary it delayed national development by all means possible, as a way to perpetuate its predatory interests, keeping these countries in a state of backwardness where they remained as mere suppliers of raw materials. To this end, world capitalism used war and its consequences to tear apart political power in China and break the integrity of its territory. The ruin of the nation was perpetrated by fomenting civil war with the support of the various warlords, so that behind every militaristic marauder there was a foreign capitalist.

In this context, the main task of the revolutionary movement in China was emancipation from foreign domination.

Not just the Communists, but all sincere Chinese democrats would have to relentlessly criticize their various politicians who were going along with one of the imperialist gangs, especially the many sympathizers of America. An indispensable condition for emancipation from the foreign yoke was the intervention of the peasant masses. "Without the awakening of these peasant masses there is no hope of national emancipation", Safarov asserted.

In order to win the peasant masses to the cause of revolution it was necessary to raise the banner of land nationalization.

"Liberation of China from its foreign yoke", "nationalization of land", "overthrow of the Dutsiuns" (warlords), "establishment of a united federation", "democratic republic", and "introduction of a uniform income tax" were the goals for which the Chinese working masses and their vanguard were about to fight for.

But the still young workers' movement was also beginning its advance. The movement had before it the task of organizing real trade unions. A singleclass, proletarian revolution was not on the agenda, so the banner raised was that of the double revolution – the communists had to support the revolutionary nationalist movement, with the clarification that this support would only be there as long as it was not directed against the proletarian movement, while at the same time strengthening their own class organizations and maintain their autonomy from democratic parties and bourgeois elements.

Safarov concluded: "The revolutionary proletariat cannot take into consideration the wrong idea that in the colonies we only support the proletarian movement. The backward countries do not possess a large proletarian class. Only in alliance with the proletarian movement of the nations they oppress will their freedom be obtained. Our discussion must result in a clear view that the chances of victory for the national revolutionary movement will be greatly increased if the proletarian masses play an independent role in this movement, if the proletarian elements of the oppressed nations establish themselves as leaders and standard bearers in this national-revolutionary struggle".

The Theses that were approved, taking up what had been expounded in the work of the Congress, were perfectly in line with the Marxist tradition and confirmed what had been established at the Second Congress of the International on the national and colonial question, from which sprang clear instructions for the young communist parties in the Far East.

The fixed points of the struggle in the backward countries reaffirmed at the Congress of 1922 can be summarized as follows: close union between the proletarian struggle in the West for purely communist purposes and the revolutionary nationalist movements in the East; ruthless criticism of the hesitations of the bourgeoisie, linked to imperialism; defense of class autonomy; alliance of the young proletariat with the peasant masses; leading role of the proletariat in the alliance with the peasants.

At the beginning of 1922, the program of the world revolution was still the reference for the leadership of the International, and reached the exploited of the Far East who were asked to join the proletariat of the West in a common struggle for the final victory over world capitalism.

## The Party's Trade Union Work

### *General Meeting in September*

The party's trade union activity between June and September of this year took place mainly in two spheres: the Coordination of SelfOrganized Workers for Class Unity (Coordinamento Lavoratori e Lavoratrici Autoconvocati per l'Unità della Classe, CLA) and the Rank and File Union (Unione Sindacale di Base, USB).

On the last day of the last general meeting, Sunday, May 31, a national assembly of the CLA was also held by videoconference. The assembly confirmed the CLA's commitments on three fronts: to intervene in the mobilizations promoted by the unions, promoting unity of action among workers and militant unionism; to fight within the unions to raise awareness of the need to overcome divisions in action among unions; and to promote a campaign on the issue of health and safety in the workplace and in the territory, in which we seek to involve all militant trade unionist organizations. Another proposed area of work has been in healthcare, but so far that hasn't been followed up in a continuous and organic way.

The subsequent activity of the Coordination developed along these lines.

On June 12 the comrades of the private health institute Maugeri of Tradate (Varese) published a statement of solidarity with the workers involved in struggle at San Raffaele in Milan, the largest private hospital in the Lombard capital, where most unionized workers belong to the Unione Sindacale Italiana (USI) and to the Sindacato Generale di Base (SGB).

