

*The Italian Left &
The Communist
International*

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST
PARTY

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THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST PARTY

WHAT DISTINGUISHES OUR PARTY—The line running from Marx to Lenin to the foundation of the Third International and the birth of the Communist Party of Italy in Leghorn (Livorno) 1921, and from there to the struggle of the Italian Communist Left against the degeneration in Moscow and to the rejection of popular fronts and coalitions of resistance groups – The tough work of restoring the revolutionary doctrine and the party organ, in contact with the working class, outside the realm of personal politics and electoralist manoevrings.

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Contents

Chapter 1: The Founding Conference of the Communist International	1
Chapter 2: The Founding Congress	13
Chapter 3: The Italian Socialist Party (PSI) and its Abstentionist Fraction: 1919–1920	26
Chapter 4: The great proletarian struggles and their repercussions on the party	37
Chapter 5: The Struggle for a Split in the Italian Socialist Party	49
Chapter 6: The Second Congress of the Communist International	65
Chapter 7: The Communist Party and Parliamentarism	79
Chapter 8: Trade Unions, Italian Question, and the founding of the Communist Party of Italy	95
PART II	145
The Platform of The Communist International	146
1. The Conquest of Political Power	148
2. Democracy and Dictatorship	149
3. The Expropriation of the Bourgeoisie and the Socialization of Production	151
4. The Road to Victory	154
Theses of the Communist Abstentionist Fraction	157
I	157
II	161
III	168
Preamble to the Statutes	173
Conditions of Admission to the Communist International	177
Theses on The Role of The Communist Party in The Proletarian Revolution	185

Theses on Parliamentarism	198
The Programme of the Communist Party of Italy	204
Theses on Tactics	208
I. Organic Nature of the Communist Party	208
II. The Communist Party's Process of Development	209
III. Relations between the Communist Party and the Proletarian Class	212
IV. Relations between the Communist Party and other Proletarian Political Movements	216
V. Elements of the Communist Party's Tactics derived from Study of the Situation	218
VI. "Indirect" Tactical Activity of the Communist Party	223
VII. "Direct" Tactical Activity of the Communist Party	231
VIII. The Italian Communist Party and the Present Moment	236

2021 Presentation

The text we publish here in English is an adaptation of a study that first appeared in 1990 in "La Gauche Communiste", issues 18-19, 20-21 and 22-23, then translated into Italian in "Il Partito Comunista" in issues 187-195 of 1990, and finally in English in "Communist Left", from issue 4 of 1991 to issue 25-26.

On February 23, 1919 in "Il Soviet", the press organ of the Communist Abstentionist Fraction (the split within the Italian Socialist Party had not yet occurred) was published a short note, but with an extremely significant title: "Bolshevism, a plant of every climate".

The article highlighted how Bolshevism was not a Russian phenomenon, but an international one, because Bolshevism and revolutionary Marxism were the same thing.

“In order to combat patriotic prejudices and the sophism of the “defense of the nation”, we did not wait for Lenin and the Bolsheviks, our comrades in faith and tendency for many years, to succeed in triumphing in Russia; and even without their glorious and luminous example, the day historical events led us to victory, we would have done as they did. Precisely because we and they worked and work for the same program, for the class struggle that denies national solidarity, for revolutionary socialism, for the conquest of power and for the proletarian dictatorship, who have no fatherland. For this doctrine and method were not improvised in 1917 [...] but since 1847 had been proclaimed by the Socialist

International; and we who, as the left wing of the Russian Social-Democrats, were and are against all later revisions of Marxism, were inspired by that program [...]

“Bolshevism lives in Italy, and not as an imported article, because socialism lives and struggles wherever there are exploited people fighting for their own emancipation.

“In Russia it has made its first grandiose affirmation, and we, finding our entire program in the formidable developments of the Russian Revolution, have written at the top of these columns the magic Slavic word: SOVIET, which has become the symbol of the International Revolution.”

And what was written in the article was confirmed by the facts.

In the whirlwind of the First World War, which involved practically all the parties of the Second International and the great trade union confederations, if in Italy the Socialist Party was saved from plunging into open betrayal, it was not as much due to its own merit as to the work of the national bourgeoisie which, not having yet decided to which of the two warring coalitions it would sell the flesh of its proletarians, had initially declared itself neutral. In fact, except for a small number of nationalists, when the war seemed inevitable the Italian people, of every social class, sided with the neutrality.

In the meantime, bourgeois diplomacy opened negotiations with both warring coalitions, trying to obtain as advantageous a position as possible. Not satisfied with the offers of the Austro-Germans, with whom it was linked by a pact of alliance, it ended up entering the war on the side of the Entente, signing the "Treaty of London" on April 26, 1915. These events were preceded by an intense interventionist campaign in which the utmost important role was played by the man who until a few days before had been recognized as the leader of the intransigent revolutionary current: Benito Mussolini.

After having opportunistically vacillated on the matter, held back by the left wing of the party, Mussolini openly went to the side of

the class enemy and founded his own newspaper, "Il Popolo d'Italia". Naturally, he presented his adhesion to the war as "revolutionary", as a means of opening the road of emancipation to the masses of workers. It's not pleasant to admit it, but both Antonio Gramsci and Palmiro Togliatti, future leaders of the degenerating Communist Party of Italy, adhered to this thesis.

However, only an insignificant minority of party members followed Mussolini, the vast majority refrained from joining the war. It was said that the Italian Socialist Party had "saved its soul" for not having joined the war. But the "non-adherence", when it is not accompanied by a vigorous opposition, is nothing but a hypocritical mask that leaves to the capitalist state and the bourgeoisie every freedom to trap the proletariat militarily and send it to the slaughter on the battlefields. Lazzari's equivocal formula, adopted by the "revolutionary" party leadership, of "neither adhering to nor sabotaging the war", in fact represented nothing more than the capitulation of the party to the needs of national imperialism.

This conciliatory line was opposed by the intransigent wing of the party, which would later organize itself into the Abstentionist Fraction.

The Communist Abstentionist Fraction will write its first letter to the Communist International on November 10, 1919:

“During the whole period of the war there was within the Party a strong radical movement which opposed the mild policy of the parliamentary group, of the General Confederation of Labor – perfectly reformist – and of the Party Directorate itself, although it was intransigent revolutionary according to the decisions of the pre-war congresses. The Directorate was always divided into two currents in front of the problem of the war; the right-wing headed by Lazzari, author of the formula "neither adhere nor sabotage the war"; the left-wing was headed by Serrati, director of "Avanti!". In all the meetings held during the war, however, the two currents presented themselves in solidarity with each other, and while they

had reservations about the behavior of the parliamentary group, the “left-wing” didn’t oppose it. Left-wing elements outside the Executive fought against this misunderstanding, aiming at splitting the reformists of the group from the Party and taking a more revolutionary attitude”.

At the third congress of the Communist Party of Italy (PCd'I), held in Lyon in 1926, when by then the leadership of the party was in the hands of Gramsci and Togliatti, we had to recall how "during the World War, if the entire party, or almost the entire party [referring to Gramsci and Togliatti, ed] of Rome (February 1917), of Florence (November 1917) and at the Rome Congress of 1918 supported Leninist directives such as the denial of national defense and revolutionary defeatism, the use of the defeat for the setting up of the problem of power, the incessant struggle and the request for expulsion from the party against the opportunist leaders, trade unions and parliamentarians.

Immediately after the war the directive of the extreme left was brought to life in the newspaper "Il Soviet" which was the first to set out and defend the directives of the Russian revolution denying its anti-Marxist [Allusion to Gramsci's Article "The Revolution Against Capital" of January 1918, ed], opportunist, syndicalist and anarchist interpretations, and correctly posing the essential problems of the proletarian dictatorship and the task of the party, supporting from moment one a split away from the socialist party."

In March 1919 the first congress of the Third International was held in Russia. No representative of our fraction was then able to participate in that historic meeting, but we were present in 1920 at the Second, real founding congress, where we played an important role by making a significant contribution from both theoretical and tactical point of view.

But already after the First Congress of Moscow, the Communist Abstentionist Fraction had tried to get in touch with the Third International by sending two successive letters, joined to the collection of "Il Soviet"; the first one, which we have mentioned,

is dated November 10, 1919, and the second is from January 10, 1920. Unfortunately neither of them reached their destination because they were intercepted by the police.

However, we are interested in their contents. The fraction presented itself with these words: "Our fraction was formed after the Bologna Congress of the Italian Socialist Party (October 6-10, 1919) but had begun its propaganda through the Napolitan newspaper "Il Soviet", and then held a conference in Rome on July 6, 1919 in which the program was approved and then presented at the Congress [...] After the war, apparently the whole Party took a "maximalist" direction by joining the Third International. The Party's attitude, however, was not satisfactory from the Communist point of view. [Here the letter refers to the reading of the attached papers, ed.]

"[...] Immediately we, with other comrades from all over Italy, moved towards electoral abstentionism, which we supported at the Bologna Congress. We wish it to be clear that at the Congress we were divided from the rest of the Party not only on the electoral question, but also on that of the split in the Party [...]

"The "maximalist-electoralist" fraction, which won at the Congress, had also accepted the thesis of the incompatibility of remaining in the Party of the reformists, but renounced it for purely electoral considerations despite the anti-communist speeches of Turati and Treves".

Examining the parliamentary question, the letter continued: "Parliamentary democracy in Western countries takes such forms that it constitutes the most formidable weapon for the deviation of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat [...]. The left wing of our party has been engaged since 1910-1911 in a polemic and struggle against bourgeois democracy, and this experience leads to the conclusion that in the present revolutionary period in the world, all contact with the democratic system must be severed [...] We attach importance to the question of electoral action and we think that it is not in accordance with communist principles to leave the decision on this matter to the individual parties of the

3rd International. The International Communist Party should examine and solve this problem".

With regard to the Party it was specified: "Today we aim to work towards the establishment of a truly communist party, and our fraction within the PSI is working on this [...] It should be noted that we are not in relations of collaboration with movements outside the party: anarchists and syndicalists, because they follow non-communist principles and are against the proletarian dictatorship, indeed they accuse us of being more authoritarian and centralizing than the other maximalists of the party. See the controversy about *Il Soviet*".

Avanti! carried a letter from Lenin addressed to the German Communists on December 30 or 31, 1919 (depending on its local editions). In his letter Lenin reiterated the necessity of the struggle against all deviations from revolutionary Marxism, regardless of how they're disguised. "The Scheidemanns, the Kautskys, the Frederick Adlers – whatever the difference between those gentlemen from the point of view of personal honesty – have shown themselves to be petty-bourgeois, traitors to the proletariat, allies of the bourgeoisie. They all subscribed to the 1912 Basel manifesto in the imminence of the imperialist war, they all spoke of "proletarian revolution" and they all present themselves to us today as petty-bourgeois democrats, as standard-bearers of the bourgeois republic, as democratic illusionists, as helpers of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie [...] Through direct and frank criticism we shall soon come to wipe out all traitors to socialism in every country, by means of the Marxist-educated working masses, for there are some in every country."

In the same letter Lenin reiterated the concept of the necessity of parliamentary participation, as well as of not leaving the yellow unions, however reactionary they were, but he admitted that "differences of opinion among communists [...] are differences between representatives of the same movement which is growing in an incredible way [...] On such a basis differences of opinion are not a danger. They are the crisis of growth and not the weakness

of old age." It also reiterated the absolute necessity of "uniting illegal and legal work, of giving a systematic and strong control of the legal activity by means of the illegal Party and its organizations."

The second letter which the Abstentionist Fraction addressed to the Third International took its cue precisely from Lenin's appeal.

"The purpose of this letter is to submit to you some remarks to Comrade Lenin's letter to the German Communists, which the December 31, 1919 issue of *Avanti!* reported from the 20th December issue of *Rote Fahne*, in order to make it very clear to you what our political attitude is [...] The Italian [Socialist] Party is not a Communist party and not even a revolutionary one; the same "maximalist electoralist" majority is, rather, similar the German independents. At the congress [of Bologna, ed.] we were divided from it not only by the electoral tactics but also by the proposal to exclude the reformists led by Turati from the party".

Regarding Lenin's criticism of the German "leftists", the Fraction clarified: "Programmatically, our point of view has nothing to do with anarchism and syndicalism. We are advocates of the strong and centralized Marxist political party of which Lenin speaks, indeed we assert this conception more tenaciously than anyone in the maximalist camp. We do not advocate the boycott of the trade unions but their conquest by the Communists, and our directives are those which we read in a report by Comrade Zinoviev to the Russian Communist Party Congress published in the January 1st issue of *Avanti!*"

We reproduce in full the part of the letter devoted to the position of the Fraction on electoralism and parliamentarism:

"We are for the participation in elections of any representation of the working class in which only workers take part. On the other hand, we are openly opposed to the participation of communists in elections to parliaments, municipal or provincial councils or bourgeois constituencies, because we believe that revolutionary work cannot be done in such bodies, and we believe that electoral

action and preparation hinder the formation of communist consciousness in the working masses and the preparation for proletarian dictatorship in antithesis to bourgeois democracy.

“Participating in such bodies and avoiding social-democratic and collaborationist deviations, is a solution that does not really exist in the present historical period [...]

“Parliamentary intransigence was feasible, always, however, amidst continual shocks and difficulties, in the non-revolutionary period, when the conquest of power by the working class was not envisaged as possible; and the difficulties of parliamentary action are all the greater the more the regime and the composition of parliament itself have a traditional democratic character. It is by these criteria that we would judge comparisons with the participation of the Bolsheviks in the Duma elections after 1905.

“The tactic followed by the Russian comrades of participating in the elections to the Constituent Assembly and then forcibly dissolving this same assembly, even if it did not constitute an unfavorable condition for success, would be dangerous in countries where parliamentary representation, instead of being a recent formation, is an institution that’s been firmly established for a long time and rooted in the consciousness and habits of the proletariat itself [...].

“We contrast electoral activity with the violent conquest of political power by the proletariat for the formation of the Soviet Republic [Republic of Workers’ Councils, translator’s note], and therefore our abstentionism does not descend from a denial of the necessity of a centralized revolutionary government.”

Reference is then made to the Italian Socialist Party: "The general elections of November 16, also carried out by the PSI on the platform of maximalism, have once again proven that electoral action excludes and makes one forget all other activities and especially all illegal activities. In Italy the problem is not of uniting legal action with illegal action, as Lenin advised the German comrades, but to start diminish "legal" activity in order to begin

"illegal" ones, which are entirely lacking."

The letter concluded with the affirmation that "if up to now we have remained in the PSI, disciplined to its tactics, in a short time [...] our fraction will separate from the party that wants to keep in its bosom many anti-communists, to constitute the Italian Communist Party, whose first act will be to send you its adhesion to the Communist International" (January 11, 1920).

The Communist Abstentionist Fraction participated in the Second Congress of the International where it had a role of the utmost importance. In the November 5, 1920 issue of "Il Soviet" we read: "The deliberations of the Moscow Congress fully agree with what our fraction has always maintained about the need to create a truly communist party, about the functions and the constitution of this party and its relations with the Third International. They also perfectly agree with what we have maintained on the question of workers' councils, implicitly doing summary justice to the PSI's deliberate decision, which we fought against, to build them from now on".

It is true that there was no agreement on the question of parliamentarism, but this was, at the time, a purely tactical divergence and the Fraction, while reaffirming its position, did not hesitate to set aside abstentionism. In fact, the parliamentary action envisaged by the Third International had nothing to do with social-democratic and collaborationist parliamentarism.

"The thesis voted in Moscow reiterates as a premise the fundamental concept that parliamentarism is a bourgeois system of government, that it cannot constitute the form of the proletarian state, that it cannot be conquered from within but must be destroyed along with the other congenial and local organs to be replaced by the central and local workers' councils, etc. This evaluation of parliamentarism corresponds precisely to what our fraction has constantly maintained in this respect, which has tenaciously insisted that it be accepted by the majority of the Party as well [...]. Moscow's thesis rightly points out that the fundamental method of struggle against the political power of the

bourgeoisie is that of mass action which is transformed into armed struggle, as we have always maintained, and relegates parliamentary action to being subordinate to the aims of extra-parliamentary action, considering the parliamentary tribune as one of the points of support, that is, a legal position which the party, which directs mass action or armed struggle, must establish behind the back of the proletariat in struggle. This is fundamentally different and against what the PSI did, before and after Bologna, whose main focus is and always has been parliamentary action, which dominates and guides the entire political struggle" ("Il Soviet", November 5, 1920).

This demonstrates how, even on this issue, if the tactical evaluation differed, that of the principles coincided perfectly. Therefore, the theses on parliamentarism adopted at the Second International Congress did not represent a defeat for our Fraction, on the contrary, they confirmed what we had affirmed, because they established to what extent the parliamentary function could be used for the purposes of revolutionary action and reaffirmed that the struggle for the conquest of power is played out by parliamentary action.

Having clarified this aspect, it is worth highlighting the role played by the Italian Fraction in a much more important issue: the determination of the so-called "21 conditions" of membership.

A remarkable debate took place on this crucial question.

While almost all of the speakers argued about the peculiarities of their own countries, which would have them accepting "everything", but with reservations, our delegate, on the contrary, spoke in the sense of demanding the utmost severity in the universal conditions of admission: adhesion would have to be total and unreserved, in the fields of both theory and action. The Abstentionist Fraction recognized, perhaps uniquely among the participants, the capital importance of the Second International Congress. Its spokesman affirmed: "It must defend and ensure the fundamental principles of the Third International. When, I think

in April 1917, Comrade Lenin returned to Russia and outlined the main lines of the new program of the Communist Party, he also spoke of the reconstitution of the International. He said that this work had to be based on two essential foundations: on the one hand, it was necessary to eliminate the social-patriots, and on the other hand, it was necessary to eliminate the social-democrats, those socialists of the Second International who admitted the possibility of the emancipation of the proletariat without a class struggle that reached the level of armed action, without the necessity of realizing the dictatorship of the proletariat after the victory in the insurrectionary period”.

Our representative noted that the old distinction between "reformists" and "revolutionaries" was now outdated, because now everyone professed to be a "revolutionary". After the war, it was easy to affirm that "in the future" there would be no more relapses into the error of national defense. The same thing was true of the adherence of the centrists to soviet power, to the dictatorship of the proletariat, etc., in the hope that the revolution would not happen, and without doing anything to bring it about. It would therefore have been a serious mistake to welcome them into the new International.

Our comrade reiterated the necessity of the utmost rigor in the application of the 21 Conditions by proposing what later became the 21st point: "Those Party members who reject on principle the Conditions and Theses formulated by the Communist International must be expelled from the Party. The same applies especially to the delegates to the Extraordinary Congress".

However, despite the fact that the conditions of admission were more precise and thorough, our comrades were not under any illusions: "the matter at hand was that in principle the "reconstructionists" will be able to join the International under certain guarantees. It is our opinion that in certain countries, and especially in France, there is a danger of the entry of too right-wing elements" (*Il Soviet*, October 3, 1920).

Introduction

Thirty four years ago, in the October issue of our Italian paper, *Il Partito*, we wrote: “If seventy years after the revolution we refer back to October, it is not to commemorate a past event, but to draw certainty in the future. Opportunist traitors believe that October is dead and buried, our bourgeois enemies think they have eliminated it; but the world proletariat, once they have reappropriated the lessons of October, will wipe the smiles off their faces” (*Il Partito Comunista*, no. 158/1987)

Today, as the logical consequence of more than ninety five years of counter-revolution, it might even appear, that the crown of theoretical victory should really belong to our class enemies, and that the doctrine of revolutionary Marxism should, at best, be stowed away in the attic of history once and for all.

Over this long arc of time, the bourgeois counter-revolution has obtained real, major victories, and all the while, they have been unconditionally sustained by social-democracy and traitors to communism. After the Russian Revolution broke out, it only took a few years before the international bourgeoisie was able to recover their class unity, and thereby halt the Red Sea which threatened to engulf the capitalist regimes of Central and Western Europe.

Even in proletarian Russia, the interpretation given to October by the western chauvinists began to make headway,

and finally gained the upper hand. What had happened, according to them, was due exclusively to the “special” conditions found in Russia. With such a premise as its point of departure, Stalinism could claim to be able to construct a Russian socialist society, confined within the borders of the national territory, which both transcended and was able to do without an international proletarian revolution. It wouldn’t be long before Western workers, rather than being asked to support the October Revolution and free themselves from the oppressive yoke of capital, would find they were being asked to do exactly the opposite: to support capitalism and struggle to uphold democratic institutions. And as far as workers in the U.S.S.R. was concerned, all that was required was that they just express their solidarity with the Russian State. The upshot of this would be that the bourgeoisie of every continent was allowed to marshal a proletariat deprived of revolutionary guidance, and hurl it from 1939 to 1945 into a generalized slaughter - the sole aim of which was to breathe life back into the capitalist system of production.