The SGB was born in February 2016 out of a split from the USB, which is why the *communiqué* by the comrades of Tradate, delegates of the USB, had an even greater value, aimed at overcoming the mistrust and divisions between the different rankandfile union affiliations: in the following months, the SGB delegates of San Raffaele merged into the CUB. The *communiqué* was signed on behalf of the "USB Maugeri Collective for the Class Union adhering to the CLA".

The *communiqué* was also important for the purposes of the internal struggle within the USB against the conduct of its leadership, which aims to ignoring the actions of other grassroots unions.

This was confirmed not even a month later – on July 2 – when the USB proclaimed on its own a national strike of public and private healthcare workers. The comrades of Tradate first fought internally within the National Coordination of the medical workers' USB against this decision, then drafted a statement, which was published on behalf of the CLA, entitled "On the healthcare strike called by USB for July 2".

Earlier, on June 27, the CLA had organized a new national assembly, this time in attendance, in Florence. One of our comrades gave, on behalf of the coordination, the introductory report. Another comrade of ours intervened, underlining the limits of the demand for public health, when it is not complemented by the workers' real, material goals – free and available healthcare – and referred to the experience of the struggles of hospital workers in 1978.

The assembly was attended by new workers and delegates from Pisa, Viareggio, Brescia and Vicenza.

In the following days, our comrade was interviewed by a wellknown radio station in the Brescia area, to present the CLA and give a brief account of the assembly.

On July 11, the comrades of Tradate published a new issue of their internal union bulletin, devoted entirely to criticizing the possibility of a contract renewal for the private healthcare companies ARIS and AIOP that the regime unions were going to sign.

The following day, Sunday, July 12, one of our comrades spoke at the first national assembly of Militant Workers – held in Bologna – reiterating, for the sake of unity of action of the workers, the need to build a body that's purely a trade union, unrelated to the frontism between political parties and groups, and committed to the unity of action of all militant unionist organizations. This speech was made with the awareness that the body that was being formed in that assembly was to be, in the minds of its promoters, a type of appendage of a political front that had met the previous day in the same room as the Bologna SI Cobas.

In that assembly, the former national leader of USBPrivate Employmnt, Bellavita,

In that assembly, the former national leader of USBPrivate Employment, Bellavita, spoke with criticisms that almost entirely coincided with those expressed – on behalf of the CLA – by our comrade; with him in previous months had been vainly tried to build an internal battle within the same union, which he eventually abandoned.

Given the agreed upon assessment of the characteristics of the Assembly of Militant Workers (Assemblea dei Lavoratori Combattivi), and the commitment of Bellavita, after leaving the USB in April, in an attempt to build an “interunion base” from the involvement of Adl Cobas, Sial Cobas and SGB, he was proposed a meeting with the work group of the CLA for a review on the situation of militant trade unionism. The result was the unanimous decision of the CLA to draw up an appeal to promote – in the event that, as in previous years, some grassroots trade union leaders had proclaimed a general strike for the fall – a united effort from the entire militant trade union movement to mobilize.

Although we were convinced that there were no conditions to call a general strike, the state of severe fragmentation among the various forces of grassroots unionism seemed to possibly favor the strengthening of the battle for the unity of action of the militant unions, through the means of agitation for unified action, in the event that a part of the unions called for the full mobilization of the working class, as has been the custom of past years.

This was not the case, however, because none of the unions involved in the attempt to build the interunion supported the appeal – except for the small ADL of Varese – and neither did the group of metalworker delegates who had followed Bellavita from FIOM to USB and remained there despite his exit. So the appeal did not go beyond the number of adherents that similar initiatives had in past years.

At the end of the day, the general strike this year was called by only one basic union: CUB for October 23.

Thus, the union bloc formed by CUB, SI Cobas, SGB, ADL Cobas and USI, which in recent years had promoted the general strike, without getting involved in competition with USB and the Cobas Confederation, was broken. The leaderships of these two organizations could not help but be pleased, placing themselves on the same plane of competition between unions and pulling the lever of “separate and competing” actions, that is, dividing and damaging the already weak workers’ movement that has been involved in struggles in recent years.