From the end of the Second Imperialist War onwards, every last trace of an international character has been definitively erased from the Russian State: no connexion remains, not even purely sentimental. No longer does it ask for the sympathy of the international proletariat and the people oppressed by imperialist domination, instead the “Socialist camp” now appears on the world stage with the crazy, though inevitable, ambition of competing on equal terms with the “Western World”.

In the Russia of today, one further step (the last) is being taken. Now things have sunk to the level where even the petty-bourgeois notion of “Socialism in one country” is giving way to the most vulgar bourgeois liberalism; a perspective which isn’t the least concerned with socialist questions, but

restricts itself to simply pontificating about the necessity of profit and free initiative.

Even back in 1953, we predicted that the Stalinist counter-revolution would turn out in this way, so this latest travesty causes no vacillation on our part but serves rather to confirm long held convictions of ours. “In our party text *Dialogue with Stalin* we foresaw that eventually it would be confessed that two key links had been definitively broken: that between the Russian system of production and Socialism, and that between the politics of the Russian State and the struggle of the working class of all States against the world capitalist formation...A full confession will be made one day...the confessors will confess” (from *Dialogue with the Dead*).

The counter-revolution, therefore, managed to crush the Red October, made the ex-communist parties serve its interests, and reduced the proletariat of the entire world to a state of prostration like never before. The counter-revolution has done all that, and yet it hasn't managed to prevent capitalism accumulating a large quantity of that explosive material that will give rise to a more potent rebirth of proletarian action in the future; and thereby putting on the agenda the question of the one possible solution: the communist revolution.

Capitalism will always be incapable of providing bread and peace to those it exploits; to those whose sweat and blood it absorbs with ever greater avidity in its thirst for surplus-value. With this being the material foundation, the class struggle must inevitably arise on a planetary scale; and when it does, the proletariat will accept that supreme challenge of combat or death.

Both the revolutionary class party and the proletariat must therefore treasure the teachings of October, derived both

from its victory and its defeat, and also the incessant battle sustained by the Italian Left to safeguard the Marxist programme, doctrine and tactics against the degeneration which triumphed in the Comintern.

This work on the history of the Left and the Comintern, which we will be publishing over the next few issues, has precisely such an aim.

Chapter 1: The Founding Conference of the Communist International

The First World War, the betrayal of social democracy organized in the Second International, and the revolutionary wave which spread through Europe and the entire world between 1916 and 1923 were the factors that prompted the birth of the great Communist Party, the Communist International; an organization which represented the final historical result of the world proletarian experience. The moment had finally arrived for the practical realization of the watchword outlined by the Paris Commune and clarified by Marx: dictatorship of the proletariat – the one and only way to smash the yoke of bourgeois society on humanity as a whole.

From 1914 onwards, particularly after the March 1919 congress in Moscow, it became clear that the Bolsheviks were expressing a marvellous synthesis of all the experiences and theoretical baggage of the workers' movement from the 1848 Manifesto onwards. This was due both to their theoretical clarity, and to their position at the head of the Russian revolutionary movement, which would accomplish concretely and physically the dictatorship of the proletariat under the form of the Soviets.

Confusion and infantilism still prevalent amongst the revolutionaries of other countries, who, as often as not, would find themselves bypassed by the revolutionary instinct of the masses in action, and only propelled into action by their gigantic push forward. Only the Italian left (already arisen in Naples before 1914 in response to the evident degeneration of local socialism, immersed in opportunism and brazen electoralism) was gradually compelled, slowly but surely, to carve out a solid theoretical path and clear practice – and arrive at the same positions as the Bolsheviks. It is in fact remarkable to note how the Italian Left, in all its writings from 1914 to 1918, had already clearly stated the same positions and watchwords as the Bolsheviks, and how at the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920, the two currents would again find that total agreement existed as regards theoretical vision, both programmatic and tactical, and in their analysis of the world situation.

Having asserted that we totally agreed with the Russian revolutionaries on the key issues, we certainly don't intend to gloss over those differences which are caricatured so often by corrupt historians. And of those differences that did exist between us and the Bolsheviks, we will never cease to insist that they were of a secondary character and concerned a low-priority question discussed at the Second Congress, namely the parliamentary question. Both we and the Russian comrades recognized at the time that the issue was not one of principle. The Bolsheviks, like us, were engaged in a vigorous fight against one of the weak points of many "left-wing" revolutionaries – infantilism and theoretical immaturity; anti-parliamentarism on principle was their target as well as ours. We do not however deny that later on, points of disagreement unfortunately multiplied. Our analysis of the damaging effect that the use of electoralism would have on the workers' movement would however prove correct, as indeed,

particularly from 1926 on, our immediate denunciation of the erroneous tactics of the Third Congress of the Communist International would be tragically borne out by the degeneration of this international organization and its destruction by the Stalinist counter-revolution.

The continuation of this work will assume the task of demonstrating how the Italian Left, in conjunction with the Bolsheviks as always, and, united and disciplined with the International, resolutely made its voice heard in the attempt to bar the way to opportunism. Though unable to succeed in this task – with the International degenerating and the Bolsheviks assassinated – it remained, and it remains to this day, even in the present counter-revolutionary desert, the sole inheritor of the experience and the Marxist theoretical knowledge of the international workers' movement.

Historical Necessity

All the historical events immediately before the First World War, the open betrayal of social democracy, from 1914 onwards, and the deluge of the revolutionary wave in Europe and the rest of the world, all these contributed to show how the foundation of the Communist International had become a matter of historical necessity.

In the ten-year period preceding the First World War, virtually all the socialist parties had adopted positions which travestied the Marxist doctrine and its revolutionary praxis. A long period of relatively peaceful development of capitalism had given rise to the catastrophic theory that Marxism be abandoned for that of an illusory, peaceful, and gradual evolution to socialism. Eventually even the necessity for class-war was denied. From being instruments for overturning the bourgeois regime, the parties of the Second International had become factors in ensuring its stability, and along with proletarian economic

organizations the best instruments for capitalism to lead the masses into the imperialist war.

If the war had served to demonstrate the conservative and pro-bourgeois nature of social democracy, it would be the Russian Revolution and the proletarian movements which would completely unmask its function as executioner and gravedigger of proletarian emancipation. Faced with the danger of a proletarian assault, social democracy would unhesitatingly renege on its democratic and pacifist philosophy, becoming (both in coalition and completely "Socialist Governments") violent and dictatorial in confrontations with the working class and communists.

Whilst it is true that up to the outbreak of the imperialist war, reformists and revolutionaries had been able to coexist in the same party, this was not the case once the social democrats had definitively passed over to the ranks of the bourgeoisie. Now revolutionaries were obliged to accomplish the historical task of breaking with the reformists, and creating new parties, and a new International founded on a strictly revolutionary Marxist basis – precisely to be rid of the disease of social democracy, and to be able to place itself at the head of the mass-movement.

On the day after the official foundation of the International, Lenin explained its place in history in an article entitled "The Third International and its Place in History" (*Collected Works*, L & W, vol. 29).

The Third International has been founded in a world situation that does not allow prohibitions – petty and miserable devices of the Entente imperialists or of capitalist lackeys like the Scheidemanns in Germany and the Renners in Austria – to prevent news of this International and sympathy for it spreading among the working class of the world. This situation has been

brought about by the growth of the proletarian revolution, which is manifestly developing everywhere by leaps and bounds. It has been brought about by the Soviet movement among the working people, which has already achieved such strength as to become really international.

The First International (1864-72) laid the foundation of an international organization of the workers for the preparation of a revolutionary attack on capital. The Second International (1889-1914) was an international organization of the proletarian movement whose growth proceeded in breadth, at the cost of a temporary drop in the revolutionary level, a temporary strengthening of opportunism, which in the end led to the disgraceful collapse of this International.

The Third International emerged in 1918, when the long years of struggle against opportunism and social chauvinism, especially during the war, led to the formation of communist parties in several countries. Officially, the Third International was founded in its First Congress, in March 1919, in Moscow. And the most characteristic feature of this International, its mission of fulfilling, of implementing the precepts of Marxism, and of achieving the age-old ideals of socialism, and the working-class movement – this most characteristic feature of the Third International has manifested itself immediately in the fact that the new, third, "International Working Men's Association" has already begun to develop, to a certain extent, into a Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The First International laid the foundation of the proletarian, international struggle for socialism. The Second International marked a period in which the soil was prepared for the broad, mass spread of the movement in a number of countries.

The Third International has gathered the fruits of the work of the Second International, discarded its opportunist, social-chauvinist, bourgeois, and petty-bourgeois dross, and has begun to implement the dictatorship of the proletariat. The international union of parties, leading the most revolutionary movement in the whole world, the movement of the proletariat to overthrow the yoke of capital, now has an unprecedented solidity: many Soviet republics embodying, on the international scale, the dictatorship of the proletariat, his victory over capitalism. The universal historical significance of the Third International, the Communist International, is that of having begun to put into practice Marx's greatest slogan, the slogan that takes stock of the evolution of socialism and the workers' movement. For a century, the slogan that has been expressed as follows: dictatorship of the proletariat.

The historical duty incumbent on the Third International was therefore to bring to fruition the watchword launched by Marx after the Paris Commune of 1871: "dictatorship of the proletariat" – the end point of the evolution of the workers' movement: And, with such an aim, to found the International Party – navigator of the world revolution.

In the text we have already cited, Lenin continually affirms that "following the Paris Commune a second epoch-making step was taken" with "Soviet, or proletarian, democracy" which "for

the first time in the world created democracy for the masses" by repressing the "freedom" of the exploiters and their accomplices, since what is bourgeois democracy but freedom for the rich. For Lenin, the Soviets are the new form that the dictatorship of the proletariat must take in the world revolution. On March 5, he wrote an article in Pravda entitled "Won and Recorded" (Collected Works, L & W, Vol 28) which he ended thus: «*The founding of the Third, Communist International heralds the international republic of Soviets, the international victory of communism*».

The Letter of Invitation to the Congress

For the Left of the workers' movement, the collapse of the Second International and the necessity of separating from opportunism were obvious from August 1914 onward. Nevertheless, there remained profound disagreements over the issue of when the initiative would have to be taken to found the new International. In 1916, the Zimmerwald Left, supporting the rapid foundation of the Third International, remained weak and only gathered a handful of militants around the Bolshevik nucleus. In 1917, the sufferings of the war and the victory of the Russian Revolution would radicalise the situation.

Immediately on his arrival in Petrograd, Lenin made it the first duty of his party to constitute the new International (point seventeen of the "April Theses"), and in January 1918, an "international conference", grouping mainly Latvians and Scandinavians, took place in Moscow and declared itself in favour of the rapid convocation of "an international socialist congress". In the ensuing months, the label "social-democratic" would be abandoned by the Bolshevik party, and the Communist Parties of Latvia and Finland are founded. In January 1919, the Communist Party of Germany is born.

The British Labour Party initiative of convoking an international conference at Lausanne – to breathe new life into

the Second International – provoked a lively response from the Bolsheviks, and in December they prepared a political document for the convocation of the "International Socialist conference" on the basis of the Bolshevik and Spartacist programmes.

This political document would be completed on December 31, 1918 so as to be handed over to the Spartacist representative who'd arrived in Russia, just before the founding congress of the German Communist Party.

The Bolsheviks in fact held the foundation of the German Communist Party to be a fact of crucial importance, and on January 21, 1919, in his open letter to the workers of Europe and America, Lenin would declare that: *«As soon as the Spartacist League gave itself the name Communist Party of Germany, then, the foundation of the Communist International – authentically proletarian, authentically internationalist – became a fact. This foundation has not yet been formally consecrated, but in reality, the Third International exists from now on».*

The definitive document, the "Letter of Invitation to the Congress", drafted by Trotsky, would be submitted to an international meeting (end of January 1919) where it was approved and signed by representatives of the Russian, Polish (foreign bureau), Hungarian (foreign bureau), Austrian (foreign bureau), Latvian, and Finnish parties, the Revolutionary Social-Democratic Federation of the Balkans, and the American S.L.P.

The provisional date for the international congress was February 15, and the place chosen, Berlin. But, as we know, the meeting eventually took place in Moscow, in March 1919.

The letter of invitation to the congress began as follows:

The undersigned organizations and parties consider the convocation of the First Congress of the new international to be an urgent necessity. In the course of the war and the revolution, the complete failure of the old social-democratic and socialist parties, together with the Second International, has been demonstrated in striking fashion. The intermediate elements of the old social democracy (called “center”) have shown their incapacity for effective revolutionary action. But, in addition to this, we are today seeing the delineation of the contours of the true revolutionary international. The very rapid growth of the world revolution, which constantly poses new problems; the danger of the suffocation of this revolution by the alliance of capitalist States against the revolution, under the hypocritical banner of the League of Nations; the attempt of the social-traitor parties to reunite and help their governments and bourgeoisies yet again, in order to betray the working class, after being granted a mutual “amnesty”; finally, the extremely rich revolutionary experience already acquired, and the world character of the entire revolutionary movement; all these circumstances oblige us to put the question of the convocation of an international congress of the revolutionary proletarian parties on the agenda of the discussion.

Thereafter, the letter was divided into three parts. The first part concerned the goals and the tactics drawn up on the basis of the programmes of the Spartacist League and the Russian Communist Party: the present period is that of the collapse of the world capitalist system; the tactics of the proletariat consist, at present, in seizing State power by destroying the bourgeois State apparatus and organizing a new apparatus of proletarian power/proletarian dictatorship; the power of the workers’

councils or the workers' organizations is the concrete form of the proletarian State.

The second part was concerned with the relationship to the "socialist" parties: implacable struggle against the social patriots, break with the Center – which had Kautsky as its theoretician following his attempt to detach the revolutionary elements; the necessity of winning over any group which displayed an evolution towards the revolutionary current. The letter continued with a list of the thirty-nine parties, tendencies and groups invited to the congress.

Finally, the third part dealt with matters of organization, and the question of the party's name.

The Founding Congress, Moscow, March 2-6, 1919: The Founding Proclamation

In besieged and starving Russia, only a small group of delegates reached the congress. Thus, the Moscow assembly was not very representative, and it would have been easy to commit errors of judgement as regards the international situation. Fifty-one delegates took part in the various meetings, but many of them were simply Bolshevik militants unaware of the global situation; the same applied to the communist parties of Poland, Latvia, the Ukraine, Lithuania, Byelorussia, Armenia, etc. The same was true of the group of Germans in Russia, and for the representatives of the "communist groups" formed in Russia two years before, since these were in reality foreign sections of the Russian Communist Party: the Czech, Bulgarian, Yugoslavian, French, Chinese, and Korean groups. Only a few really came from abroad, namely Platten and Katscher, the two Swiss delegates, the German Eberlein (pseudonym Albert) the Norwegian Stange, the Swede Grimund and the Frenchman Gilbeaux (who had lived in Switzerland for years). There was

no representative from Italy.

On the other hand, the stance taken by the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) posed a large problem for the Bolsheviks. Based on the positions of Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches, the Center of this party was opposed to the immediate foundation of the Third International, judging it to be premature in the absence of the truly representative parties of Western Europe and a well-defined platform.

The attitude of the German party was held by the Russian leaders to be of decisive importance, because an international could not be constituted on the basis of one great party such as the Russian Communist Party. The German CP, therefore, came to be regarded as the second foundation stone, and its stance obliged the Bolsheviks to retreat, and to put off the planned proclamation to a later date; this is clearly evidenced by the work, speeches and voting of the first two days of the conference. Yet on the third day, there occurred a sudden turnaround when Rakovsky and others made a proposal calling for the proclamation of the Third International, and therefore, for a return to the voting of the first day.

The intervention of the Austrian delegate Gruber, who arrived on the second day and gave an enthusiastic description of the revolution in central Europe, certainly had a decisive effect. Similarly, Eberlein had affirmed on the first day that a victorious German revolution was imminent (on the same day that Noske dispatched his Freikorps to re-establish order in Berlin!).

For the Bolsheviks, the proclamation of the International whose necessity they had proclaimed for five years, was above all tied to the revolutionary movement and its rhythm of global development. Isolated from the rest of the external world as they were, and equipped only with what scanty information

they could gather, yet they would have the magnificent intuition that the hour for the proclamation had struck. They would have to sweep away any trace of reticence in the other delegates, above all those of the German delegate, “to unfurl the communist banner” in order to assemble the revolutionary troops in movement behind a world party!

In the weeks and months which followed, all the revolutionary movements would rally behind the Communist International, and prove that the formidable decision taken by this small conference in March 1919 was correct.

Chapter 2: The Founding Congress

As we have seen, no current of the Italian Socialist Party was present at the founding congress of the Third International. As for the party left, this was certainly because of material obstacles, and not because they disagreed on the need to organize the organ of proletarian emancipation on an international scale.

In May 1918, that is a year before the Moscow conference, the Italian Left had already posed the problem very clearly in an article entitled “The Marxist Directives of the New International” (“L'Avanguardia” of May 26, 1918). This article, though heavily distorted by the censor, asserted that it was necessary to reconstitute the proletarian international, excluding the mouldering parties of the Second International, and found the new International on the theoretical and programmatic basis of revolutionary Marxism and the Communist Manifesto. *«We are and we remain Marxists in the highest and most all-encompassing sense of the word, holding the modern socialist proletariat to be the continuer of the critical work started by the first Communists founded on the 1847 Manifesto».*

The revisionist distinction between the “maximum” and “minimum” programme is abolished; repeatedly we find the principle of the violent conquest of power reasserted and the

anarchist objection against dictatorship of the communist State refuted; there is the demand for a strongly centralised and disciplined party:

The new international will be a great collective force, perfectly placed within the social field and the historical epoch through which we are passing, the sole purpose being to replace capitalist society with communist society, by means of proletarian class action [...] The International will dedicate itself to organizing the forces specifically capable of bringing about the great “step” that humanity will have to take [...] The new international will therefore be the world socialist political party, the collective organization of the labouring class for conquering and exercising power, in order to transform the capitalist economy into a collective one. Such a party aspires to a collective and conscious “discipline”, and it will be the proper sphere for the future universal proletarian administration.

The article concludes as follows:

The fundamental postulate of the conquest of power is not to be confused with the overestimation of parliamentary action [...] The positive foundations on which we must found the new International can be summarized in a final synthesis as follows: doctrine: Marxist interpretation of history and society; program: [violent] conquest and exercise of power to activate the socialization of the means of production; method: intransigent class political action within a collective discipline.

(“L’Avanguardia”, May 26, 1918)

If the Italian Left had taken part in the First Congress, there is no doubt that it would have made itself heard on the necessity, first of all, of defining very clearly who was and who wasn't in the revolutionary camp. This in its turn would have curbed the enthusiasm (based on the Russian revolutionary wave and the all too vague information filtering through from the West) which would lead to the formal constitution of the Third International at a time before real communist parties existed.

As a matter of fact, in the article we have already quoted it was stated that the International shouldn't *«be a shapeless jumble of groups and conflicting methods but a homogeneous union of forces directed towards the one main goal, using precisely established and circumscribed methods [...] We can show by various examples, with episodes drawn from the Russian Revolution, and from the life of our own party in Italy, how every deliberation that has led to a 'restriction' of the field of socialist tactics has given rise to a considerable re blossoming of the movements»*.

Our current decided to opt, then as now, for greater strictures on the criteria of admission to the International and was also of the opinion that only those parties holding to unequivocal communist positions should be admitted to the new International. It therefore found itself expressing reservations about the Bolsheviks' own formula of the *«coalition with the elements of the revolutionary workers' movement and those who, though not past members of the socialist parties, are now placed completely on the terrain of the proletarian dictatorship in its soviet form, that is with the elements corresponding to syndicalism»*.

Even if the Italian Left did not entirely agree, the Bolsheviks' hopes were certainly not lacking in a firm logical basis: their hope that in the wake of the victorious revolution, elements which weren't completely Marxist could be integrated in the melting-pot of a new October, and that their influence could be the determining factor against the inauspicious influence of all

the Johnny-come-lately communists who had suddenly converted to communism after long careers dedicated to reforms and compromises.

Having said that, by far the most important thing is that the Italian Left had recognized, in all the documents, theses, platforms, and resolutions emerging from the First Congress of the newly born International, the entire heritage of programmatic and tactical positions of revolutionary Marxism common to both the Bolsheviki and the Italian fraction of the extreme Left.

The Daily Sessions

The first day, March 2, 1919, commenced with Lenin's opening speech, in which he declared that, «*Our meeting has great, world-historical significance... the international world revolution is beginning and gaining strength in all countries [...] The proletariat is now in a position to make practical use of its dominion*».

A congressional bureau was elected, including Lenin, Eberlein, and Platten, with Klinger as its permanent secretary (German leader of the Russian party). The assembly decided to support the proposal of the German Communists, that it commence sitting as the "International Communist Conference" and so not to formally establish the Third International, as the Central Committee of the Russian party and the Finnish delegates had hoped. Lenin proposed the following agenda:

1. Constitution
2. Reading of reports
3. "Platform of the International Communist Conference" (speakers: Albert or Eberlein, Bukharin)

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4. "Bourgeois Democracy and Proletarian Dictatorship" (Lenin's theses)
 5. The Berne Conference and the stance towards the socialist currents (Platten and Zinoviev)
 6. The international situation and the policy of the Entente
 7. Trotsky's "Manifesto of the Communist International"
 8. The White terror
 9. Election of the bureau

The delegates' reports were then given: that of Albert (Eberlein) for Germany, Platten for Switzerland, Zinoviev for Russia, Sirola for Finland, Stange for Norway, Reinstein for the USA, Rudnyansky for Hungary, Katscher for Switzerland, Trotsky for Russia, and Rutgers for Holland.

On March 3, 1919, the second day, the session began with the report by the Ukrainian comrade Rakovsky (Balkan Revolutionary Federation), followed by a report by Shrypnik (representing the Ukrainian CP), who described the revolutionary situation of the Ukrainian masses. Sadoul, a member of the French Communist group in Russia, commented on the situation in France. Feinberg, in Russia since June 1918, spoke of the situation in England.

Afterwards, the debates began on the "Platform of the International Communist Conference" with Albert and Bukharin as its presenters. This platform aimed to clearly and distinctly express the tasks, goals, and methods of the proletariat. It consisted firstly of a preface which characterized the bourgeoisie, capitalism, and its antagonisms. Then it divided

into four parts:

1. The conquest of political power by the proletariat, through the destruction of the bourgeois State apparatus and the creation of the proletarian State apparatus.
2. Democracy and dictatorship: the dictatorship of the proletariat will be a transitory situation preceding the disappearance of classes, bourgeois democracy being no more than disguised dictatorship; by contrast, the soviet system links the masses to the organs of administration.
3. The expropriation of the bourgeoisie and the socialisation of the means of production.
4. The path to victory; all means, such as the revolutionary use of bourgeois parliamentarism must be subordinated to the war declared on the bourgeois governmental machine. The preliminary conditions for the victorious struggle of the proletariat are the break with the social democrats, of both Right and Center.

The day ended with the report by the Austrian CP's representative, Gruber, who gave an enthusiastic description of the revolution in central Europe.

March 4, 1919 (third day) saw the continuation of the debate on the platform, which was adopted near-unanimously, with one abstention (that of the Norwegian CP). Lenin then read his twenty-two "Theses on Bourgeois Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat". This was a denunciation of the hypocrisy of bourgeois democracy. Thus, thesis nine declared:

The history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has shown us since before the war what the famous “pure democracy” is under capitalism. Marxists have always said that the more evolved “pure” democracy is, and the more tormented, fierce, and openly-declared the class struggle becomes, the more the yoke of capital and the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie are revealed in all their “purity” [...] even in the most democratic republics, in reality we see the rule of terror and dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, which shows itself overtly every time that it seems to the exploiters that capital’s power is spent.

Hence these theses emphasize that the dictatorship of the proletariat is the only defence against the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, and that there can be no half-measures. But they also show that these dictatorships are fundamentally distinguished by the fact that the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie is the repression of the immense majority of the population, that is the workers, while the dictatorship of the proletariat is the suppression of a tiny majority of the population, that is, the exploiters. The form of the dictatorship is that of the power of the soviets in which the power of the whole State, the whole State apparatus, has for its permanent and only foundation the organization of classes who were oppressed by capitalism, that is the workers and semi-proletarians (peasants who do not exploit the labour of others).

The resolution concerning these theses affirms that the principal tasks of the communist parties, in all countries where soviet power does not exist, consists in:

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1. Explaining to the broad masses of the working class the considerable importance of the political and historical need for the new democracy, of proletarian democracy, which must be substituted for bourgeois democracy parliamentarism.
 2. Spreading and organizing the soviets among the workers in all branches of industry, among the soldiers and sailors, and among labourers and poor peasants.
 3. Creating a solid Communist majority in the soviets.

Next, the proposal for proceeding to the foundation of the Third International was discussed. Since the previous evening, and after Gruber's description of the revolution in central Europe, the supporters of the immediate proclamation of the Third International had counter attacked. The decision to consider itself as a simple preparatory conference had been taken on the first day, in the absence of many delegates, notably Rakovsky. The latter had insisted the evening before that the vote be taken again. The proposal was put forward by the representatives of the CP of Austria (Gruber), the Swedish Left Social Democratic Party (Grimlund), the Revolutionary Social Democratic Workers' Federation of the Balkans (Rakovsky), and the Hungarian CP (Rudnyansky). Albert intervened to oppose the proposal, by arguing on the basis that true CPs only existed in a few countries, and that one couldn't know who would associate themselves with the new international since the parties of the major western countries weren't represented at the conference. Zinoviev responded by repeating that from the start of the meeting the Russian CP was for the immediate foundation of the Third international, but that the German comrades had insisted on putting off this foundation.

For him, the victorious advance of revolution was worth much more than the formal creation of CPs that the Germans required for the foundation of the Third International. The proposal was adopted unanimously, except for five abstentions including that of the German CP.

The work and discussions were thus conducted by the assembly as a congress of the Communist International. Eberlein declared that after his return to Germany he would strive to convince his comrades, in fact, he would not meet any opposition to the decision taken in Moscow (which ran counter to the mandate he had received from the Center) because the revolutionary upsurge had already changed people's minds in Germany.

The day ended with the declaration of those who had attended the Zimmerwald conference that, following the dissolution of the Zimmerwald organization, the bureau of the Zimmerwald conference would be asked to send all its documents to the Executive Committee of the Third International (signed by Zinoviev, Rakovsky, Trotsky, Lenin, and Platten). The resolution on dissolving the Zimmerwald grouping was adopted unanimously.

On March 5, 1919 (fourth day), the question dealt with was to do with "the Berne Conference and the position to be taken towards the socialist currents", whose presenters were Platten and Zinoviev. The resolution passed affirmed that the Berne Conference in February 1919 was an attempt to re-animate the corpse of the Second International. The servile attitude of the conference showed that the social patriots had consciously declared themselves in favour of the maintenance of capitalist wage-slavery, and were ready to fool the working class by means of hollow reforms. The C.I. congress saw that the International which the Berne Conference was trying to

reconstruct was a yellow, strike-breaker's international which was, and could only continue to be, an instrument of the bourgeoisie.

Lao Chi-Tao, president of the Central Committee of the Union of Chinese Workers in Russia, then reported on the situation in China. And the day finished on point seven of the agenda: "The international situation and the Entente's policy".

On March 6, 1919 (fifth day), Trotsky read his "Manifesto of the C.I. to the Proletarians of the World". This was a magnificent analysis of the class struggle and bourgeois society from the time of the first manifesto. The following is an extract:

Conscious of the world-historic character of their tasks, advanced workers have striven for an international association since their first steps to organize the socialist movement. The cornerstone was laid in 1864 in London with the founding of the First International. The Franco-Prussian War, out of which Hohenzollern Germany emerged, cut the ground from under the First International while at the same time giving impetus to the development of national workers' parties. Already in 1889, these parties came together at the Paris Congress and created the organization of the Second International. But in that period, the center of gravity of the workers' movement remained entirely on national soil, within the framework of the national State, based on national industry, and working within national parliamentarism. Decades of organizational and reform work created a generation of leaders who in their majority verbally acknowledged the programme of social revolution but renounced it in

reality and became mired in reformism and in adaptation to the bourgeois State. The opportunist character of the Second International's leading parties was completely exposed and caused the greatest debacle in world history at the moment when the course of events called for revolutionary methods of struggle by the workers' parties. If the war of 1870 dealt a blow to the First International by revealing that the power of the united masses did not yet stand behind its revolutionary socialist programs, so too the war of 1914 killed the Second International by revealing that above the solidly welded masses stood parties that had become servile organs of the bourgeois State.

This does not apply only to the social patriots, who today have openly gone over to the camp of the bourgeoisie and who have become its trusted and preferred agents and the reliable executioners of the working class. It also applies to the amorphous, unstable socialist center, which is now busy trying to revive the Second International, that is, to revive the narrow-mindedness, opportunism, and revolutionary helplessness of its leading elite. Groups such as the Independent Social Democratic of Germany, the current Socialist Party majority in France, the Menshevik group in Russia, the Independent Labour Party in Britain, and others are actually trying to take the place occupied before the war by the old official parties of the Second International, as before, they are coming forward with ideas of compromise and unity and thus are doing everything possible to paralyse the proletariat's energy, prolong the crisis, and thereby intensify Europe's suffering. The

struggle against the socialist center is a necessary precondition for a successful struggle against imperialism.

Rejecting the vacillation, lies, and rottenness of the outlived official socialist parties, we Communists, united in the Third International, consider ourselves the direct continuators of the heroic endeavours and martyrdom of a long succession of revolutionary generations, from Babeuf to Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg.

If the First International foresaw the road that lay ahead and indicated its direction; if the Second International assembled and organized millions of proletarians; then the Third International is the international of open mass action, the international of revolutionary realization, the International of the deed.

Socialist criticism has sufficiently denounced the bourgeois world order. The task of the international Communist Party is to overthrow this system and construct in its place the socialist order.

We call upon working men and women of all countries to unite behind the communist banner, under which the first great victories have already been won.

Workers of the world: in struggle against imperialist barbarism, against monarchy, against the privileged classes, against the bourgeois State and bourgeois property, and against all forms and kinds of social and national oppression – unite! Under the banner of the workers' councils, of the revolutionary struggle for power and the dictatorship of the proletariat, under the banner of the Third International, proletarians of all countries unite!

Next came the question of the C.I.'s organization. In order to get under way without slowing down its activity, the congress immediately elected the necessary bodies, the idea being that the statutory constitution of the C.I. be deferred to the next congress on the bureau's proposal. The leadership of the C.I. was vested in an Executive Committee (E.C.) composed of a representative from each Communist Party of the most important countries. Until the arrival of foreign representatives, the comrades of the country where the E.C. had its base, were entrusted with organizing the work. The E.C. elected a bureau of five people: Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Rakovsky, and Platten.

Finally, Lenin brought the congress to a close with a speech which affirmed that the congress delegates only *«had to register what the masses have already won in their revolutionary struggle»*. The little conference of March 1919 had the formidable historical task of raising the standard behind which the working class of the entire world must rally not, as in Paris in 1871, in order to storm heaven, but to storm bourgeois society as a whole.

Chapter 3: The Italian Socialist Party (PSI) and its Abstentionist Fraction: 1919–1920

The Origins of the Italian Socialist Party and the Extreme Left Current: 1864–1914

From 1860 to 1880, the workers' movement in Italy was dominated by "libertarians", and it is not until 1881 that the first avowedly Marxist tendency emerges at Rimini, in the Socialist Party of Romagna. The Socialist Party of Italy (PSI) is founded in 1892 in Genoa, would arise from the union of the Socialist Party of Romagna with the Workers' Party of Milan (an "apolitical" and abstentionist party which counted Turati amongst its members).

This founding signaled the definitive separation from the anarchists, who were opposed to any participation in elections. The party's programme (which would remain unchanged up until 1919) although containing some very vague statements, was nevertheless mainly characterized by the tenets of class struggle, i.e., socialization of the means of production, organization of the proletariat into a political party, independence from all other parties.

Little by little, inside the PSI, a movement would develop in response to reformism. Since the Marxist wing was so weak, it fell to the syndicalists to express this reaction to begin with, but in 1907, these would leave the party. In 1910, at the Milan Conference, the “Intransigents”, opposed to the reformists, manifested themselves in the shape of Mussolini and Lazzari. During the Libyan War period (1911-12) the reformists were divided into groups for and against the war; in 1912, the parliamentary group would however vote against the annexation of Libya. At the congress held in Reggio Emilia, the intransigents managed to gain the upper hand over the reformists and the extreme right. The latter grouping, represented by Bissolati, Bonomi, Cabrini, and Podrecca, supported the Libyan War and were prepared to participate in bourgeois cabinets: this wing was expelled from the party. Mussolini would speak out at this conference against the autonomy of the parliamentary group.

The intransigent fraction, which represented the PSI's left, had “La Soffitta” as their journal (The Attic to which certain bourgeois politicians thought Marxism had been banished!). Mussolini, already editor of the Youth Federation paper, “L'Avanguardia”, became editor of “Avanti!”, the party paper. The Youth Federation, founded in 1907, had an extreme left leadership, and would carry out a determined fight against reformism. Complete victory for the intransigent revolutionary current came at the Ancona Congress in April 1914, a congress characterized by the declaration that membership of the party was incompatible with participation in Freemasonry.

The extreme left current of the PSI was born in Southern Italy, specifically in Naples. One of the first sections of the International had been set up in Naples, by Bakunin in 1870. This section, oriented towards a Sorelian syndicalist policy, founded “La Propaganda” and fought against the Liberal

administration. In 1900, Naples became the Italian center for reformism's development - thanks in large measure to some scandalous electoral alliances. In 1907 the syndicalists abandoned the section, which at the time consisted mainly of reformists and freemasons.

In 1912 it is the revolutionary socialists who abandon the section, though still retaining their membership in the PSI, in order to start the "Karl Marx" Socialist Revolutionary Circle and to publish the review "La Voce". The Circle would eventually restore the local section after the Ancona Conference, where the revolutionary Marxist group of Naples had presented its conclusions on its long battle against the disgraceful electoralism which had reached unparalleled heights in Naples. On March 14, 1914, *Il Socialista* of Naples was founded as the organ of the Campanian PSI.

The 1914–18: Struggle of the Left Against the Inertia and Deviations of the PSI Leadership

Of all the socialist parties, only the Bolshevik party, the Serbian Socialist Party, and the PSI (along with all other Italian Parties up to 1915) were opposed to the war. But whilst the entire PSI, or at least a good part of it, rejected the policy of the Union Sacrée, its Left, quite distinct from it, defended Leninist positions at the party congresses and reunions that followed (Bologna, May 1915 – Rome, February 1917 – Rome, 1918) namely: rejection of national defense; defeatism, the use of military defeat to pose the problem of the seizure of power; incessant struggle against the union leaders and opportunist MPs and the demand for their expulsion from the party. Hence the Left vigorously and consistently opposed the inertia and opportunism of the PSI leadership in a series of theoretical and

practical battles, about which we'll have more to say later.

The declaration of war on August 2, 1914, which neither the Italian government nor its bourgeois opposition were party to, had been preceded in Italy by an important episode in the class war. This was the explosive "Red Week" of June 9-12, 1914, which occurred in response to the murder of three workers during an anti-militarist demonstration in Ancona. Strikes and demonstrations quickly spread to all the cities in Italy. But the CGL, led by reformists, didn't hesitate to betray the struggle and ordered an end to the general strike.

Between August 1914 and May 1915, all official Italian political life focused on the question of neutrality, and Italy's intervention in the war. The Italian bourgeoisie would soon show that its real aim was war against its Austrian ally. Their nationalist and patriotic stance would soon be echoed on the unstable fringes of the PSI.

On October 18, 1914, Mussolini revealed his treachery in "Avanti!", the paper he edited, in an article entitled "From Absolute Neutrality to Active and Operative Neutrality", a prelude to the theory of the revolutionary and defensive war. The extreme left of the Naples section responded to Mussolini and this war theory immediately through its own review "Il Socialista". There was also an intervention by the Youth Federation, in which Mussolini had hitherto enjoyed great influence. Mussolini was expelled from the party, and the leadership entrusted to Lazzari, Bacci, and Serrati. Three currents then were delineated inside the PSI: the Turatian reformists; the intransigents, who while supporting opposition to the war in parliament were opposed to expelling the reformists, in effect supporting them; and finally, the left, who demanded that a policy of active sabotage of the war be adopted.

On May 24, 1915, Italy went to war against Austria. At the PSI Bologna Congress on the war (May 19, 1915), the participants were: nine members for the party leadership, twenty for the parliamentary groups, eight for the CGL, and peripheral delegations of the party (Reggio Emilia, Rome, Turin, Bologna, Catania, Florence, Genoa, Milan, Pisa, Venice, Naples, Parma, Modena, and Ravenna). In the course of this conference all the various conflicts between the various PSI tendencies with regard to the war came to the surface. The vague formula “neither participate nor sabotage” put forward by Lazzari corresponded to a centrist policy. The extreme left took a radical position by referring to defeatism and sabotage of every war, according to Lenin’s formula. The Italian left wasn’t aware of Lenin’s position at the time, but from the identical programmatic and theoretical premises it arrived at the very same tactical conclusions. The initiative of the general strike was left to the local organizations, as requested by the delegates from Turin, where the proletariat was in a state of extreme volatility, and where repression was fierce. The resolution passed was “lackluster” and spared the PSI from “taking on its responsibilities”.

The PSI took part in the resumption of international relations; it attended the conferences at Zimmerwald in September 1915, and Kienthal in April 1916. At Zimmerwald, Modigliani and Lazzari signed the general manifesto, but not the manifesto of the extreme left proposed by Lenin.

During the war it was impossible to organize the national congress of the PSI; however, in Rome, a non-clandestine convention was held on February 25-26, 1917. The few documents that we have from this meeting are still sufficient to show there was a fierce struggle between two opposing positions. Three points came up for discussion. The first of these concerned the relationship of the party leadership and the

parliamentary group. The parliamentary group – like the union leadership – in fact carried out its own policy independently of the party, without the leadership intervening. However, since the Socialist Party was being attacked on all sides for its position on the war, sentimentality would prevail, and a vote of confidence in the leadership was moved by Trozzi, a representative of the Left, and passed. The second point concerned the proposed reuniting of the socialist parties of the countries in the Entente (which now included Italy). It would have been correct simply to say, as the extreme left did, that the Second International and the French Socialist Party were well and truly dead, and therefore there was no need to participate in the Paris conference. The motion of unity, however, would be carried on secondary points. On the all-important third point, there were clear differences: the Left obtained 14,000 votes against the 17,000 of the Center and Right. This third point involved establishing the tactics the party should adopt when the war had ended, just then in the offing. The pacifist wing of the party supported democratic-bourgeois formulae: peace without annexations, and without war reparations; the right of nations to self-determination; the creation of the League of Nations. The thesis of the left was clear, and blew sky-high all the creaky ultra-bourgeois notions:

The war came about because in a capitalist regime, it could not be otherwise (Zimmerwald reaffirmed that) and it is not a question of basking in a new historic phase of peace, but of posing the question of how to prevent another war. What means does the proletariat have at its disposal? One and one alone: to overthrow capitalism: therefore, if our present programme (1917) hasn't been up to the task of stopping the war with defeatism, the post-war programme must involve the proletariat taking power and the social revolution!

(from “Storia della Sinistra” Volume 1, page 106)

In February 1917, The Russian Revolution breaks out. Then there is the intervention of the United States, giving the Entente powers that added democratic veneer which the socialist Right seeks to use against the Left. Faced with the inconsistent and vacuous stance of the central organs of the PSI with regard to the war and the Russian Revolution, the extreme left mobilizes. The motion passed by the Naples section (a motion subsequently circulated throughout the entire party) would criticize the party’s passive attitude, in war and in peace. Opposition to the leadership’s policy becomes increasingly lively, particularly in Turin and amongst the young.

On August 23, 1917 in Florence, a committee of the Left fraction was formed which included the federations of Milan, Turin, Florence, and Naples. The committee issued a circular with a view to the party’s Fifteenth Congress (which was then postponed to autumn 1918). This circular expressed an orientation completely opposed to the leadership: socialist activity would have to be developed exclusively on the terrain of class struggle.

In August 1917, the workers of Turin launched a new class action, to which the national bourgeoisie react with violent repression and the arrests of proletarian leaders. In September – October 1917, the Italian defeat at Caporetto provoked a flare-up of interventionism in the PSI. The parliamentary group, supported by the CGL, proposed a Union Sacrée in defense of the fatherland, and their aim is obstructed only by strenuous opposition from the rest of the party.