That union bloc saw the departure of CUB and SGB after an important part of the delegates of the latter passed to the former; SI Cobas for its part has launched the supposed “unitary initiative” of the Assembly of Militant Workers (ALC), which CUB did not join, instead the SGB joined; not even the ADL Cobas, as mentioned, joined the ALC, considering it an instrument of the so-called *Patto d’Azione Anticapitalista* (Pact of AntiCapitalist Action), and, as usual, limited itself to promoting, alongside SI Cobas, the national strike in the sector in which both unions are most deeply rooted, logistics, set to the same day in which CUB had proclaimed the general strike, October 23.

After the July 12 assembly, the SI Cobas leadership made an effort to make the ALC independent of the Action Pact. This was partially reflected in the text of the convocation of the second national assembly of the Militant Workers, held in Bologna on September 27, in which the speech written by a comrade of ours on behalf of the CLA was distributed in print to approximately 300 people there.

In the weeks leading up to this second assembly, our comrades followed the activities of the Lazio LAC, the most active of the few local LACs that were actually set up (Veneto, Lombardy, Piedmont). On the basis of the change in the conduct of the leadership of the SI Cobas and the activities of the Rome ALC, it was considered appropriate to participate in this body, fighting for it to be put on the correct path – that of building unity in working class action: its maintenance on a trade union ground; its attempt to involve all militant trade unionist organizations; its internal life methods that would make it independent from the so-called *Patto d’Azione*.

These are the characteristics of the CLA, except, of course, the third one, which doesn’t concern them in any way, since the SI Cobas leadership has dedicated itself to the construction, first of all, starting from February 2020, of the *Patto d’Azione*, and then, in July, the ALC joined them, after abandoning the CLA, in which it had participated only to seek support for the initiatives of its own organization.

We were aware of how the changing conduct of the SI Cobas leadership was instrumental in expanding participation in the ALC, while maintaining control through the *Patto d’Azione*. However, the control of any union body by the opportunist leadership is only guaranteed by the use of coercive methods, which inevitably forces the organization to turn rickety.

On the other hand, the participation of the SGB, a union force that did not participate in the so-called Pact of Action, could easily have been the litmus test of the conduct of the promoters and leaders of the ALC.

### *General Meeting in January*

Trade union activity in Italy has been centered on employment and the battle for an united front “from below”, that is, the proletarian trade union united front. This took place in two areas: the *Coordinamento Lavoratori Autoconvocati* (CLA) and the *Assemblea Lavoratori Combattivi* (ALC).

The CLA is a small body made up of militants from different grassroots unions and the class opposition in CGIL, which does not enjoy the support of any union leadership, neither those of the grassroots unions nor those of the opposition in CGIL. It was born in January 2019, also as a result of our Party’s work throughout the previous years in support of the unity of action of the class unions, even though our comrades are a minority of the union militants in it. This objective, which turned out to be premature in previous years, in September 2018 was embraced by the group that gave birth to the CLA.

It’s good to point out that despite the fact that our comrades are a minority among the adherents of the CLA, even with how small this organization is, confirms that the trade union movement is nonetheless susceptible to a communist orientation, insofar as it coincides with its demands, and that it can find a following in the workers’ movement outside the organizational perimeter of the party and even among union militants adhering to other workers’ parties. It is in this way that the so-called “transmission belt” between the communist party and the working class comes into operation, which allows the revolutionary communist party to perform a function of directing the movement of the proletarian masses, of which only a part, and generally speaking a small part, are communists.

On the other hand, the ALC is an organism constituted in July 2020 on the initiative of a political front called “Patto d’Azione Anticapitalista Per un Fronte Unico di Classe” (PAAFUC), of which the main forces are the majority of the leadership of the SI Cobas, a Stalinist political youth organization called the Communist Youth Front (FGC), a Trotskyist party called the Communist Workers Party (PCL), and the small Slai Cobas for Class Union, which is essentially the union of a Maoist political group.

The ALC claims to be pursuing the same goal as the CLA: unity of action. The only force that adhered to the ALC but not to the PAA was the *Sindacato Generale di Base* (SGB), smaller than SI Cobas and larger than the Slai Cobas for the SdC, which however left after the national assembly of November 29 (“[A fake general strike](#) in order not to prepare a real one”).