The leadership of the PSI, with Lazzari, in effect adapted itself to the extreme left, which was joined by the intransigent fraction to make common cause against the interventionists. At the request of the extreme left, the leadership convoked the

members of the intransigent fraction, which represented the majority of the PSI, at the reunion of Florence on November 18, 1917, holding it illegally. The clandestine meeting, brought about under the stimulus of the Left, was hence directed openly against the reformist and jingoist attitudes of the parliamentary group, of the union leaders, and certain mayors (like those of Milan and Bologna), and set itself the task of putting a stop to such bad habits. Following this meeting, the circulars of the PSI center aimed at hindering the patriotic initiative of the parliamentarians and the union leaders, and the most resolute of the militants were able to organize themselves even more effectively.

The intervention of the representative of the extreme left at the clandestine meeting in Florence involved a clear condemnation of the French and German Socialist Parties, of their Union Sacrée policy, and it denounced those who justified participation in the war as the defense of the parliamentary-democratic bourgeois countries against the allegedly “feudal” Central Powers. It developed Marx and Engels’ distinctive critique of the prospect for a democratic Europe, supposedly resulting from a military victory of the Entente. The stance of the Neapolitan extreme left coincided with that taken by Lenin: defeatism and negation of the defense of the fatherland, the view that the proletarian revolution could triumph where the armies of the bourgeois State had been defeated, as had been confirmed in Russia in 1917. At the fraction reunion, the extreme left therefore proposed to use the military defeats incurred by monarchist and bourgeois Italy as the means of getting the proletarian revolution under way. But such a proposal didn’t fit in with the policy of the party leadership, which subscribed to Lazzari’s passive formula: “neither participation nor sabotage”. For the left current, the PSI position on war was inadequate because it stopped short of what Lenin termed “the transformation of the war between

States into civil war between proletarians and bourgeois”.

In point of fact the PSI leadership had already compromised itself in May 1915, both when it had refused to proclaim the general strike against mobilization, and, not for the last time, when it had tolerated the parliamentary group’s acceptance of Turati’s watchword, “defense of the fatherland”.

From 1917, the Italian State, after it had rejected any form of support by the PSI, unleashed a terrible repression against the proletarian movement and against all those opposed to the war. In January 1918, Lazzari and Bombacci were arrested and accused of conspiracy and defeatism, and Serrati was arrested in May 1918. In 1918, the Turin comrades were put on trial and incurred very heavy sentences. In February 1918, Turati would make a patriotic speech in the House of Deputies, and in May the parliamentary group and the union leaders decided to participate in the study commissions for the passage from war to peace. They were disavowed by the party, but still Turati refused to give up his place on the government commission.

The Fifteenth Congress of the PSI (Rome, 1918) was authorized by the State powers, whereas that held in September 1917 had been prohibited; this was because there are times when democratic illusions are far more effective than rifle shots in restraining revolutionary anger. At this congress, many delegates were absent, whether because of mobilization, which still kept a considerable number of militants under arms, or because of arrests. There were 365 sections of the party represented. The struggle against the war had invigorated the party and many of those present condemned the maneuvers of the parliamentary and union Right, the patriotism of Turati, and the ambiguities of Graziadei. Whereas the representatives of the Right avoided making the slightest reference to the Bolshevik revolution, Repossi (long associated with the extreme

left), declared himself in favor of Lenin and the dictatorship of the proletariat and concluded his speech by calling for the struggle of “class against class”. The lawyer Salvatori, who had also attended the congresses of Bologna (1915) and Florence (1917), defended the positions of the extreme left; he drafted a motion disowning the parliamentary group, and deploring the weakness of the leadership. Modigliani then intervened in a violent manner declaring that the MPs would denounce such a motion if it were approved. Hence it was given a blander formulation: nevertheless, it required the parliamentary group to conform strictly to the party’s directives. Salvatori’s modified motion would collect 14,015 votes, the centrists’ 2,507, and Modigliani’s 2,505. However, it only took a few months for the parliamentary group to recommence its autonomous activity, with the party leadership standing by and letting it happen.

The congress, in fact, avoided the central question by getting absorbed in trivial personal disputes and accusations. Already in the previous year the center current had asked that “theoretical” debates be avoided so as not to compromise the unity of the party! The Left affirmed, on the contrary, that, *«the sincere, honest and upright way of resolving the question (of divergences) is rather to decide whether one or the other tendency lines up with the party’s programme and corresponds to the goals that it has set [...] We are firmly on theoretical terrain here. We have to be convinced that it is time to face the matter and resolve it, so as to be able to proceed then with certainty in the field of action»* (“Avanti!”, October 13, 1917). Practical questions, in particular tactical and organizational ones, could only be resolved by equating them with doctrine, and examining them in the light of Marxist theory. As for personal polemics, it was appropriate to the bourgeoisie and reformism, and must be especially spurned.

The consequence of not being able to reach agreement on basic questions was that the new party leadership which emerged

from the congress was neither able to straighten things out in an organizational sense, nor overcome the legacy of hesitations and wavering of the past.

In this struggle of the extreme left against the inertia and deviations of the PSI during the war, it is critical to highlight the importance of the Socialist Youth Federation. On the eve of the war, the socialist youth movement made significant contributions to the revolutionary wing of the party. In October 1914, in the wake of Mussolini's treachery, a minor crisis was unavoidable. The National Youth Committee was then convoked as a matter of urgency on October 25, 1914 at Bologna, that is a few days after the famous article would signal Mussolini's volte-face. A resolute motion was passed, which put an end to any interventionist hesitation in its paper "L'Avanguardia". A few days later, the paper's editor, Lido Calani felt obliged to go over, lock, stock, and barrel, to the traitor's side, without even a tiny minority of the youth to follow him. After Bologna, the line of the paper was rectified completely, and it carried out radical activity against the war. At the congress of Reggio Emilia (May 10-11, 1915), on the eve of Italy's entry into the war, the principle of revolutionary defeatism and a general strike in the event of war was approved. The Youth Federation developed the same directives as those backed by the extreme left at the Rome Congress in 1917. It made an open criticism of the "pacifist and gradualist" attitude of the leadership. On October 23, 1917, the federation held a national congress in Florence and supported the circular issued by the revolutionary and extreme fraction. A representative of the left (the extreme left of Naples) took over the leadership. The federation gave voice to passionate support for the October Revolution, and began to raise the question of the new International, thereby preparing itself for the decisive struggle between the left wing and the reformist tendency.

Chapter 4: The great proletarian struggles and their repercussions on the party

Impotence and Inefficiency of the PSI

On November 4, 1918 there was the armistice with Austria and the war was over. The working class in the West galvanized itself into action following the Russian proletariat. Italy, fresh from the conflict, is in the throes of deep economic crisis. The workers take action straightaway, but the PSI prevaricates once again and shows itself incapable of taking the lead when proletarian struggles take place.

On November 13, supporters of the war organized a campaign against certain local administrations with socialist leanings (Milan, Bologna). The working class replies with a demonstration and a manifesto signed by the mayor of Milan, the CGL (Confederazione generale del lavoro), and the leadership and parliamentary group of the PSI. The manifesto makes a list of general demands without calling for class struggle. Another manifesto calling for immediate reforms is issued by the CGL on November 30. This is echoed by yet another drawn up on November 7 but not published until December 7 and issuing from the leadership of the PSI, still associated with the CGL, the parliamentary group, and the league of cooperatives. Thus the PSI would blindly adhere to the positions of reformist economic

organizations. “Avanti!” would publish a report, truncated by the government censor, on the meeting of the Directorate (December 7-11). One notes that despite all, there is still resolute opposition towards annexation by Italy of the Slav territories still belonging to the ex-empire of Austria, but the order of the day is limited to adopting a programme of immediate political actions initiated already by trade-union organizations.

In short, once the war was over, the PSI, though officially led by “revolutionaries”, didn’t take up clear positions and assert itself as guide of the proletarian class movement. Instead, it gave fresh evidence of its organizational weakness and, de facto, the betrayal by some of the leaders.

On March 22, 1919 the PSI adheres to the Third International which had been founded at the beginning of the month (we recall that there was no delegate representing the Italian proletarian movement). It was a time when the Italian proletariat would launch a formidable offensive lasting a good two years: the famous Biennio Rosso (Two Red Years) of 1919-1920. This offensive would quickly be characterized by a prodigious increase in union membership, rising from 200,000 in 1918 to 1,000,000 in 1919, reaching 2,000,000 in 1920. Of particular note was the large-scale participation of agricultural laborers in these struggles. The vigor and force of the attack is also to be explained by the fact that the Italian proletariat was uncorrupted by the politics of the Union Sacrée and had been firmly opposed to the war, much more so than its party. The Italian proletariat’s magnificent postwar revolt was characterized by the variety and sheer number of struggles which took place throughout Italy. And though the class struggles in Naples were but one episode amongst many, they differed by clearly formulating the existing relations between the workers union movement and the political socialist movement in post-war Italy.

The extreme opportunism of the socialist section in Naples before the war had caused, by way of reaction, the differentiation of a Neapolitan extreme-left which fought to bring the PSI back onto

class positions, both before and after the war.

“Il Socialista”, organ of the Neapolitan Socialist Federation, was substituted on December 22, 1918, by “Il Soviet” which would soon develop the theses of electoral abstentionism. The proletarian struggles in Naples, which commenced in May 1919, would last for almost two months and be characterized by a large-scale trade-union movement supported and led by the extreme left of “Il Soviet”. It was certainly no accident that the “Il Soviet” office was in the Camera del Lavoro, alongside the metalworkers’ federation. But many other union and craft organizations grouped around it as well. These fifty days of bitter struggle regain a glorious chapter and confirmation of everything the left was asserting on the necessity of the split from the party and the foundation of the Communist Party. From January 18 to May 2, 1919, a first great trial of strength took place between the metalworkers and industrialists. In May there was the big strike in which at least 40,000 metalworkers took part. Buozzi, secretary of the metalworkers’ union (FIOM), would have his attempts at conciliation rejected. Only on June 12 would he manage to sign an agreement.

But the PSI was just as incapable as the unions of making the most of the opportunity offered by this proletarian battle, or rather it didn’t wish to. In fact, the proletarian offensive revealed and accentuated the contradictions existing within these organizations. Remaining faithful to its Pact of Alliance with the CGL (which assured the unions independence from the party), the PSI swallowed whole the communiqués of the CGL and quietly published them, without comment, in “Avanti!”. Thus on June 17, 1919 a CGL communiqué was published which denounced the work of groups of “secessionists”. This was clearly a reference to the extreme left of the party, which, though very active inside the unions, hadn’t proposed to split them.

Faced with the growth of the fascist movement (in April 1919 there would be the first clashes between fascists and workers) an adherent of the so-called “intransigent” fraction proposed some *vie nuove*,

new paths, namely: a parliamentary alliance with Nitti's and Giolitti's parties and even with the Catholics, that is with all those who had, in due course, made declarations against the war. The PSI reacted in a spirited manner to such a proposal, yet without making any concrete proposals. The extreme left, in contrast, would never cease to insist that the defeat of the proletarian movement in Italy wasn't directly dependent on the strengthening of fascism. The main reason being instead the work of sabotage carried out by opportunism. The extreme left actively fought to reorientate the PSI and propound the theses of electoral abstentionism. In June, "Il Soviet" published an article entitled "Elections or Revolution". Numerous sections and youth federations would adhere to the positions expressed in "Il Soviet". The necessity of organizing a fraction on a national scale immediately made itself felt, and in July 1919 the extreme left of the PSI met at Bologna with a view to organizing the abstentionists into a national fraction. Its programme was published in "Il Soviet" on July 13. The programme contained a historical part and a political part. This programme would then be completed at the meeting of the Communist Abstentionist Fraction held in Florence in May 1920, with a part on tactics and a critique of the opposing schools. This text showed that the question of abstentionism didn't represent the central characteristic of the Marxist programme of the Left. The group that had put forward this programme proposed to diffuse it within the Socialist Party in order that some sections and individual members might adhere to it, the intention being to create a communist fraction within the party.

The fraction got ready to present its programme to the party's national congress as a replacement for the Genoa programme of 1892. On June 15, "Il Soviet" welcomed, with reservations, the appearance of the Turinese paper "L'Ordine Nuovo". The two papers in fact stand for very different political and practical positions.

In the spring of 1919 the deepening of the economic crisis, with a vertiginous inflation of the prices of basic necessities compels the proletariat to re-enter the struggle. In the major cities violent agitations break out which take the name of *lotta contro il caro viveri*,

struggle against the high cost of living. There are also committees of an inter-classist nature which are set up to defend consumers. Revolutionaries would denounce this absurd form of action, which would see the Confindustria (Italian equivalent to the British CBI) joining in the struggle against the high cost of living.. because the bosses have an interest in seeing that the workers can eat at low cost! They would denounce the Labour Federation that echoed the appeals of the industrialists and which, substituting itself for the party, led the struggles of the masses.

In June the movement was radicalized by the strike movements. On June 16 the Dalmine metalworkers strike and occupy the factory, and Mussolini makes his famous speech. The scheming political hack declares himself in favor of the workers' demands, approves the strike, and speaks in defense of a trade-union movement linked to the Fascist Party. Only an "expert" on the workers' movement could help the bourgeoisie to organize their dictatorship – in order to conjure away the menace of the red dictatorship! In July the violence of the agitations against food prices reaches extreme levels with a great international strike planned for July 20 to halt the military operations against Russia and Hungary.

In 1970, a representative of our party had this to say on the subject of these proletarian struggles:

The war having ended with the victory of Vittorio Veneto, glorified despite being neither large-scale nor producing notable successes, there was an intensification throughout the country of hardship and economic crisis [...] The inevitable state of widespread discontent didn't provoke the masses into a recovery of that collective historical consciousness that unfortunately the party had largely lost; the response, of course, was the reappearance of a veritable tidal wave of demands and agitations for immediate improvements, including of wages. The earth shook under the feet of the bourgeoisie, but it was still not enough to summon up the potential in the proletariat needed to take up

arms to establish its dictatorship.

Today we can give a more exact formulation than “the situation was ripe for the socialist revolution in Italy in 1919”; it is better put this way: the First World War over, the proletarian parties could have placed themselves at the head of a victorious offensive movement, which didn’t happen only because those parties betrayed their own ideological heritage and the appropriate vision of how historical struggles would bring the capitalist era to a close. It was therefore the right moment and the fateful juncture for the reconstruction of the proletarian and socialist movement, for restoring its true doctrinal foundations both programmatic and tactical. It was to this task that Lenin and the Communist International promptly turned their attention, as did the left wing of the Italian movement which showed – and can still show to today – that its work was entirely in harmony with the glorious historical line of the worldwide anti-capitalist revolution, which commenced with the 1848 Manifesto of Marx and Engels.

The complexity of the setting in which the proletarian battles were fought and the perils resulting from the dubious directives of the various committees struggling against the cost of living meant another meeting of the party leadership was needed and it met on July 10. Out of the discussions no clear directives emerged and it was decided to summon a meeting of the National Council of the PSI at Bologna. The Left’s delegates took an active part in discussions on every topic. They affirmed that the international strike of solidarity with Russia and Hungary ought to be to the bitter end, and not just forty-eight hours long. The strike in Europe had only a very modest success, above all because of sabotage by the French Socialist Party and by the defection of the CGT: even in Italy there was the extremely serious defection of the railway union. On July 13 the Left put up a lively opposition (in the movement against the cost of living) to the reformist and counter-revolutionary Right and to the disorganized and pseudo-revolutionary positions of the Maximalists

(centrists) that appealed to the demagogic formula of the “expropriating strike”.

“Il Soviet” on July 20 would declare: *«The concept of expropriation simultaneous with insurrection and put into effect in a capricious way by individuals and groups, which is implicit in the phrase ‘expropriating strike’, is an anarchist concept devoid of revolutionary contents».*

The Left had to, therefore, fight on two fronts, on the one hand opposing the clearly counter-revolutionary stance of the right-wing, which was rooted in the parliamentary socialist group and the CGL leadership, and on the other, opposing the lack of clarity of the PSI leadership and its majority which declared itself, in words, in solidarity with the Bolshevik revolution and for an attack against the bourgeois regime in Italy, but with chaotic methods and with a chaotic programme. The internal debates in the PSI were therefore focused essentially on the electoral question: “Revolutionary preparation or electoral preparation” was the headline in “Avanti!” on August 21, 1919. To this article, written by one of our comrades, the electoral Maximalists turned a deaf ear.

The Bologna Congress of the PSI, October 5–8, 1919

In 1919 there existed at least four currents within the PSI:

1. The Right, headed by Turati, Treves, and Modigliani who placed themselves on purely legal terrain.
2. The Intransigent Communist Fraction, “communist electoralists”, or “Maximalists”, who had the leadership and “Avanti!” in their hands. This current was represented by Lazzari, Serrati, etc.; revolutionaries in words, but reformists in practice; they had led a non-active opposition against the war and above all

against any opposition of a revolutionary character.

3. The Turinese *Ordinovisti*, with Gramsci, Tasca, Terracini, and Togliatti, allied to maximalism. They were gradualists and educationalists. With their watchword of the conquest of the municipalities and the factories they avoid the central problem of the taking of power and the party. According to the Ordinovists, the party is a technical organ whose function is to coordinate the different socialist organizations.
4. Finally, the fourth tendency is the Communist Left which consisted of the embryonic nucleus of the future Communist Party of Italy. We have already traced the origins of this current in an earlier chapter. From immediately after the meeting in Rome on July 6, the current set itself the aim of making a defense of the revolutionary Marxist programme, diffusing it by means of “Il Soviet” and by articles sent to “Avanti!”.

Eighty-three sections adhered to “Il Soviet”, with these more concentrated in northern and central Italy than in the southern part of the country. The Left took the name *Frazione Comunista Astensionista* (Communist Abstentionist Fraction) to distinguish itself from the electoral “Maximalist” communists. At the regional congress in Naples on September 14, 1919, the abstentionists are victorious. For the communist abstentionists, the necessity of a split has far greater importance than the tactic of abstentionism.

At the Sixteenth Congress of the PSI (1,418 sections representing 66,708 members are present) three motions are presented: one by the “Communist Electoralist Fraction”, one by the “Communist Abstentionist Fraction”, and there is the “Unitarian Maximalist Motion”.

The electoralists would recognize that the party’s programme (still as set down at Genoa in 1892) had been by-passed by events on the international scene, above all by the Russian Revolution, and that the

proletariat, to win power and consolidate its revolutionary victories, must have recourse to the use of violence: but it reiterates the necessity of utilizing elections as a useful form of propaganda for Marxist principles; they decide, after all, for the adherence of the PSI to the Third International.

The motion of the abstentionists is marked by the assertion of the inappropriateness of having as members of the party those who proclaim the possibility of proletarian emancipation within the ambit of a bourgeois democratic regime, and who repudiate the method of armed struggle against the bourgeoisie to achieve the proletarian dictatorship. The abstentionists would call on the PSI to take the name of Communist Party and become an integral part of the Third International, accepting its programme and pledging itself to observe its discipline. The party should refrain from electoral competition and intervene in the hustings only in order to make propaganda on the reasons for taking such a stance. The entire forces of the party should be pledged to spreading, inside the working class, the historical consciousness of the necessary and complete realization of the communist programme, building up the proletarian organizations, and adopting practical means of action and struggle in order to bring about the realization of the cardinal programmatic points.

The unitarian motion rejected any break with the reformists promulgating «for all members the right of citizenship in the party and their complete liberty of thought». The modification to the old Genoa programme was solely platonic because no other programme was put forward.

The first motion won the majority with 48,000 votes, the abstentionists received 3,400, and the unitarians 15,000.

In the frequently recalled testimony of 1970, our comrade who participated in these events would write:

At the Sixteenth Congress [...] the Communist Abstentionist Fraction [...] didn't differ from the other currents only in its

proposal not to participate in the imminent political general elections and in parliament, but also because they alone had supported the theses of the constitutive congress of the Third International held in March 1919, in which was distilled the great historical experience of the October 1917 revolution in Russia. These theses placed to the fore the conquest of power not through bourgeois democratic forms but through the advent of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and its Marxist class party. The prospect of a big electoral campaign – and the real possibility of success for the one party which had truly opposed the bloody and ruinous war of 1915 – was rejected because it would diffuse the tension in the Italian masses which had arisen from the immense and bloody sacrifice on the battlefields, and out of the grave economic crisis which characterized the post-war period. Such an outcome would openly contradict any possibility and hope of channeling that tension, that uneasiness, that widespread discontent, into the one direction history had shown could lead, not only in Italy but throughout Europe, to the socialist and revolutionary solution.