Besides the leaders of the unions that promoted this event, as said SI Cobas and the small Slai Cobas for the SdC, the other grassroots unions did not join the ALC, nor did the oppositions in the CGIL. The union leaderships explained this decision, among them the CGIL “Riconquistiamo tutto” opposition and, importantly, the ADL Cobas, which has historically always sided with SI Cobas for mobilization in logistics, did so by claiming that the initiative of the ALC was instrumental in supporting the aforementioned political front, the so-called *Patto d’Azione Anticapitalista*.

All evidence points to this being true. However, it must be pointed out that in itself it is not a decisive element. If the promoters of the ALC, the political groups in charge of the PAA, set up this organism according to the correct criteria that we have repeatedly stated and that we will go on to explain later, and do the same with regard to the relations between the ALC and the AAP, this would make the former a useful instrument for the construction of the unity of action of the workers, with goals similar to those of the CLA.

The problem does not lie in whether a union or a trade union front is directed by a political force or a front of political forces. This is, in general, inevitable because the union organizing is fundamentally distinct from Party organizing, but it cannot be independent of it, it cannot not be influenced by it. The problem is how the political direction of the trade union movement is exercised: for what purposes and by what means.

We maintain that only the Communist Party is able to direct the trade union movement in its struggles, with organizational directions that fully favor the development of these struggles, and that all the other workers’ parties can only end up securing the directive position of the movement through means that damage it.

Therefore, in addition to the obvious observation of the fact that the intentions of the political groups in charge of the PAA are to use the ALC to give support to that political front, we also explain that this is done by means that are

detrimental to its stated objective, the unity of action of the workers, and are therefore harmful to the workers' movement.

The abandonment of the ALC by the only union force that is not part of the PAA, the SGB, demonstrates this. As does the lack of adherence of the ADL Cobas that, we say again, has always struck alongside SI Cobas in union disputes in the logistics sector.

However, given our invariant conduct within the proletarian bodies, we take the declarations of intent of the leadership as good and challenge them to be consistent and to actually follow up on them, in order to demonstrate to the workers in these bodies their opportunism and the correct line of the positions of the union branch of the party. Therefore, even if the criticisms of the ALC by various leaders of the militant unionist movement were partially correct, we affirmed that their practical conclusion of not wanting to join it was wrong, and we gave the opposite practical direction: participate in the ALC and struggle for it to adopt those characteristics necessary to make it an organism that's actually useful to the unity of action of workers, by making the example of the CLA known and favoring a relationship with it.

It must also be said that, if the militant unionist leaders, while starting from partly correct criticism, arrived at a wrong practical conclusion, this was due to a trade union-political opportunism, no different from that of the leading groups promoting the ALC. At least for most of them, the obvious flaw in the origin of the ALC was a pretext for not committing themselves in a practical way in the area of workers' unity of action. Confirmation of this assessment is given by the fact that none of these militant trade unionist leaders have so far joined the CLA, despite the fact that it has shown to have those characteristics necessary for the construction of an actually useful body for the struggle for the unity of action of the workers that the ALC lacks.

In this regard, it should be pointed out that the leadership of the SI Cobas had initially shown its willingness to join the CLA. But its militants didn't participate in the activities of this coordination in any real way, except for a soonabandoned attempt at building a coordination of health workers, which was used as a mere propaganda area for their union. This explains the subsequent decision to abandon the CLA and promote the ALC. What reason was there to form a new, ostensibly similar body? Evidently the characteristics of the CLA did not correspond to the aspirations of the SI Cobas leadership.

A similar evaluation must be made for the other trade unionpolitical forces in the ALC. The trade union militants of the PCL have never shown interest in the CLA and have instead joined the ALC because they are part of the so-called *Patto d'Azione Anticapitalista* (Anticapitalist Action Pact) and thus have a common interest with the SI Cobas leaders in the ALC acting as an appendage for that political front. The same is true for the small Slai Cobas for the Class Union: it is part of the PAA and to support that political front it adheres to the ALC. The typical opportunist denominator of the choices of these political groups is the subordination of the construction of a single class union front to that of a political front, which inevitably prevents the realization of the former.

As for the Stalinist youth association known as the Communist Youth Front, this had sought a confrontation with the CLA. In a correct and rigorous way, the "working group" of this coordination answered that the CLA wanted to be an organism constituted only by workers, that is, having a tradeunion nature, distinct from the party sphere, and that therefore it did not want to be linked with the FGC as a whole, but was interested in relating only to the militants of the FGC who were workers. This rigid criterion, which is fundamental for keeping the party sphere distinct from the union sphere for the healthy development of both, was enough to direct the FGC towards the ALC. In fact, in the ALC it soon became clear that it only deviated from its selfproclaimed nature of a body of workers by wanting to include students (and why not in the future so-called "social" movements). This is to allow greater participation of the FGC in the ALC and thus honor the close association within the PAA.

The inclusion of sectors outside the working class in union bodies is a typical method by which opportunistic union leaders coopt political elements loyal to them into the union in order to ensure greater control over it. For example, in the USB this happens with the so-called *Federazione del Sociale* ("The [USB at its Second National Congress](#). *Federazione del Sociale*").

We reiterate, therefore, the two essential characteristics for an organism to really be on the road to pursuing the unity of action of the workers. The first is that it be formed by workers only, employed and unemployed, and therefore be organizationally distinct from the partypolitical sphere. In Italy today, this characteristic is only adopted by

the CLA, while all other similar initiatives, which claim to pursue the objective of workers' unity of action, mix trade unions with parties, political groups, associations and movements of an interclass nature. It is relevant to note, as it demonstrates their opportunism, how the militant trade unionist leaders easily find unity of action with mobilizations of an interclass nature, in which there is a marked, if not predominant, presence of political groups and social movements, as in the case of the No TAV movement and the so-called "feminist strike" of March 8, while they seem almost completely unable to do the same in the field that is specific to trade union organizations, where the immediate interests of workers are at stake.

The second characteristic to be considered necessary for adequately working for the goal of unity of action of workers is to pursue it not only by proclaiming the need for it directly to the workers, but also in the bodies of class unionism, fighting within them so that they may adapt to it in their actions. Both of these ways, the direct appeal to the workers and the work in the unions, are necessary and neither of them by themselves is sufficient to achieve the goal. The role of the trade unions in the labor movement is fundamental and their conduct is an inescapable problem. That is why work within them is an inescapable task of the party. The promoters of the ALC who claim to want to pursue the unity of action of workers by overcoming even the divisions between unions, appeal only to the workers to join the mobilizations called by the ALC itself, or to the militant trade unions in a generic way, and only after having already organized and proclaimed the strike, without involving the other unions in its preparation.

This conduct does not differ substantially from that of the majority of leaders of other grassroots unions, who also, with rare exceptions, call strikes ignoring other organizations. The difference is that the latter do not have the audacity to call on other unions to join strikes they have called without any prior involvement and thus pretending to be true supporters of workers' unity of action.

Instead, the CLA believes that in calling a mobilization, whether it be company, territorial, categorical or inter-professional, the unions that take the initiative must first invite all militant unions among those workers to join the organization.

This way of proceeding towards the unity of action of workers does not envisage diplomacy work between the union leaders, a thesis with which the promoters of the ALC agree, but which leads to justify their limiting themselves to the direct appeal to the workers. On the contrary: the attempt to involve all the bodies of class unionism, inviting them to the construction of a united mobilization, is an act against the opportunist leaderships, since they are challenged to be consistent, before the proletarians and their members in particular, with the principle of the unity of action of the workers in the economic struggle.

The attempt to involve all class union forces is also a conduct that helps minority groups within each union struggle against their opportunist leaderships. In fact, any union leadership not called upon by other unions to prepare for a strike has a good chance of justifying to its members and delegates its failure to participate by being ignored by the promoters. The noninvolvement in the preparation and organization of actions of struggle is a favor that opportunist union leaders do each other, in the framework of an implicit understanding produced by the common interest not to organize strikes where the militant unionist movement is truly united. Evidently, inviting other unions to the construction of a mobilization, offers to the workers who are fighting for unity of action within them, a valid polemical instrument and battle against their own leadership, in the event that it rejects the call for a united strike.