These fundamental positions, on which the entire abstentionist fraction had stood firm [...] obviously could not be presented and sustained before the other three currents at the congress. The latter instead were satisfied with anticipating a broad electoral success which maybe would allow the party, by use of the parliamentary maneuver, to usher in measures which might in part alleviate the anxiety of the masses and correspond to their hopes and expectations. Such an outcome would mean definitively destroying the favorable aspects of the situation as it existed at the time, and barring the way to the one path which, once taken, would mean the entire movement of the exploited classes bringing its pressure to bear; it would mean clipping the wings of the revival of true revolutionary consciousness

of the working class and its party.

The reformist Right would in fact openly condemn the vital communist theses. The so-called Maximalist current, whilst it didn't reject these theses outright, didn't see how these principles, which formed a precise historical programme, must be binding not only on the party as a whole, but also on each of its parts, and on each of its individual militants and members, who in the event of obstinate opposition would have to be excluded from the ranks of the party. Only by such means could one arrive at the reconstruction of a new international movement which wasn't hopelessly ensnared by the danger of a repeat of the horrendous catastrophe of August 1914, at which could be cured of the infection of social-democratic and minimalist opportunism. From the time of the congress of Bologna, therefore, the Abstentionist Fraction put forward the demand that the unity of the Socialist Party be broken. The fact that implicit in this unity was a considerable membership and anticipated future electors, would deceive the proponents of the electoral tactic into making a grave error: that there could be a march towards proletarian socialism whilst repudiating the employment of violence and armed force, and the great historic measure of the dictatorship, the key to which consists in depriving of any electoral or democratic right (and even of organization and propaganda) all strata of the population not consisting of authentic workers [...]

The central thesis of our fraction wasn't anti-electoralism but was rather splitting the party, to leave on the one hand genuine revolutionary communists, and on the other, those who supported the "revisionism" of the principles of Marx regarding the inevitable catastrophic explosion of the conflict and the struggle between the opposing social classes, already put forward by the German Bernstein before the war.

Putting our theses to the test at the conference, we proposed to the leaders of the Maximalist electoralist fraction, counted amongst whom were Serrati, Lazzari, and Gramsci, a specific proposal aiming to substitute one single text which would stipulate anti-revisionist far more plainly than the one they had prepared: in it we agreed there would be no talk of boycotting the elections if they would accept our theses on the split in the party. Our proposal was totally rejected by the Maximalists. Regarding this proposal, it is worth recalling that Lenin, in writing his text against extremism as an infantile disorder of communism, stated he had received and read some numbers of “Il Soviet” and appreciated that our movement was the only one in, in Italy, to have understood the necessity of separating communists from social democrats, through splitting the Socialist Party.

Chapter 5: The Struggle for a Split in the Italian Socialist Party

The Communist Abstentionist Fraction

After the Bologna Congress, the abstentionist communist left did not, indeed could not, break with the PSI. The one truly communist fraction was temporarily imprisoned when Italian maximalism “repainted” itself by adopting a programme compatible with the Moscow theses. For this reason, after the vote of October 8, 1919 at the Bologna Congress, the PSI’s abstentionist communist delegates published a decision which affirmed:

Given the resolution with which the great majority of the congress has adopted the electoral tactic, they [the abstentionists] reassert their view that such a tactic contradicts the Maximalist programme, the methods of the Third International and the Italian proletariat’s preparation for revolutionary action; and that a clear separation between the followers of the social democratic method and the followers of the communist method is inevitable; however the delegates have decided to propose to the sections they represent that they remain within the Italian Socialist Party, whilst desisting from abstentionist propaganda amongst the masses, for reasons of discipline; they declare the establishment in the party of the Communist Abstentionist Fraction, and invite all sections and groups who agree with

the programme presented to the congress to join it.

(“Il Soviet”, October 20, 1919)

Thus «Il Soviet» was reorganized, not to be the organ of the Socialist Federation of Naples, but as the organ of the fraction which had been constituted on a national level.

For its part, the “Ordine Nuovo” group was completely aligned with the Maximalist positions, as shown by its article of the October 18, significantly entitled “The Unity of the Party”. In the months following the congress, the fraction attempted to strengthen international ties, especially with Moscow, which had greeted the result of the Bologna Congress as a success for international communism, and cited Lazzari and Serrati as representatives of the left!

“Il Soviet” fully accepted the positions expressed by the First Congress of the Communist International, whilst favoring a greater rigidity in the criteria for admission, including the barring of economic organizations. The fraction addressed two letters to the Comintern (one dated November 11, 1919, the other January 11, 1920), but unfortunately, both of these ended up in the hands of the Italian police. These letters explained the differences with the majority over the incompatibility of the right belonging to the party. In the letters, Serrati’s maximalism was diagnosed as equivalent to the centrism of the German Independents denounced by the Bolsheviks. In addition, Ordine Nuovo’s lack of clarity was pointed out, confusing as it did those political organisms, the Soviets, with economic organisms. In its second letter, the fraction showed how the general elections of November 1919 in Italy had proved that electoral activity excluded any other, especially revolutionary activity. The fraction also denounced the German workerists, who didn’t differentiate between participation in parliament and participation in trade unions, and who consequently proposed the abandonment of the latter. Finally, the letters affirmed the necessity for the formation of a Communist Party, separate from the Italian Socialist Party.

Unmasking False Maximalism of Centrism

Precisely by virtue of its constitution, the PSI was totally incapable of leading a proletarian revolution, as was shown by the failure of the revolutionary movements in 1920. This was the result of a policy conciliating a Marxist verbalism with an opportunist practice, which would bring the party to overtly counter-revolutionary positions. The formidable proletarian actions in the class struggle set the party the task of preparing for the seizure of power. But to achieve this, unity of doctrine and discipline in the proletarian organism was essential. And this was what the Second Congress of the C.I., with its famous twenty-one conditions of admission, would seek to bring about.

Therefore, the Italian Abstentionist Fraction didn't just attack those reformists openly allied to the bourgeoisie (Turati, D'Aragona, etc.), but above all Serrati's false maximalism, which followed a policy with disastrous results for the revolution; a policy denounced by the fraction from the rostrum of the Second Congress of the International.

In effect, even if the PSI's old Genoa programme was modified in a revolutionary direction at the Bologna Congress of 1919, the fact remained that the Maximalist majority tolerated the presence in the party of those who denigrated the new programme and refused to break with the old one. The PSI had joined the Communist International, but in such a way that in substance it remained the old pre-war party, pursuing its reformist and electoral policy. Self-styled maximalism, which we defined as centrism, really didn't possess a scrap of revolutionary preparation.

In the review "Rassegna Comunista" of June 30, 1921 we said:

What did the majority at Bologna know of the International's positions of principle and tactics? Less than nothing. Most didn't distinguish between the idea of the conquest of power and that of the expropriation of the capitalists, and they had no notions about the problem

of union action or on any other question. The impending election overshadowed everything else, and stifled a new departure in the old disagreements, inevitably maturing below the surface, which loomed up with regard to the tactic to be carried out during the war. Thus was made possible the formation of that Serratian bloc, lacking in any homogeneity, which could only be broken up by a better diffusion of communist consciousness, together with painful experiences in the field of action.

In fact, the party's complete lack of preparation for revolution permitted the sabotage action by its right wing. The role of saboteur performed by the reformists became clear at the time when a grave economic crisis had pushed the proletariat to undertake a struggle with revolutionary connotations. This struggle was to culminate in the workers occupation of the factories and lands. In that moment, the party's task should have been to lead and unite the struggles with a view to the conquest of political power, but, in the National Council (composed of party and union representatives) called amidst the struggles, the reformists successfully propagated the concept that the movement had a purely economic goal and was non-political and that therefore the leadership had to be left in the hands of the unions, not in those of the party! The government didn't dare use armed force against the workers' movement, but it was the reformists who came to the aid of the bourgeois State by establishing negotiations on the basis of economic demands alone, and this could only bring about the liquidation of the movement.

For the class struggle to reach its objectives it was therefore necessary to eliminate the reformist ideology, whether overt or camouflaged, from the party. The Abstentionist Fraction had always been conscious of this, and it knew that the "purification" of the party could come about solely by means of a split and the consequent formation of a new party.

In essence the PSI placed itself on the same level as the other social-democratic parties that were sunk in social-patriotism. The

Bologna Congress, which continued to tolerate the reformist presence in the party, had, with its new programme, merely given a revolutionary veneer to a non-revolutionary organization.

After the parliamentary elections of November 16, 1919, in which 156 seats were won by the Socialist Party, the indiscipline of the MPs and the inertia of the union bodies, combined with the paralysis of the party, forced the leadership to hold a National Council meeting in Florence on January 11, 1920. This was done with the aim of saving the Right, and so to protect the leadership itself against an extreme left which was daily gaining positions on a national level. At this meeting the fraction was represented by Verdaro, but only as an observer. "Il Soviet" of February 8, 1920 was obliged to say that once again the Maximalist leaders had, in both practical and theoretical terms, shown themselves to be totally out of their depth.

The fraction concerned itself more with the definition of the programmatic basis of the new party than with the problem of the split. In "Il Soviet", during the first quarter of 1920, there appeared a long series of articles on the nature and function of the Soviets in polemic with Ordine Nuovo, and on the European and world communist movement. As far as the Communist Abstentionist Fraction were concerned, the Ordinovists were situated on the same terrain as the German councilists of the KAPD.

The PSI's National Council (held from April 18-22, 1920) reflected the serious internal tensions provoked by the class struggles in Italy, and the deficiencies of the party. During the great "clock hands" strike, which from its beginnings in Turin that March had spread throughout Piedmont, both the party's leadership and that of the CGL were opposed to a nationwide extension of the action. At the National Council confidence in the leadership was confirmed yet again: 26,000 votes in favor, 10,000 against. Our comrade intervened on the question of the Soviets.

National Conference in Florence, May 1920

The Communist Abstentionist Fraction of the PSI therefore met again in Florence on May 8-9, 1920. Beside the delegates from the socialist sections and groups belonging to the fraction and its Central Committee, the following attended: for the PSI leadership, Gennari; for the Socialist Youth Federation, Capitta; Misiano for a communist tendency which had proposed a non-abstentionist agenda at the Socialist Conference held some days before in Milan; Gramsci represented those who on the same occasion had supported the no confidence vote against the PSI leadership. An appeal from the Western Secretariat of the Communist International was read out, which concluded with a call for the establishment of a communist party with the ability – beyond divergences on minor issues such as electoralism – to guide the Italian proletariat *«to the conquest of power and the institution of the Italian Soviet Republic, as an integral part of the World Soviet Republic»*.

In the report carried in “Il Soviet” of May 16, 1920, the fraction affirmed that:

1. The PSI, due to its composition then, was unable to guide the proletarian revolution, and its many deficiencies hinged upon the presence of a reformist tendency within it. In the decisive phase of the class struggle, this reformist tendency would inevitably have assumed a counter-revolutionary position, balancing a verbal extremism with an opportunist practice in political and economic action.
2. The PSI’s membership of the Moscow International was invalidated by the fact that the party tolerated in its midst a current which negated the principles of the Communist International – whether by openly defaming it, or worse still, by capitalizing on it with a view to electoral gains.
3. The true instrument of the proletariat’s revolutionary

struggle was the political party of the class, founded on Marxist doctrine and on the historical experience of the revolutionary communist process already triumphant in Soviet Russia.

4. The fraction wished to consecrate all its forces to the constitution in Italy of the Communist Party (Section of the Third International).
5. The fraction gave a mandate to its CC to prepare the programme of the new party, and its statutes; to intensify international relations, with the aim of constituting an anti-electoral fraction in the Comintern, and to uphold the positions of the fraction at the next world congress; after that, to convoke the founding congress of the Communist Party; to summarize in clear theses the fraction's positions of principle and tactics, and to spread them widely in Italy and abroad.

The Theses Approved at the National Conference, May 8–9, 1920

The theses were divided into three parts:

1. The first part resumed the general definitions of the principles and goals of communism and is subdivided into thirteen theses; they affirm that communism is the doctrine of the social and historical conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat. The doctrine takes the form of the Marxist critique of capitalist economy, the method of historical materialism, the theory of class struggle, the conception of the historical development of the fall of the capitalist regime and the proletarian revolution. The central and fundamental expression of this doctrine is the 1848 Communist Manifesto, on which the Communist Party is based. The theses defined the relations of bourgeois production, the

political institutions of capitalism (that is, the parliamentary-democratic State) and the forms of proletarian struggle against capitalist exploitation. The instrument of revolutionary proletarian class struggle against the bourgeoisie is the class political party, the Communist Party. This party brings about the conscious organization of the advance guard of the proletariat. The organization of the proletariat into a dominant class will be realized in the form of the dictatorship, that is, in a type of State whose representatives (systems of workers councils) will consist exclusively of working-class members, while the bourgeois will lack voting rights.

2. The second part, in seventeen theses, carried out a critique of the various hostile schools of thought. The theses attacked idealism; the concept of liberalism and bourgeois democracy; the education and instruction supplied by the ruling class, denying that they could make the slightest improvement in the living conditions of the masses; the principle of nationality; bourgeois pacifism (Wilsonian illusions); utopian socialism, and all those conceptions typical of reformism and incoherent revolutionism, which serve only to disarm and disorient the proletariat.
3. The third part defined the forms of struggle and tactics of the Communist Party. These fourteen theses affirm that the communist conception and economic determinism doesn't turn communists into passive spectators, but into tireless fighters, and that struggle and action aren't separate from doctrinal principles. The revolutionary work of communists is founded on the international party organization, functioning on the basis of disciplined responses to the decisions of the majority and the central organs. Propaganda and proselytism are fundamental party activities, but the communist movement doesn't make *«majority consensus an essential condition for its own actions»*. The decisive criterion for unleashing a revolutionary action is the objective evaluation of our own forces and those of our enemies, and the

numeric element is not the only determinant, nor even the most important one. Communists must penetrate *«the proletarian cooperatives, the unions, the factory councils by forming groups of communist workers. These groups seek to win over the majority and the leadership positions, in order to get the mass of proletarians enrolled in such associations to submit their own action to the higher political and revolutionary goals of the struggle for communism»*. However, the CP must keep out of all institutions and associations where bourgeois and proletarians participate under the same heading.

With regard to electoralism, the theses repeat that participation in elections and parliamentary activity, while presenting constant risks of deviationism, could be utilized for propaganda and the formation of the movement in the period before the possibility of overthrowing bourgeois domination had arisen. In the present period, communists had to pose the direct objective of the revolutionary conquest of power, to which all the party's forces had to be devoted. It was therefore considered inadmissible to participate in bodies that are powerful defensive arms of the bourgeoisie. On the contrary, communists must take an active part in the great proletarian demonstrations, preparing and organizing them, even carrying out propaganda in the ranks of the bourgeois army. The Communist Party has to train itself to act as the general staff of the proletariat in the revolutionary war, therefore, to organize its own network of information and communications.

On how to deal with other parties, the theses reject the united front: no accord or alliance with other political movements which incidentally share some contingent goals with the Communist Party but diverge on the subsequent programme of action.

Concerning the Soviets, it was explained that they can exercise their true function only after the overthrow of bourgeois rule. They only became revolutionary when the Communist Party has won the majority in them.

The fourteenth thesis is fundamental from the tactical point of view:

What distinguishes the communists is not to propose in every situation and every episode of their class struggle that all proletarian forces immediately deploy for a general uprising, rather they have to argue that the insurrectional phase is the inevitable outcome of the class struggle, and to prepare the proletariat to take it on in conditions favorable to success and the ensuing development of the revolution. According to the situation, which the party can judge better than the rest of the proletariat, it could find itself having to act either to precipitate or to delay the final conflict. In any case it is the specific task of the party to combat those who by rushing into revolutionary action at all costs, may push the proletariat towards disaster. Equally, communists must combat those opportunists who exploit circumstances in order to thoroughly disrupt the action, with the aim of stopping the proletarian movement completely and dispersing the mass action towards other objectives. The Communist Party must instead lead this mass action onto the terrain of effective preparation for the inevitable, final armed struggle against the defenses of the bourgeois regime.

The Objectives of the Theses

The Italian Left expected from the Second Congress of the Communist International (its true founding congress) that it would define the basis of the communist theory and programme, whose acceptance would then be the primary criterion for the parties' membership of the C.I. It was additionally expected that the Second Congress would formulate the fundamental rules for action on the union, agrarian, colonial, and other questions, which all members would have to strictly observe. Hence these theses were not to be considered the doctrinal platform of a national party, but as a draft of the programmatic and tactical foundations of the world communist

party, in other words of the Communist International. The theses were closely linked to the positions of the Bolsheviks. The only divergence was tactical: it concerned, on the one hand the problem of electoral and parliamentary abstentionism (the Bolsheviks still saw in elections and in parliament a possibility for propaganda, as carried out in Russia); on the other hand, there was the problem of alliances and accords with the other parties and political groups.

The need for a single programme for all the sections of the Communist International was to be defended by the fraction's representative at the Second Congress, in the matter of the conditions of admission, in opposition to the project which allowed parties to revise their programmes according to the "particular conditions" in their countries. In fact, the latter argument provided the opportunist groups with valuable aid in avoiding the main questions. Our representative made it as clear as he could that with regard to the programme, there could be no problem: either it was accepted, or it was rejected. In the second case, one had to leave the party. The programme is something that had to be common to all, not something proposed by the majority of the party comrades.

The Theses of the Socialist Section of Turin

The majority of the PSI's Turin section belonged to the Communist Abstentionist Fraction; they made an agreement with the *Ordine Nuovo* group, together forming the Executive Council. The latter proposed the famous theses which habitually became designated the "Theses of *Ordine Nuovo*". Inasmuch as they didn't contain the anti-parliamentarian formula, the theses were to be cited as perfectly in line with the programme of the Communist International in the resolution of the Second Congress, point seventeen, on the principal tasks of the International.

The theses were supported by Gramsci at the Milan Conference, with the support of the abstentionist communists, in opposition to the Serratian leadership of the party. (The theses in question were republished in full in our review “Comunismo” no.30/1991)

The Left Adheres Spontaneously to Bolshevism

From 1918 the Communist Left with its organ “il Soviet” had conducted a determined offensive first against the Right, then against the Maximalist Center, which protected the Right; in the process the Left distinguished itself from the anarcho-syndicalists. What marked off our fraction was not so much its abstentionism as its total convergence of principle with the Bolsheviks. In fact, the Italian Left’s abstentionism had completely different foundations to that of the anarchists and constituted the most effective catalyst in the process of separation from the reformists and from the false revolutionary Maximalists. The fraction had not made a principle of its abstentionism, so much so that fifty years later the representative of the Abstentionist Fraction would recall:

At this point, I think it is opportune to recall an actual precedent which for me, even after many years, seems to take on real historical significance. The central thesis of our fraction was not abstentionism, rather it was the split in the party, which would leave on the one hand the real revolutionary communists, and on the other followers of the “revisionism” of Marx’s principles concerning the inevitable catastrophic explosion of the conflict, and the clash between the opposing social classes, as could already be seen before the war by the German Bernstein. To put our thesis to the test, at the Bologna Congress we put a precise proposal to the leaders of the Maximalist electionist fraction, among whom were numbered Serrati, Lazzari, and Gramsci. Our

proposal tended to substitute a single text, quite clearly more anti revisionist, for the one they had prepared: we agreed not to speak of boycotting electoral activity, if they'd accept our thesis entailing a split in the party. Our proposal was sharply rejected by the Maximalists. In this respect, I want to remind you that shortly afterward Lenin, in writing his famous text on extremism as the infantile disorder of communism, declared that he'd received and read some issues of *Il Soviet*, and appreciated our movement as the only one in Italy which had understood the necessity for a separation between communists and social democrats, through a split in the Socialist Party.

If abstentionism was not a matter of principle but only of tactics for the Left fraction, this didn't prevent it assuming great tactical importance. With the war of 1914-18, the capitalist regime had entered a new, imperialist phase. To this new phase there had to correspond a new tactic – that is, the electoral and parliamentary boycott. If in the preceding phase, electoralism and parliamentarism could still be used as means of revolutionary propaganda, under imperialism this tactic would just represent a support of bourgeois reaction.