In conclusion, the opportunist groups that lead the unions, that claim to be advocates of workers' unity of action, but pursue it by bypassing other unions in appealing directly to workers, and present this conduct as a rejection of management diplomacy, are those who in reality play a diplomatic game between political groups, in this case those adhering to the PAA, which results in a war against other unions, those whose leaderships do not adhere to the PAA, conducted through separate actions of struggle and thus dividing the working class union movement. That is, they do the exact opposite of what they proclaim to do: diplomacy on the one hand, division of workers' action on the other.

The correct communist union direction, on the plane we are dealing with, is therefore to address both the union leaderships, the union members, and the entire working class. Opportunist leaders, especially in phases when the struggle of the working class is mounting, unlike the present, cannot reject appeals to unity of action, on pain of discrediting themselves before the workers. But it is certain that the formal acceptance of a united plan of struggle will not be followed by a conduct that's coherent and consistent with that plan on their part, but rather by hesitation, wavering, and often by sabotaging the united initiative.



In the course of this struggle, the Communist Party strengthens and extends its influence and authority in the union movement and in the working class. This is the historical experience of the Alliance of Labor, an organization obtained in 1922 thanks to the battle of the Communist Party of Italy for a single class union front, conducted from the first days of its establishment in January 1921. At that time, the union leaders could not refuse to be part of that unified front “from below”, that is, economic and not political bodies, but they worked to sabotage it, to make it not work.

It must be made clear that in the construction of a united class union front, the party does not exclude an agreement between its own union fraction and those of other workers’ parties. In the meantime, it must be said that, even if we believe that only the communist party has the instruments, deriving from Marxist doctrine, necessary to maintain itself continuously on the correct line of action, to make demands and organize in the union sphere, we do not exclude that other parties, in their contradictory oscillation between alternate and contradictory practical directions, a consequence of their nonMarxist doctrines, at certain times and for certain periods, may temporarily follow correct positions similar to those of our party. Only we know that sooner or later they will find themselves irremediably decamping and straggling. Secondly, it must be made clear that, while it is absolutely correct and necessary for union bodies to frame workers without political discrimination in order to gain maximum strength, it is equally certain that the role of the parties within the union movement is decisive. A considerable part of trade union activists are also and first of all political activists, often the most militant and devoted to the cause. Moreover, even the most committed union militants without a party frequently end up embracing a political cause and organization, becoming aware of the fact that the union struggle is limited to curbing the effects of the social problem of the workingclass condition, but that only the political struggle can affect the causes. It is therefore contrary to the nature of things to maintain that the union movement can and should be independent of political parties.

It must be organizationally separate from and independent of the bourgeois political parties, otherwise it will lapse into collaborationist syndicalism. But it is inevitably, and rightly so, a field of battle between the workers’ political organizations, in which each, through its union fraction, proposes to the workers its practical direction of struggle, which derives from its theory and its political program.

All workers’ parties, i.e., all those parties which believe that the working class has a peculiar immediate and political interest in society and in contrast to the bourgeoisie, legitimately aspire to direct the trade union movement, in the belief that they can give it the best development.

The crux of the problem lies in the verification of the coherence between the practical union direction and the theory and political program of the parties, and whether the former proves favorable or harmful to the development of the workers’ movement. We claim that both of these characteristics are the privilege of the only authentically Marxist party. Only the communists “have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole” (“The Communist Manifesto” of 1848). All other workers’ parties must, sooner or later, either embrace practical directions inconsistent with their ideology, or preserve this coherence by advocating directions of action that harm the workers’ movement.

This impossible coherence between the practical union direction and the political theory of the opportunist workers’ parties is at the origin of the inevitable disbandment in their workers’ base and of the growth of the authoritarianism and influence in the union field and among the working class of the communist party. This is the reason why, in certain historical periods, we see the worker base of the opportunist parties going on strike in spite of and against the indications of their leaderships and following the communists.