This was after all affirmed by the Left in the “Draft Theses” presented at the Third Congress of the PCd'I (Lyon, 1926) in the third part concerning “Italian Questions”:

In the development of the aforesaid situations, the grouping which made way for the formation of the Communist Party set out with these criteria: a break from the illusory dualisms presented by the bourgeois and parliamentary political scene, and the statement of revolutionary classist dualism; destruction in the proletariat of the illusion that the middle classes would be capable of producing a political high command, of assuming power and setting the proletariat in motion towards its conquests; and based on a series of critical, political and tactical positions that are original,

autonomous and firmly interlinked through successive situations – confidence in the working class carrying out its own historic task.

These political traditions could already be recognized before the war on the Left of the Socialist Party. Starting with the congresses of Reggio Emilia (1912) and Ancona (1914), not only was a majority formed capable of setting itself against both the reformist error and against the syndicalist one which had up until then impersonated the proletarian left, but in this majority an extreme left took shape which tended toward more radical solutions. In this way, notable class problems were resolved, with respect to electoral tactics, relationships with the trades-unions, colonial war, and freemasonry.

During the World War, if the Union Sacrée politics was opposed by all or almost all the party, better still the work of a well-defined extreme left appeared inside it. In the conferences of Bologna (May 1915), Rome (February 1917), Florence (November 1917) and at the Rome Congress of 1918, the Left supported Leninist policies such as rejection of national defense, defeatism, the utilization of defeat to pose the question of power, incessant struggle, and the demand for the expulsion of opportunist trade-union and parliamentary leaders from the party.

Immediately after the war, the line of the extreme left found expression in the paper “il Soviet”, which was the first to set out and defend the policies of the Russian Revolution whilst countering the anti-Marxist, opportunist, syndicalist, and anarchistic interpretations of it. The paper also correctly posed the essential problems of the proletarian dictatorship and the party’s tasks, supporting a split in the socialist party

from the very beginning.

This group supported electoral abstentionism and its conclusions would be rebuffed by the Second Congress of the International; even though its abstentionism didn't set out from the anti-Marxist theoretical errors of the anarcho-syndicalist type (witness the resolute polemics conducted against the anarchist press). The abstentionist tactic was forecast above all in the political environment of complete parliamentary democracy, which creates particular obstacles to winning over the masses to an accurate understanding of the word "dictatorship"; difficulties that we still believe were underestimated by the International.

Secondly, abstentionism was proposed not as a tactic for all time, but for the general situation, today unfortunately superseded, in which great struggles were imminent and even greater mass movements of proletarians were starting up.

With the elections of 1919, Nitti's government opened a huge safety valve to suppress revolutionaries, diverting the proletarian offensive and the attention of the party by exploiting its tradition of unbridled electoralism. The abstentionism of Il Soviet was then the only proper response to the true causes of the proletarian disaster which ensued.

At the subsequent Bologna Conference (October 1919), the abstentionist minority alone correctly posed the question of splitting from the reformists, and on this basis sought an accord with part of the Maximalists by renouncing the abstentionist condition. With the failure of this attempt, the abstentionist fraction remained the only one, until the

Second Congress, working on a national scale for the formation of the Communist Party.

Therefore it was this group which represented the spontaneous orientation, according to the experiences and traditions of the left of the Italian proletariat, towards the policies which triumphed at this time in the victory of Lenin and Bolshevism in Russia

Chapter 6: The Second Congress of the Communist International

Petrograd, July 19 - August 7, 1920

During the First Congress of the Communist International in 1919, precise conditions for admission were not set out. In most countries, with the exception of Russia, there were merely communist groups or communist tendencies, not communist parties.

“At the time of our First Congress”— said Lenin in 1920 – “we were only propagandists; we were only expounding basic ideas to the proletariat of the whole world. We were calling people to fight and we were only wondering which men would be capable of following our route.” At its Second Congress, the C.I. appeared as “an organization of struggle,” and in every respect “a unique communist party of the whole world. The parties working in the various countries should merely be its various sections.”

The fundamental problem was to safeguard the new organization from the ever-present danger of an opportunist ambush. Indeed there were numerous parties and groups who asked to join the Comintern who hadn't made a clear and final break with the programmes and methods of the Second International. “The in-between parties and the centrist groups, seeing the utter hopelessness of the Second International, are trying to find support in the Communist International, which is growing steadily stronger.

But in doing so they hope to retain enough ‘autonomy’ to enable them to continue their former opportunist or ‘centrist’ policy” (From the Conditions of Admission). The example of Hungary, where the merger of communists with left-wing social democrats had allowed the bourgeoisie to drown the Magyar revolution in blood, was present in the minds of communists everywhere.

The Second Congress had an economic and social framework which was potentially revolutionary, and Warsaw was expected to fall under the counter-offensive of the Red Army, even though this didn’t eventually happen. Huge strikes broke out in Germany, England, and France, which were followed by arrests (Loriot, Monatte, Souvarine in France, Pankhurst in England).

Organization

The delegates, 218 of them representing thirty-seven countries, arrived from all corners of the world. Faced with a radicalization of the class struggle, powerful organizations like the English Independent Labour Party, The German USPD, the French Socialist Party, and the Socialist Party of America, asked to join.

The Italian delegation arrived on June 6 and was composed of a large number of representatives, only some of whom were admitted and allowed to participate in the congress. Those with deliberative votes were Serrati, representing the leadership of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), Bombacci and Graziadei from the parliamentary group, and Polano from the Youth Socialist Federation; the part of the delegation not asked to take part in the congress was composed of members of the unions (D’Aragona, Colombino); the league of co-operatives (Pavirani) and some other proletarian organizations. This mainly right-wing delegation arrived under Serrati’s protection and had their main discussions with the Bolsheviki prior to the congress. Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Bukharin attempted in vain to convince Serrati that it was necessary to split from Turati & Co., but the obstinate leader of the Maximalists continued to defend Turati and D’Aragona, and even attempted to extend the consultative vote

to all eight representatives of the union confederation. He also deplored the invitation sent by the Executive Committee to the representative of the Communist Abstentionist Fraction (CAF) to act in a consultative capacity. The union and co-operative delegates got ready to return to Italy before the congress had started, whilst Serrati would continue to justify their presence within the PSI.

The representative of the CAF was therefore not included in the PSI delegation. It was Lenin who wanted them to participate at the congress, and he organized this by means of Heller (Chiarini) his delegate in Italy, who went to Naples several times to arrange the journey according to the following itinerary: Brenner, Berlin, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Helsingfors, Reval, and Petrograd. The CAF representative thus arrived at Petrograd the day before the opening of the congress. He was invited to participate in all the congress debates with a consultative vote as representative of the Petrograd, July 19 – August 7, 1920 only fraction of the PSI which had explicitly set out the necessity of an irrevocable break with the reformist right-wing of the party.

The French delegation, including Rosmer, Sadoul, Guilbeaux, Cachin, and Frossard were sent by the French Socialist Party on a “fact-finding mission”, and left before the final conditions of admission to the CI were drawn up (with only nineteen of the twenty-one conditions!). In the autumn of 1920, on the return of the CAF delegate, “il Soviet” published an article called “On the International Communist Congress” in which the proceedings and organization of the debates were described. For each subject on the agenda, a commission was named which presented its deliberations for debate in full congress. The debate would then generally conclude with a preliminary vote after which the theses would be sent back to the commission in order to introduce the amendments which had been agreed in congress. Sometimes, if substantial changes were made to the theses, they had to be resubmitted to congress for final approval. The arrangement of the topics to be discussed often led to repetition.

«The prior preparation for the congress debates, conducted within the communist movements of all countries and within the international communist press, was integrated by the comrades of the Executive Committee in Moscow, and supplemented by critical writings and polemics summing up their viewpoint. Particularly outstanding, and provoking much discussion, was Lenin's "Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder". The Executive Committee also presented a report on its work, which, along with reports by representatives of particular parties was incorporated without much discussion into the proceedings of the congress». ("il Soviet", October 3, 1920).

Apart from the question of parliamentarism, the conclusions reached by the commissions didn't come up against any noticeable opposition from congress when it came to the vote. As a matter of fact, at no time was a vote close enough to merit a recount.

The following topics were debated:

1. Statutes of the CI
2. Conditions of admission of parties to the CI
3. Principal tasks of the CI
4. Resolution on the role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution
5. The trade-union movement and the factory committees
6. Theses on the national and colonial questions
7. Theses on the Agrarian question
8. The Communist Party and parliamentarism
9. Congress Manifesto: the capitalist world and the Communist International

The Tasks of the Party and the International

On the July 19, at the seat of the Petrograd Soviet, Zinoviev opened the congress with a speech which summed up the tasks of the International. The fundamental task of Communists was to create a strong party, centralized and international, to fight against the bourgeoisie. Lenin took the stand after Zinoviev and provided an outline of the world situation and the inter-imperialist conflicts. The principal enemy of the proletarian revolution were the opportunist currents (Kerensky in Russia, Albert Thomas in France, Turati in Italy, etc.) since they defended not only the bourgeoisie but capitalism as a whole. It would be a thousand times easier, said Lenin, to correct any mistakes made by the Communist International's left-wing tendencies than to fight against «those bourgeois who, in the guise of reformists, belong to the old parties of the Second International and conduct the whole of their work in a bourgeois, not a proletarian, spirit».

On July 23, the congress sat again in Moscow taking up the question of “The Role of The Party in the Proletarian Revolution”. Zinoviev's theses were formally clearly Marxist and confirmed the authoritarian and centrist nature of the proletarian dictatorship and of the party, and they agreed point by point with the positions of our fraction. The theses condemned both the anarchist and councilist positions: or to be precise, the anarchist and syndicalist positions which denied or minimized the role of the class's political party, and which therefore represented an obstacle to Marxism by playing into the hands of the social traitors and the bourgeoisie.

During the debate some syndicalist delegates opposed the theses, not on questions of principle but rather by raising doubts about their general relevance to all countries. On August 4, the Statutes of the CI were debated. The International's supreme body was declared to be

the World Congress, whose function was to discuss and take decisions on the most important programmatic and tactical questions; The Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) would be the leading body of the CI in the periods between World Congresses and responsible only to the World Congress; there were debates about Communist Party discipline and centralization, etc.

On August 6, there was the report on “The Fundamental Tasks of the Communist International”, which confirmed the principals and programme which presupposed the existence of a “unified proletarian army” marching towards its historical goal. Divided into three main sections, and nineteen theses, the first section concerned “the meaning of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and of the Soviet System”; the second responded to the question of “What work should be carried out at once to prepare for the dictatorship of the proletariat”, and the third section concerned “Correction of the policy and partly also of the personnel of the parties adhering or willing to adhere to the Communist International.” Thesis seventeen referred to the situation in Italy:

In regard to the Italian Socialist Party, the Second Congress of the Communist International recognizes that the revision of the programme undertaken by this party at its congress at Bologna last year represents a very important stage in the transformation to communism and that the proposals made to the National Council of the party by the Turin Section and published in the newspaper “L’Ordine Nuovo” on May 8, 1920 all correspond with the fundamental principles of communism. The congress asks the Italian Socialist Party to examine at its next congress, which will take place in accordance with its own statutes and the general conditions of entry into the Communist International, the proposals that have been made and all the decisions of the Second Congress of the Communist International, especially with regard to the parliamentary fraction, the trade unions, and the non-Communist elements in the party.

The Conditions of Admission to the Communist International

The fact that the Second Congress (the real founding congress of the Comintern) was taking place in circumstances full of serious pitfalls and dangers, even if pregnant with revolutionary possibilities, was mentioned on several occasions: in the “Theses on the Fundamental Tasks of the CI”, in several of the speeches of Lenin, Trotsky, and Zinoviev, and even in the introduction to the “conditions” themselves. Now the situation becomes one where not just communist groups or currents were allowed to participate in the congress, but also representatives of other proletarian parties and organizations. The irresistible attraction that the October Revolution and the new International was exerting on the masses couldn’t fail to influence the parties which, up to the day before had belonged to the Second International and accepted its theoretical, tactical, and organizational conceptions. The French Socialist Party (PSF), represented by Cachin and Frossard, and the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (still scarred by its adhesion to the imperialist war and its participation in the first bloodthirsty republican government) were two characteristic examples.

Another example was the Italian Socialist Party, whose majority declared in favor of joining the CI at the Bologna Congress in the autumn of 1919, but whose conception of the revolutionary process was very vague; to the extent it stubbornly refused to expel well-known reformists such as Turati, Treves, Modigliani and D’Aragona from its ranks. The revolutionaries therefore feared that it would all too easy for certain people to subscribe to the condemnation of pacifism and the Union sacré since the problem was no longer a “hot” issue, and similarly it would be very easy to declare in favor of an insurrection that history still hadn’t placed on the agenda. Therefore the fear of seeing the CI sink under the massive weight of the big opportunist parties was a major concern

amongst genuine revolutionaries. Meanwhile, other factors pulled partly in the other direction, since it was also necessary to prevent the “left-wing infantilism” founded on idealism. There existed also the problem of an over-optimistic evaluation of the revolutionary process, which held that the masses, carried forward on the revolutionary wave, would reject, or at least remain neutral towards, their wavering and hypocritical “leaders”. Still in the balance also was the pressing necessity of pulling heroic revolutionary Russia out of its isolation by speeding up the process by which the parties would “crystallize”. To address the masses by means of the old leaders, using them as go-betweens, seemed easier than talking to the masses over the heads of these leaders. The Italian Left did not share this latter view since it had always declared that unhesitating use of the “scalpels of history” was necessary.

The congress condensed the fundamental tactical questions into theses which clearly marked out the positions of communism. The Left was nevertheless correct in deploring the fact that the congress hadn't established a general and complete definition of principles on which to base its work, or defined an inviolable platform for admission to the Comintern from which tactical lines of action, and a definition of practical and organizational directives, could be derived. The representative of the CAF alluded to this in his speech: «We must compel these parties (social democrats) to make unequivocal declarations of their principles. All the communist parties throughout the world must have a common programme, which unfortunately isn't possible at the present moment». On his return to Italy, The CAF representative declared in the Turin Section and published in the newspaper “L'Ordine Nuovo” on May 8, 1920 all correspond with the fundamental principles of communism. The congress asks the Italian Socialist Party to examine at its next congress, which will take place in accordance with its own statutes and the general conditions of entry into the Communist International, the proposals that have been made and all the decisions of the Second Congress of the Communist International, especially with regard to the parliamentary fraction, the trade unions, and the non-Communist elements in the party». that it would have been preferable to start off

by debating the programmatic principles of communism, and by formulating them in a very precise way, and then on this basis to proceed to discussions about the various tactical questions which the congress had to decide upon. In such a way, abiding by the Marxist maxim so little prized by the reformists: «No Revolutionary Action without Revolutionary Theory», Marxists would then be clearly distinguishable from opportunists, who are characterized precisely by their lack of principles.

The “Theses on the Conditions of Admission” prepared by Lenin partly filled this gap. Although lacking the general value of a “declaration of principles”, they nevertheless covered the entire range of principles, and left no room for doubt either about the most important tactical questions of the world communist movement, or about the fundamental criteria of centralism as the premise for effective functioning of the International and its sections as a unique world party. The nineteen theses on the conditions of admission assumed an overriding importance in the congress debates following lively discussions during the committee stage. The German Independents and the Italian Maximalists, although they declared themselves keen to join the CI, went on to express strong reservations in virtue of the “special conditions” in their respective countries. As for the French party, the verbally unconditional acceptance of Cachin and Frossard (who left Moscow before the twentieth and twenty-first conditions were discussed), if we consider how silent and reticent they were about the fundamental program and tactics, didn’t in fact offer any guarantees.

Given the arrogance of the speakers representing the German Independents; Serrati’s resistance to the elimination of the Right; and the rather too easy approval given by Cachin and Frossard, several voices rose up in objection. These included Lenin and Radek, along with other Russian delegates, delegates from the German CP and representatives of the French Left. Lefebvre (who would die soon after his journey back) stated that, because of Cachin’s and Frossard’s long opportunist past, they presented the risk of a penetration of the Second International’s spirit of betrayal into the ranks of the

Communist International. Guilbeaux declared that their adherence was artificial, and that once they were back in Paris the pestilential atmosphere of the PCF would ensure they would relapse into their old errors. Goldenburg, from the French socialist youth movement, took a stand against what he held to be the voluntarist method of allowing elements into the CI which didn't in fact approve of it, and he along with Guilbeaux called for the formation of a communist party which contained communists only! The debate nevertheless seemed to be restricted to the various internal problems faced by movements at a national level and it was to the merit of the Italian abstentionists that the discussion was raised to the level of principles.

In his speech, the representative of the CAF declared that faced with the danger of opportunist elements joining the CI due to a lull in the revolutionary movement, communists should require everyone to completely accept the theses in an unconditional way, in the realm of theory as well as action.

In Europe, where capitalism was much more developed than in Russia, it was necessary to apply Marxist methodology and theory much more rigorously, and the way had to be barred to the social democrats by forcing them to formulate unequivocal declarations of principle. With this aim in view, the Italian representative proposed amendments to the fifteenth condition of admission, which went: «Parties which still retain their old social-democratic programmes are obliged to reverse them as quickly as possible, and to draw up – in accordance with the special conditions of their country – a new communist programme in conformity with the decisions of the Communist International». The Italian Left's proposal was to get rid of the expression «in accordance with the special conditions of their country» and replace it with the following formulation:

... and to draw up a new programme in which the principles of the Third International are incorporated in an unequivocal way. The minority which votes in congress against the new programme and joining the Third International will have to be excluded from the

party for this reason alone. Those parties which have already joined the Third International without adopting this condition must call an extraordinary congress as soon as possible in order to bring it into force.

More than any other group, the fraction emphasized that it was a burning necessity for all communist parties to have a shared programme, although at the time this was, regrettably, impossible. They therefore called for the question of the right-wing minorities to be posed with extreme clarity: for example, the PSF representatives hadn't said if they intended to get rid of Renaudel or not. Those who voted against the new programme should be expelled from the party. «Abiding by the programme - our spokesman declared - is not a question of discipline: either one accepts it or rejects it, and in the latter case one leaves the party. The programme is something common to all of us, not something established by a majority of militants. It is what is, and must be, enforced on parties which want to join the Communist International». This concept was incorporated into the twenty-first condition of admission.

After this organizational stage, the door would stay closed to parties which failed to meet the entry requirements and only individual membership would be possible. The fraction's representative also moved to resubmit Lenin's proposal (which had been withdrawn) according to which parties which wanted to join would have to have a certain percentage of communists in their directorates, even if it was preferable that they were all communists (twentieth condition).

Conditions twenty and twenty-one were put to the vote and carried whilst the amendment to the fifteenth condition was not accepted. The reason the representative of the Italian Left insisted on dwelling on the "special conditions" clause was because defending it, at the Second Congress, had already become the battle-cry of Serrati, Modigliani, and Treves etc., of the Center and the Right, in other words. According to these gentlemen it was the responsibility of the local party, not of the International, to establish what the "special conditions in each country" were. In the review "Comunismo" (no.

15, September 30, 1920), Serrati would deny that the International had the right to formulate «absolute and definite judgements from a distance, without detailed knowledge of the facts», and he quoted, as a scandalous example, the fact that the twentieth condition required communists, regardless of their administrative capacity (!), to take up responsible positions in the town halls, co-operatives, etc. Similar pretexts would be used by the PSF in order to relegate trade-union activity to a minor role, and to avoid the resolute action required by the eighth condition in the face of French militarism and colonialism.

In the October 3, 1920 issue of “il Soviet”, the Left’s representative wrote: «The conditions have been more or less completed and have been sharpened up, but the gist of the discussion on the whole was that the “reconstructors” should be allowed to join the International under certain conditions. Our view is that in certain countries, and above all in France, there exists the danger of elements that are too right-wing joining».

If the “restrictive” conditions favored by the abstentionists had been accepted, it might have been possible to avoid mergers like those which occurred at the Halle Congress, where the reunification of the German CP with the majority of the Independents would prove to be a contributory cause of the 1921-23 crisis. Similarly, the maneuvers of the “Terzini” in Italy could have been avoided.

The Twenty-One Conditions were therefore approved with only two votes against. Here is a résumé:

1. Propaganda and agitation: the party press must be subordinated to the party presidium and run by reliable Communists.
2. Removal of reformists and centrists from positions of responsibility.
3. Creation of parallel illegal organizations.
4. Agitation amongst the troops; refusal to undertake such work is tantamount to a dereliction of revolutionary

duty, and incompatible with membership of the CI.

5. Agitation in the countryside. The working class cannot consolidate its victory without the support of at least part of the workers in the countryside.
6. Denunciation of social-patriotism and social-pacifism.
7. Recognition of the need for a complete and absolute break with reformism and with the policy of the "Center".
8. Each party must expose the imperialist role of its own bourgeoisie in the colonies and support every colonial liberation movement.
9. Systematic propaganda within the trade-unions and within other mass organizations of the working class. Communist cells should be formed.
10. Struggle against the Amsterdam "International" of yellow trade unions; support for the international association of red trade unions adhering to the Communist International.
11. The composition of the parliamentary fraction to be reviewed and subordinated to the party presidium.
12. The principle of democratic centralism, iron discipline, the party center equipped with the most comprehensive powers.
13. Periodical evictions from the party of petty-bourgeois elements.
14. Support for the Soviet Republic in the struggle against reaction.
15. Party programmes to be revised and a Communist programme drawn up.
16. All the decisions of the congresses of the CI, as well as those of the Executive Committee, are binding on all

parties belonging to the CI.

17. Every party wishing to join then CI must be called: Communist Party of such and such a country (Section of the Third Communist International).
18. All leading press organs in all countries are obliged to publish all important official documents of the Executive Committee of the CI.
19. Parties to convene within four months an extraordinary congress to examine the Conditions of Admission.
20. Parties which have not radically changed their former tactics must see to it that, before joining the CI, at least two thirds of their central committee and of all their leading bodies are Communists.
21. Expulsion from the party of all those who reject in principle the conditions and theses put forward by the Communist International..

Chapter 7: The Communist Party and Parliamentarism

The commission on the parliamentary question (which didn't include any Italians) was chaired by Trotsky, and he would present a historical introduction to the subject. This would serve as the preface to the "Theses on Parliamentarism" drawn up by Bukharin and Lenin. The representative of the Communist Abstentionist Fraction (CAF) of the Italian Socialist Party requested that they be allowed to present their counter-theses, and this was agreed. He was nominated as co-reporter to the congress and invited to participate at commission sessions in order to defend the CAF theses. The commission then proceeded to an exploratory debate which ended with the Lenin-Bukharin theses being approved with only two votes against (cast by the Swiss delegate and the IWW).

The debate was now taken up at the congress. Bukharin began by presenting the theses he co-authored with Lenin (the introduction by Trotsky being entitled "The New Era and New Parliamentarism"). The theses stated the differences between the era of peaceful development and the existing phase of class war. The peaceful period which preceded the First World War was characterized by a certain community of interests between the proletariat and bourgeoisie in the developed capitalist countries, where, due to the politics of imperialism, the bourgeoisie had managed to pay higher wages to the workers. This period was characterized by the incorporation of the workers organizations into the machinery of the bourgeois State: a

fact evidenced by the stance taken by the unions during the war. Likewise, the parliamentary fractions of the workers' parties had been integrated into the parliamentary system. The opening of the period of capitalist decadence and civil war saw the communist parliamentary fractions become instruments of parliamentary destruction. Aspects of the old epoch still survived but were disappearing.

Bukharin went on to review the composition of the parliamentary fractions; reformists predominated in all of them and they were politically opposed to revolutionary parliamentarism. The reporter dwelled at length on the German Independent Socialist Party and its eighty-two-member parliamentary group, which comprised around twenty members in the right wing, forty centrists, and twenty representatives in the party's left wing. The politics of this parliamentary group were consequently extremely reformist. As regards the Italian Socialist Party affiliated to the Third International and "one of our best parties" Bukharin declared that 30 percent of its parliamentary group belonged to the right-wing Turatian tendency, 55 percent was centrist, and 15 percent were left-wing. The French Socialist Party had sixty-eight parliamentary deputies, forty reformist, twenty-six centrist and two communists. Bukharin's explanation for this state of affairs was that the parties weren't sufficiently communist; on the contrary, they contained an extremely large number of opportunists.

Bukharin proceeded to tackle the problem of anti-parliamentarism and divided its supporters into two distinct groups. The first rejected all parliamentary participation under any circumstances (the IWW). They could only see the negative aspects of parliamentarism and had a false view of the political struggle. The second group, whose theses Bukharin dwelled on at greater length, was anti-parliamentary both on the basis of a weighing-up of the possibilities offered by taking part in parliamentary action (the Communist Abstentionist Fraction of the PSI) and because of its view that the communist parties needed to reinforce the revolutionary Marxist method by extricating themselves from the machinery of bourgeois democracy. This second

group asserted that it was materially impossible to utilize parliament for revolutionary purposes, but, according to Bukharin, they were unable to provide evidence for this contention. Bukharin argued that «before maintaining a priori that all revolutionary activity is impossible inside parliament, it is first necessary to prove it» and he added that examples of revolutionary parliamentarism existed. In this regard, he cited Liebknecht, the Bulgarian comrades, and the Bolsheviks: «If you have a party which is truly communist, you shouldn't be afraid of sending representatives into the bourgeois parliament [...] If the parties affiliated to the Third International are real communist parties, cleansed of all opportunist and reformist elements, we can be certain that the old parliamentarism will give way to a truly revolutionary parliamentarism which is an infallible method for overturning the bourgeoisie, and the destruction of the State and the capitalist system».

A counter-report was presented by the representative of the Italian CAF which affirmed that the anti-parliamentarism of the abstentionists didn't involve putting principles into question. In principle we are all anti-parliamentarian, it declared, because we are against parliamentarism as a means of the emancipation of the proletariat, and as a political form of the proletarian State. Our anti-parliamentarism, in contrast with that of the anarchist and syndicalist conceptions, is closely connected with the Marxist criticism of bourgeois democracy. The Marxist movement had degenerated into a social-democratic movement and created a field of common action for narrow interests of a cooperative character of certain groups of workers, and for bourgeois democracy. It had created a different ideology which put aside violence and abandoned the proletarian dictatorship. The Russian Revolution confirmed the Marxist theory, «But the historical conditions under which the Russian Revolution developed do not resemble the conditions under which the proletarian revolution in the democratic countries of Western Europe and America will develop. The situation in Russia reminds us of the situation in Germany in 1848, when there were two revolutions one after the other: the bourgeois democratic revolution and the proletarian revolution. The tactical experiences of the

Russian revolution cannot be transplanted into countries with a bourgeois democracy of long standing, in which the revolutionary crisis will mean only the direct transition from this political regime to the dictatorship of the proletariat. [...] For Western Europe, the revolutionary problem makes it first of all necessary to go beyond the limits of bourgeois democracy, to prove the necessity of carrying the struggle on to another ground, that of direct revolutionary action for the conquest of power. A new technical organization of the party is necessary, i.e., a new historic formation. The first bourgeois machinery that has to be destroyed is parliament».

It is necessary to show the masses the entire duplicity of bourgeois democracy which acts as a means of direct defense for capitalism against the masses. The anarcho-syndicalist reaction, which denied that political action had any value, leads the proletariat onto a false path. «We propose that the agitation for the proletarian dictatorship in those countries where the democratic regime has been developed a long time should be based on the boycott of the elections and of the bourgeois democratic organs. The great importance which is being given in practice to the electoral action contains a double danger: on the one hand it gives the impression of being essential action, and on the other hand it absorbs all the resources of the party and leads to the almost complete abandonment of action and of preparation in other domains of the movement. The party becomes a group of electoral committees entrusted only with the preparation and the mobilization of electors».

As regards to the historical introduction to Lenin and Bukharin's theses on parliamentarism, in which Trotsky stated that the Third International must return to the parliamentarism of the First International for the purpose of destroying parliament from within, the representative of the CAF observed that «should the Third International accept the doctrine of the First International, it must on the contrary use quite different tactics and not participate in the bourgeois democracy, because of the great difference in the historic conditions». If we agree with the first part of the theses, we differ on the utilization of the electoral campaign and of the parliamentary

tribune as a means of mass action. We are not against parliamentarism because it is a legal means, like the press or freedom of assembly etc. Likewise, we are not against “heads”, because we will always need journalists, propagandists, and a centralized party, in which the “heads” will take on dangerous work without enjoying the advantageous benefits conferred on leaders in bourgeois society. The examples by the commission’s other report do not touch our theses: Liebknecht acted in the Reichstag in an epoch in which we recognize the possibility of parliamentary action. However, after all the numerous cases of social democratic treachery are put in the balance, it turns out most unfavorably for revolutionary parliamentarism. The question of the Bolsheviks in the Duma could likewise not be placed alongside the conditions in which we propose the abandonment of parliamentary tactics in other bourgeois countries. The representative of our fraction said that he intended «to make use of the electoral campaigns for agitation and propaganda for the communist revolution, but this agitation will be more efficient the more we support before the masses the boycott of bourgeois elections». In conclusion, in order to distinguish our abstentionist tactic from those who recommended withdrawing from the trade unions, the speaker would respond to the arguments brought forward by Lenin in his pamphlet *Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*. The trade union, even if corrupted, is still an organization of the working masses. If the question of parliamentarism is secondary for the communist movement, this is not the case with the trade union question.

As to Lenin’s tactics, our representative declared: “*I only want to say that a Marxist movement in the western democratic countries demands much more direct tactics than those which were necessary for the Russian Revolution.*” Furthermore, in response to Lenin’s accusation that the Italian abstentionists wished to postpone the problem of communist action in parliament because anti-parliamentarism requires the least effort, he replied that seeking to direct the greater part of the efforts of the communist movement towards grounds of action of greater importance than that of parliamentarism would certainly not be easier. But the tenfold efforts required to solve the problem of communist parliamentarism according to the theses would however

draw resources of energy away from the real revolutionary movement.

The CAF considered that the transference of power from the exploiters to the exploited implied a change in the representative apparatus. For bourgeois parliamentarism must be substituted with the soviet system.

However, the question of parliamentarism should not be the cause of a split in the communist movement and, therefore, the abstentionists would submit to the Communist International's decisions and not attempt to bring about the failure of its work.

Speeches followed by those who were against parliament on principle.

Lenin then took the floor to make a short polemical speech in which he stated that every revolutionary crisis was accompanied by a parliamentary crisis. Now, it is true that the struggle must be carried into a different field, for instance the Soviets, we know that these can't be created artificially and may only be formed either during or immediately before the revolution. «Only when one is a member of parliament is it possible from the given historical point of view to fight bourgeois society and parliamentarism». The backward elements amongst the masses, who really believe that their interests are represented in parliament, must have the truth brought home to them by act and deed. In Russia, the Constituent Assembly was convened in order to show backward workers that nothing could thereby be achieved through parliamentarism, and to confront them with the formation of Soviets as an accomplished fact in order to bring them to the conviction that the Soviets were their only weapon. Addressing the CAF, Lenin asserted that to destroy parliament it had to be destroyed from within to prove to the masses how parliament was an instrument used by the bourgeoisie to deceive them. Moreover, according to Lenin, if all classes are prompted to participate in the parliamentary struggle, class interests and class will

be reflected in parliament: *«parliament represents the arena of class struggle»*.

Expounded with an incontestable dialectic power, Lenin's proposals provoked serious worries, not so much because of fears about what the International might do under Lenin's leadership, but because the proposals were open to misinterpretation, and could be seen as authorizing an overly flexible tactical approach. The representative of the Left would underline this ambiguity in his reply to Lenin.

Lenin had cited Germany as the best proof that a communist group in parliament was possible, and he maintained that many parties were driven to contest the necessity of working in parliament because of their weakness.

Our representative remarked that Lenin's objections raised the general problem of the Marxist tactics, and that the historical mission of communism *«leads us to a new tactical position, i.e., to declining participation in parliament, which is no more a means of influencing events in a revolutionary sense»*. He also stated that he was convinced that the Communist International would not succeed in expediting really revolutionary parliamentary tactics.

Our representative rounded off his intervention by expressing the hope that when it came to voting for the theses of the Italian abstentionists, only those anti-parliamentarian comrades who accepted the Marxist spirit of the assertions on which they were based, would vote for them.

Bukharin, who had been the first speaker, closed the debate with a reply to the anti-parliamentarians. At the voting, only seven votes were cast against the Lenin-Bukharin theses, and eighty votes for, and the latter were therefore approved by an overwhelming majority. Out of the seven votes against, at the express request of the abstentionist speaker who was concerned to avoid any confusion with the arguments of the revolutionary syndicalists, only three votes were registered in favor of the theses he had defended: the ones cast by the Swiss, Belgian, and Danish Communist Parties.

The Lenin-Bukharin theses, approved by the congress, were divided into three parts. The first part explained that the modern conditions were of unbridled imperialism. In the preceding historical epoch parliament was an instrument of the developing capitalist system, and as such played a role that was in a certain sense progressive, and could be an arena in which to struggle for reforms and improvements on working-class living standards. In the modern imperialist epoch parliament had become a weapon of falsehood, deception, and violence. The historical task of the working class was therefore to wrest the parliamentary apparatus from the hands of the ruling classes in order to destroy it. The time had come for a new tactic in parliament as a means to destroy parliamentarism in general. The Communist Party enters parliament to uproot the parliamentary and governmental apparatus from within, i.e., Liebknecht in Germany, the Bolsheviks in the Duma, and the Communists in Bulgaria.

The second part of the theses denounced parliamentarism as a “democratic” form of the rule of the bourgeoisie. Parliamentarism can never be a form of proletarian government. Parliament cannot be won over to the side of the proletariat but must be destroyed along with the bourgeois State machine. The same attitude must be taken to local government institutions. Consequently, communism denies the possibility of parliament being won to the proletarian cause and sets itself the task of destroying parliamentarism. The Communist Party must stand exclusively for the revolutionary utilization of parliament. Anti-parliamentarism as a principle is therefore a naive and childish position.

A certain combination of conditions may make withdrawal from parliament essential. The Bolsheviks left the Kerensky parliament in order to weaken it, undermine it, and counterpoise it to the St. Petersburg Soviet which was about to take on the leadership of the October Revolution. It may also be essential to boycott elections. A boycott of elections or of parliament are permissible when conditions are ripe for an immediate move to armed struggle for power.

It was essential to keep in view the comparative unimportance of this question since the focal point of the struggle for State power lay outside parliament. For this reason, the International therefore emphasized most strongly that it considered any split or attempt to split the Communist Party solely on the parliamentary question to be a serious mistake.

The third part of the theses gave precise directives for developing revolutionary tactics in parliament. It was essential to monitor the quality of the members of the parliamentary fractions and to break with the social-democratic custom of putting forward only so-called “experienced” parliamentarians. As a rule, the party should put forward candidates who are workers. The parliamentary fractions would be organized by the Central Committees (CCs). The CC of the party must have a permanent representative in the parliamentary fraction with the right of veto. There must be a thorough purge of the parliamentary fractions penetrated by reformists. The Communist deputies must also combine their legal work with illegal work if the CC decides, and their parliamentary immunity should be put at the service of the party. The deputies must subordinate their parliamentary work to the extra-parliamentary activity of their party; the deputy must bear in mind that they are agitators sent into the enemy camp to carry out party decisions.

Following this brief summary of the Lenin-Bukharin theses, we need to clarify that the parliamentary question didn’t assume a position of central importance (even if “illustrious” opportunist historians affirm the contrary) at the International’s Second Congress, and this can be shown merely by pointing to the weighty body of theses on questions of principle, on revolution, on the taking of power, on the dictatorship of the proletariat, etc., etc. If the Bolsheviks considered parliamentarism as one of the criteria for establishing the revolutionary efficiency of the nascent parties, this is only because it was a parliamentarism with an anti-parliamentary agenda: on the one hand it aimed at overcoming the democratic prejudices that persisted inside the workers’ movement; on the other hand, it aimed at eliminating the opposite prejudice, of the anarcho-syndicalist,

workerist variety, whose electoral abstentionism was founded on the basis of natural morality (rejection of “power”, of leaders, scruples about purity etc.), and identified the parliamentary struggle with politics in general, finally rejecting the political struggle in favor of a purely trade-unionist struggle. The Bolsheviks then also stood by the critical rejection of the cult of the sovereignty of the masses, that is of those who were affected by the same malady which had already infected the parties of the Second International. The Bolsheviks placed themselves on the same terrain as us. We can equally say that, as far as the examination of the historical role of parliament is concerned, there was no difference between the positions as outlined in Trotsky’s introduction, the Lenin-Bukharin theses and those of the Italian abstentionists.

What were the areas of disagreement between us and the Bolsheviks then? The difference is explained in points six and seven of the theses on parliamentarism presented by the Italian Left: during a period when the conquest of power did not seem possible in the very near future, possibilities of propaganda, agitation and criticism could be offered by participation in elections and in parliamentary activity. This possibility existed still in those countries where the bourgeois revolution was still developing and where parliament kept its original character of an institution which was anti-feudal and therefore historically revolutionary (Russia in 1917, colonial countries). On the other hand, in those countries where the democratic regime achieved its formation a long time ago, and in the historical period which opened with the ending of the World War, with the victory of the October Revolution and the Third International, it wouldn’t be possible to use the parliamentary tribune for revolutionary ends. Our view (thesis eleven) was that the continuation of electoral action would prevent the necessary elimination of social-democratic elements without which the Third International would fail in its historic role.

In conclusion, we draw the reader's attention to the fact that the only party which had actually practiced revolutionary parliamentarism and remained true to its spirit was the PCd’I led by the Left, and that this

was because the clear demarcations which had followed the scissions at the Livorno Congress had effectively set up a barrier against the “parliamentarists as a matter of principle.” The elections which followed in 1921 would do nothing to advance the movement towards revolution in Italy, as should have occurred according to the Second Congress theses which predicted the revolutionary effect of entering parliament. It would be left to the lack of success of the movements during March 1921 in Germany and those of autumn 1923 to tragically confirm the truth of what the Italian Left had asserted.

In an article from “Il Soviet” of September 5, 1920 written after the Second Congress of the Third International and entitled “The Abstentionist Fraction and the Moscow Congress,” the Left explained yet again its one and only divergence with the Bolsheviki:

The resolutions of the Moscow Congress agree fully with what our fraction has always upheld on the necessity of creating a truly Communist Party, and on the functions and constitution of this party and its relations with the Third International. They also fully agree with what we have always asserted regarding the Soviet question, implicitly dispensing summary justice to the resolution, opposed by us but backed by the PSI, of constituting them right-away; a resolution which was reduced after the National Council of Milan to the minimum expression of local (mono-communal) experimental Soviets, and in its turn tacitly allowed to die a death. The single divergence is on the parliamentary question.

The theses voted for in Moscow reasserts as premise the fundamental concept that parliamentarism is a system of bourgeois government, which cannot constitute the form of the proletarian State, which cannot be conquered from within but must be smashed along with all the other similar and local organs in order to be substituted by central and

local soviets etc. This evaluation of parliamentarism responds exactly to what has always been maintained on the subject by our fraction, who have doggedly insisted on it in order that it be accepted by the majority of the party as well. At the Bologna Congress the difference between us and the winning majority on this cardinal point was that we called on all those who didn't accept this scheme to leave the party, and that was what we were really voting for; the majority confined itself to making a verbal agreement on the matter and voted for those who didn't accept the programme to remain in the party. We were with Moscow in word and deed, the others... Well, they didn't practice what they preached.

The Moscow thesis correctly points out that the fundamental method of struggle against the political power of the bourgeoisie is that of mass action becoming armed struggle (just as we have always said) and subordinates parliamentary action to the aims of extra-parliamentary action, considering the parliamentary tribune as one of the bases, or a legal position which the party, which directs the actions of the masses or the armed struggle, must constitute behind the fighting proletariat. This is profoundly different and opposed to what has been done, both before and after Bologna, by the PSI, whose epicenter has only ever remained that of parliamentary action, which dominates and drives forward its political struggle. Illegal action was and remains unknown (before Bologna it was strongly repudiated and it still is by many members); and yet it is one of the cornerstones of the Moscow thesis, and constitutes no small part of that extra-parliamentary action to which parliamentary action should be linked in a subordinate capacity in order to utilize parliamentary immunity. With its aims restricted in this way, parliamentary action, in itself, is not nearly so important, and the question of the use of parliament is restricted within much narrower confines. It is true that communists have

always viewed the question in this way, and nor could they do otherwise, seeing that their initial premise is that parliamentarism is a system of bourgeois government; but the PSI, the social democrats, and even many so-called Maximalists don't see it like that.