From these premises it follows and can be understood how in the construction of a single class union front there can be either an explicit agreement or an implicit understanding between the union fraction of our party and that of other political organizations. An example of this was the appeal of the Communist Party of Italy for the construction of a front of the leftwing unions for the reconstruction of the Alliance of Labor, after its abandonment by the union leaders following the strike of August 1922.

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Within the framework of what has been described so far, the recent trade union activity of the party in Italy has been intense, despite the imposition of strong limitations of union mobilizations due to the pandemic.

On Sunday, September 27, the last day of the last general meeting of the party, one of our comrades spoke in Bologna, on behalf of the CLA, at the second national ALC.

On Saturday, October 3, we intervened in a national demonstration in Modena, convened by SI Cobas, against the repression by the bosses, antiproletarian and antiunion, distributing both a leaflet of the CLA, along with other of its militants, and a leaflet of the party.

On Sunday, October 18, the national assembly of the CLA was organized for the first time in Genoa, with the contribution of our comrades, and it had a satisfactory outcome.

On Saturday, October 24, in Rome and Milan, at the small demonstrations promoted by the CLA, as decided at the national assembly of September 27, we circulated a leaflet of the party that explained very clearly the distinction between the political and trade union single front, deprecating the former and pointing out to the workers the latter.

In the newspaper that came out on November 9, we reported from the national assembly of the Militant Workers on September 27 to the small demonstrations up to October 24. In the article we reported an exemplary episode about the nature of the relationship between the PAA political front and the ALC and about the deliberate confusion made by the leaders of the two organizations between the united political front and the united trade union front, clearly with the aim of pursuing the former to the detriment of the latter: the national *communiqué* of SI Cobas that three days later commented on the outcome of the day of October 24, stated that the demonstrations had been called by the PAA, thus making this political front responsible for a mobilization that had been decided by the ALC of September 27.

In the same issue of the newspaper we published an article developing a critique of the claims of the patrimonial tax and of the nationalizations, both of which we consider harmful to the workers' movement because they divert the struggles from their true class claims to illusory objectives. The patrimonial tax is the central demand of the PAA and consequently of the ALC. It is supported by the SI Cobas leadership. The Trotskyists within the PAA and the ALC are pushing for the two bodies to embrace the second claim as well.

On November 11, we participated in the demonstration of the Genoa steelworkers against three dismissals for disciplinary reasons; a sole *communiqué* was issued by the CLA; the same for the provincial Coordination of the USB Vigili del Fuoco; both initiatives received praise from some metal workers.

On November 25, a CLA *communiqué* was published on the umpteenth USB strike in health care, organized in complete solitude.

On November 29, two of our comrades spoke at the third national ALC, one on behalf of the CLA, the other as a worker adherent to the CLA and the ALC. On December 5, another comrade spoke at the Rome LAC.

On December 28 in our press we returned to the question of patrimonial assets and commented on the national LAC of November 29 and the course of this body. That assembly decided, by voting, and thereby splitting, to call a "general strike" for Friday, January 29. A grotesque decision, since the maximum mobilization of the working class is not even remotely within the reach of this organism, and which reveals a vague conception typical of the petty-bourgeois movementism of the ALC leadership. In addition, the fact that the SI Cobas leadership imposed this decision through a vote, the outcome of which was a foregone conclusion given the numerical preponderance of SI Cobas, resulted in the abandonment of the ALC by the SGB, the only union force that is not part of the PAA. This confirms how the leaders of that political front are willing to use any means to ensure the obedience of the ALC, whether harmful or not to the Assembly itself, and, even more so, to the labor movement as a whole. The outcome of the so-called "general strike" was predictable: successful only in logistics, and even in this category weakened by the lack of participation of the ADL Cobas and SGB and by the political character given to the "general" mobilization, despite the fact that this category is affected by the renewal of the national collective agreement. It would have been much more effective, however, to continue the mobilization for this contract renewal, trying to unify it, to see if the conditions existed, with the action of other categories also waiting for the new contract (civil service, railroaders, tram workers, seafarers, social workers). For the SI Cobas leadership, however, the "general strike" was a success "even if it was a minority": an obvious oxymoron, for an action such as the strike, in which the first factor is the strength of numbers.

# International Communist Party

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