Our bitter and determined struggle within the PSI, which led us to feel we needed to form an abstentionist fraction in order to act with greater energy and unity of purpose, was, and is, inspired by the conviction that the proletarian struggle for the conquest of power takes place outside parliament; and it is a struggle which is trying to carry party activity along towards its true destination. Obliging the party to restrict parliamentary activity within the limitations required by Moscow and to agree to discuss the parliamentary question from the standpoint from which we have always considered it, that is to say: how and up to what point can the parliamentary role be utilized in pursuit of revolutionary aims, is a great victory for us. We have never declared that the political struggle can be characterized as a matter of aptitude towards parliamentarism, nor have we supported an absolute and ingenuous negation of parliamentary participation. In the programme presented at Bologna we clearly distinguished the pre-revolutionary period, in which parliament is used to carry out a work of criticism and propaganda, from the revolutionary period, the present one, in which the proletariat rises up to overthrow the bourgeois State; an action to which no effective contribution can be brought by way of parliament. Future experience, when on the basis of the Moscow resolutions all the member parties of the Third International, rendered truly communist and rid of their various encumbrances, have adopted the parliamentary tactic, will tell if our view was right or wrong.

The Moscow thesis don't rule out that leaving parliament, boycotting parliament or boycotting elections may happen; they simply say that this should happen when there is a situation which allows an immediate passage to the armed struggle. Without going into a detailed examination of these various actions and the considerable differences between them; without considering the not easily surmountable difficulty of how to evaluate the circumstances for their implementation as expressed in the theses, we draw attention to the fact that the active boycotting of elections which we propose (intervening in them without candidates with a view to propagandizing with greater effectiveness the bourgeois nature of parliamentarism, its ineptitude compared to the proletarian dictatorship, and the necessity of overthrowing it) is definitely to be found amongst those actions recommended by the Moscow theses.

There is maybe a different evaluation of when a boycott should be used. We say "maybe" because we were certain that the majority wasn't behind us and so were aware that our claim was premature, not in the historical sense but in the sense of its acceptance and its consequent implementation. We didn't call for a boycott, nor do we do it now, for the laughable reason of appearing more revolutionary.

All tendencies have always started like this: they begin with just one person or a few people and grow and develop if they respond to a real need and future necessity. Just because a tendency in a given period of its development only has a small following doesn't mean its ideas are immature. If we reasoned thus all new ideas would be immature. When at the Bologna Congress we called on the party to call itself Communist, to consecrate a radical change of direction, there were only few of us then and we knew it.

It was the same when we argued the incompatibility of having centrists and right-wingers in the party. We will see at the next congress, following the deliberations in Moscow, what progress our tendency has made in a year. And the same for abstentionism. To have supported and to still support abstentionism has, and will, serve to exercise a powerful devaluation of the function of parliamentarism especially amongst the Maximalists; supporting abstentionism inspires in the party and the masses the growing conviction that the proletarian movement's center of gravity is outside the bourgeois parliament and prepares it for the hour when this will have to be swept away once and for all.

That we don't consider abstentionism as representing the central fulcrum of communist action can be gauged from the fact that we have never wanted to split the party over it nor have we wanted to ally ourselves with those anti-parliamentarists whom, merely through the fact of being such, don't rigidly subscribe to the communist programme. In the motion voted for by the fraction at the Florence conference we said amongst other things, that: "The fraction resolves to consecrate all its energies to the constitution in Italy of the Communist Party, as a section of the Third International, affirming that in this party, as at the heart of the International itself, the fraction will uphold the incompatibility of participating in elections to bourgeois organizations etc The clear upshot of this resolution is our fundamental proposition of the need to form a communist party, an indispensable organ in the proletariat's political struggle; a party with a positive programme of action, and not one based on negative differentiations such as abstentionism. This proposition of ours, corroborated by the Moscow resolutions, obliges us to engage in the most energetic activity now that it is finally and definitively

entering into its implementation phase. We will continue to work in order to try and become a majority in the International, which, it is understood, will absolutely not detract from our observing the most rigorous, disciplined, and unconditional respect towards its resolutions, even those which don't correspond to our most deeply held convictions. An iron discipline is the main strength of those communist parties which are truly such both in name and in deed.

Chapter 8: Trade Unions, Italian Question, and the founding of the Communist Party of Italy

The Trade Union Question

The final body of theses on the trade union question was the result of a long debate in the commission chaired by Radek. The theses presented at the congress by comrade Radek on the “The Trade Union Movement, Factory Committees, and the Third International” corresponded to the positions supported by the German CP against the KAPD opposition and were directed against neo-syndicalist tendencies. Apart from some statements which attributed a revolutionary role to the trade unions which the Italian Left found a bit excessive, these theses reasserted the revolutionary Marxist point of view upheld by “Il Soviet”. The unions and factory committees only become revolutionary when conquered and directed by the communist parties. The factory committees cannot be substituted for the trade unions which, organized at an industrial level, play a very important part within communist economic organization.

The communist tactic doesn't therefore consist of boycotting the traditional trade unions, even when they are directed by

reformists and yellows, but of conquering them from within.

Maybe it would have been beneficial to link criticism of «boycotting of the trade unions on principle» to a condemnation of the «erroneous conception which holds that the proletariat would be mobilized not by the party's political struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat, but around the economic action of a revolutionary trade union organization» which, having expropriated the capitalists, would directly take over management of production. This point of principle wasn't highlighted by Moscow. The debate showed that theoretical divergences still persisted and numerous questions remained unresolved.

Article 14 of the Statutes of the Communist International asserted the dependence of the trade unions on the party:

Trade unions which accept communist ideas and are united on an international scale under the leadership of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) are, at the present time, forming a trade-union section of the Communist International. These trade unions send their representatives to congresses of the Communist International through the communist parties of the countries concerned. The trade-union section of the Communist International delegates one representative to the ECCI with full voting rights. The ECCI has the right to send a representative with full voting rights. The ECCI has the right to send a representative with full voting rights to the trade-union section of the Communist International.

This resolution obviously encountered bitter opposition from the revolutionary syndicalists. A year later, a compromise was

reached with the constitution of the Red International of Labour Unions.

The Italian Question

The PSI leadership's tolerant attitude towards the Right had already been sternly condemned when the Conditions of Admission to the International had considered the Italian Question. Then Lenin's pamphlet, Zinoviev's speeches on the Conditions of Admission, Lenin's speech, and Bukharin's introductory speech to the "Theses on Revolutionary Parliamentarism" would sternly criticize the PSI. Serrati answered with protests, Graziadei put forward reservations, Bombacci, and Polano backed the criticisms put forward by the Russian comrades, the representative of the Communist Abstentionist Fraction (CAF) rather than treating Italy as an isolated case intervened in a more general manner setting out from a position of principle.

The problem was bound to come to the fore in the debate on Lenin's theses on the "Fundamental tasks of the Communist International". The commission invited all the Italian delegates to voice their opinions on the famous seventeenth thesis:

In regard to the Italian Socialist Party, the Second Congress of the Communist International recognizes that the revision of the programme undertaken by this party at its congress at Bologna last year represents a very important stage in the transformation to communism and that the proposals made to the National Council of the Party by the Turin Section and published in the magazine *Ordine Nuovo* of May 8, 1920 all correspond with the fundamental principles of communism. The congress asks the Italian Socialist Party to examine at its next congress, which will take

place in accordance with its own statutes and the general conditions of entry into the Communist International, the proposals that have been made and all the decisions of the Second Congress of the Communist International, especially with regard to the parliamentary faction, the trade unions and the non-communist elements in the party.

There were those amongst the Italian delegates who didn't accept this formula. Serrati and Graziadei observed that at the time of the National Council the Turin section had taken sides against the party leadership over the Piemontese disbandment; extolling the value of this section would mean approving of its undisciplined attitude. Bombacci observed, moreover, that it would have been dangerous to approve the syndicalist tendencies of the Ordine Nuovo and its vision of factory councils. Polano argued that the Executive Commission of the Turin Section was composed for the most part of abstentionists and, as a consequence, approving of the work of our fraction meant disavowing the parliamentary question. The representative of the CAF also pointed out the possibility of misunderstandings arising around the acceptance of the positions of Ordine Nuovo: positions which weren't only contrary to the congress's directives on the trade-union question and the Soviets but had supported party unity right up to immediately before the Milan Convention. Lenin and Bukharin declared that they weren't well informed on Ordine Nuovo's positions and that a particular document was being referred to. Serrati tried in vain to avoid the convocation of the national congress.

The question was discussed again during a congress plenary session. Serrati protested again, Bombacci and Polano would agree, Graziadei attempted to round off the corners by demanding that the position of the Maximalist majority at the

Bologna Congress be recognized. The abstentionist representative made a brief declaration in which he stated that he wasn't interested so much in the form of the theses concerning the PSI as its content. He noted that the behavior of the PSI after the Bologna Congress didn't correspond to the criteria for membership of the CI given the presence in its ranks of openly opportunist and social-democratic elements. He stated also that as regards the question of anti-parliamentarism, his fraction would be disciplined subject to the decisions of the congress, but he asked that all the other resolutions be rigorously observed by the PSI as regards non-Communist members, the parliamentary group and the trade unions led by reformists.

After the closing of the congress, the Italian delegates were invited to an extraordinary session of the ECCI in the course of which was read a draft appeal to Italian comrades presented by Bukharin with a few additions by Zinoviev. This appeal prompted lively discussions. Bombacci, Polano, and the CAF would recognize its timeliness. Our comrade expressed reservations regarding the factory councils and trade union movement. Serrati would oppose the appeal itself, but his polemicizing on the details couldn't put in question the fundamental necessity of the supreme organ of the CI formally inviting the Italian workers' movement to abide by the decisions of the congress and to assume a truly communist character.

The ECCI reserved to itself the prerogative of making the final draft of the appeal which was then sent to Serrati. The letter, having expounded on the political and social situation in Italy and affirmed that it was eminently revolutionary, declared that whilst rejecting the method of fragmentary action, it was indispensable to create the conditions for a generalized revolutionary movement and to take account of the fact that

every day's delay could be of advantage to the bourgeoisie which was in the process of organizing to defend itself. There was also an analysis of the deficiencies of the proletarian movement, the incapacity and uncertainty of the majority of the party faced with the right-wingers of the parliamentary group and the trade unions.

The letter concluded by saying that all the conditions of membership of the international were put to the PSI in the form of an ultimatum: if they weren't fulfilled, the International would be forced to address the Italian workers directly, that is to expel the PSI from the Comintern.

The behavior of the PSI was therefore severely judged by the International's congress. This can be explained by the fact that as far as the Bolsheviks were concerned the Italian proletariat would in the very near future be called to take part in highly important actions and maybe to give the signal for the armed insurrection in the capitalist West. And if Moscow was more exacting in its demands towards the PSI than parties in other countries it was because it knew there was a core of real communists which it could trust, which wasn't the case in France or Germany where there hadn't been a radical split as had happened at Livorno.

Thus, Moscow demanded that the Right be expelled in the very near future; for the Maximalists it was a drastic requirement, but for the abstentionist Left it was not enough: the split should also involve the Center! From that autumn, Lenin would however launch a vigorous campaign against Serrati.

The Formation of the National Sections

Following the International's Second Congress, several communist parties were formed. Apart from the PCd'I, however, most of the new communist parties only answered very approximately to what had been fixed in the well-known Conditions of Membership to the CI. This was in large part due also to the fact that the Bolsheviks had a tendency to widen the net of the tactical and organizational criteria used in the admission procedures. Later on, these factors would inevitably weigh heavily on the fortunes of the International, and the situation would be aggravated by Soviet Russia's prolonged isolation. Thus it happened that the Comintern leadership, instead of getting the vital support which it so urgently needed from the proletarian movement in the West, found its difficulties compounded with further obstacles: namely the inveterate traditions of theoretical, programmatic, and organizational laxity inherited from the parties of the Second International.

Thus in the majority of cases new parties rose on foundations far closer to the Second than the Third International. In western Europe, with the exception of the Italian Left, the groups which had opposed the increasing degeneration of the Second International were too weak, too fragile on the theoretical plane, to be able to counter-pose a real revolutionary alternative to the dominant course. The International Executive was faced with a dilemma: what was it to do with the parties still linked by a thousand threads to the democratic and parliamentary tradition of the Second International which, nevertheless, pushed along by the masses, had arrived at Moscow? And what was it to do with those revolutionary vanguards who were sincerely revolutionary, but as far as their Marxism was concerned, weren't much better than the Right

and Center?

These dilemmas were nascent in the early 1920s, at a time when the masses were lined up in the revolutionary camp and were placing the problem of taking power firmly onto the agenda.

The Founding of the Communist Party of Italy: Livorno, 1920

Following the Communist International's Second Congress, the problem arose, for both the Socialist and the Communist Parties, of immediate expulsion of the reformists. This had been decided at the congress.

In Italy, the Maximalists, profiting from their numerical superiority inside the PSI, obstructed Moscow's directives. This had the positive consequence of bringing about the constitution of a Communist Party on the basis of a rift with maximalism, which was thus free from reformism and centrism. The process of forming the PCd'I, compared with that of other parties in the Western countries introduced features which were not only different but opposed: thanks to the existence of a well-defined communist nucleus.

Thus at the Livorno Congress the birth of the Italian section happened on the basis of a radical break not only with the reformists but above all with the Maximalists. This split was the fruit of a long process of decantation. The Communist Abstentionist Fraction played a determining role in this process of decanting the forces destined to form the future Communist Party. At the October meeting in Milan, as at the Imola Conference in November, and also at the time of the Livorno Congress in 1921, three currents, with different origins and

line-ups, came together around a single platform which regrouped the theses and considerations about the conditions of admission established at the CI's Second Congress.

The first of these groupings, the abstentionists, had a well-structured national network which covered the North as well as the South; our denigrators wish to view the Abstentionist Fraction as a Southern-Neapolitan phenomenon, that is, restricted to a zone which they consider capitalistically backward, which, incidentally, it isn't. The fraction's theses, with its organizational network and its centralized way of functioning, represented the highest point, parallel to that of Bolshevism, of the workers' movement in the West.

The work of theoretical, programmatic, and organizational preparation which brought the Italian party into being was carried out first by "Il Soviet" in Naples and then by the national organ "Il Comunista" in Imola.

The second of these groupings corresponded to the Turinese Ordine Nuovo group which declared that it wanted to set itself up as a "school of thought", a place to meet and debate; it had a very elastic network of readers with no organizational structure and was numerically ill-defined. The Ordine Nuovo group, whose theoretician, Antonio Gramsci, was closer to idealism than Marxism, disciplined itself to the fraction's positions more through revolutionary instinct than through theoretical clarity.

The third of the groups was represented by the extreme left of maximalism.

To our detractors, who have always depicted our current as suffering from sectarian authoritarianism and as incapable of meeting politically with other groups, we can state that the three component parts mentioned above, from 1920 to 1922,

submerged each of their particular political identities and united around the same political faith, determined to work with alacrity towards a split which was considered inevitable, and of benefit to, the revolutionary movement.

The Communist Fraction of Imola, formed by the fusion of these three currents, appeared at the Livorno Congress with a programme conceived not as a platform striving to gain the maximum consensus, but, on the contrary, as basis of the programme, which couldn't be discussed, of the new party. A comrade belonging to the fraction wrote in "Il Comunista" of December 19, 1920 an article entitled "Towards the Communist Party" from which we cite the following passage:

We cannot accept, antidemocratic though it might be, as "ultima ratio" the arithmetical expression of a party consultation which isn't a party. The recognition of the correctness of the majority opinion starts where homogeneity of programme and aims start; we don't accept it in a society which is divided into classes, within a proletariat necessarily dominated by bourgeois suggestions, within a party which includes too many petty bourgeois elements, and which historically has oscillated between the old and new Internationals, and which isn't therefore in its thought or practice the class party of Marx.

At Livorno, the Communist Fraction appeared determined to split regardless of the voting outcome in order to not paralyze the fraction and the proletariat up until the next party congress.

Proletarian Struggles Betrayed by the PSI and the CGL

A decline in workers' struggles and an offensive by the dominant classes characterized the international situation. The Italian proletariat had already launched an attack in the summer of 1919 and in April 1920 and had struggled against the forces of order. This time, in the second half of 1920, it was a defensive action in the face of the intransigent refusal on the part of the industrialists in the iron and steel and engineering industries to accept the new collective labour contract, which had been obtained by the Rome concordat of August and September 1919.

The proletariat took action immediately, but their movement remained restricted within the factory walls. The slogan "workers' control" raised by the socialist and trade-union leaders and leading to endless discussions about what form such control should take, served only to delude the working masses and weaken the movement. The delusion lay, in fact, in the notion that power had been conquered simply by taking possession of the factories, rather than by taking possession of the central organizations of bourgeois domination. Even if they were bypassed due to the sheer scale of the movement, the leaders of the Italian Federation of Metalworkers (FIOM) and the General Confederation of Labor (CGL) still managed to keep it under their control until the very end, showing yet again that the trade union Right was dominating the Maximalist Center, which served as its accomplice in paralyzing the labour movement.

The Italian government tried to intervene as little as possible in the hope that the proletarian fire would extinguish itself naturally through lack of oxygen. Furthermore, and it was by

no means fortuitous, the failure of this attack by the workers coincided with the birth of the fascist offensive against an enemy grown vulnerable through the very fact of its withdrawal into the workplace and weakened by its dependence on reformism. Giolitti's velvet glove and the fascist iron fist would divide the task of sapping the proletariat of its last reserves of energy, and do so very effectively.

Let's look at the facts. On the August 30, 1920, the Milan section of the FIOM ordered the occupation of 300 regional metallurgical factories. The occupation of the factories would be nearly universal in the Milan-Turin-Genoa industrial triangle, and also spread to many other parts of Italy. Between September 1 to 4, around 400,000 workers took possession, "in an extraordinarily peaceful way" of metallurgical works, and in a few cases, chemical and textile factories, etc. The problem arose of extending the strike to all the other categories of workers. The CGL, which until that point had remained a passive spectator, worked skillfully to take control of the movement. On September 4, a meeting took place between the majority of the CGL's steering committee, a representative of the socialist leadership, delegates from the main camere del lavoro (chambers of labour) in North and Central Italy, and the FIOM. Negotiations took place between two government representatives and D'Aragona (CGL), Buozzi (FIOM), the parliamentary socialists Turati and Treves, and representatives of the moderate wing of the industrialists, including Agnelli. The latter would end up by accepting the principle of workers' control over the industries by the trade-union organizations in the form of "collaboration and co-responsibility for the different elements of production", just as Turati and D'Aragona had many times proposed! The bill was never discussed in parliament, and Giolitti, the head of the government, left it to molder in his desk drawer.

On September 9 there was a meeting between the CGL and some of the socialist leaders. The CGL refused to allow the PSI to take over the leadership of the movement, which was what the Maximalists wanted. The PSI Directorate bowed to the pressure from the reformists and postponed the discussion... On September 10, at a meeting of the National Council of the CGL, the party leadership, in the person of Gennari, accepted the vote which had gone in D'Aragona's favor, that is: that the PSI would officially leave the leadership of the movement to the CGL. Thus the PSI discharged its historical responsibility!

The concordat which had been signed in Rome on September 19 was accepted by the extraordinary congress of the FIOM on September 21-22, despite the fact it only recognized some of the workers' demands. This was an open betrayal by the trade unions and the reformists, and the abstentionist section in Turin would call for an immediate split from the PSI. This proposal was rejected by the fraction's central committee.

Be that as it may, the setback suffered to the occupation of the factories didn't represent, as was said on many sides, a "missed revolution". The working class was quick to defend itself, but wasn't materially prepared to mount an offensive; the unfavorable social situation and a dominant class which had recovered from the perils of the post-war period, whose State apparatus was managed by the astute and calculating Giolitti, and supported by the fascist offensive, wouldn't allow it. The wave of popular discontent receded in the same measure as the illusion of democracy was revived inside the working class by the electoral and parliamentary successes. Furthermore, since the PSI was dominated by a reformist perspective, the class lacked revolutionary political guidance.

Only the CAF, whose participation in the movement wasn't based on the possibility of an immediate revolution, was

conscious of this state of affairs. During the debate on fascism at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, the fraction's representative would declare, «*I do not believe, as comrade Zinoviev has been saying over the last few days, that the PSI could have fought a revolution in Italy; but at least it should have got itself into a condition where it could provide a solid organization for the revolutionary forces of the working class*». And in 1970, in an interview, he declared:

[...] the proletarian movement, which involved the well-known occupation of the factories, reached its peak in the autumn of 1920, that is, after the return to Italy of the delegates who had attended the Second Congress of the Communist International in Moscow. The Ordine Nuovo group's assessment of the possible revolutionary opportunities offered by that movement was altogether different, in fact directly opposed, to Il Soviet's. At the time, Il Soviet wrote an article which was critical of the Turinese entitled, "To Take the Factory, or Take Power?" Taking matters of principle as our starting point, we rejected Gramsci's assertion that the communist revolution could open with the conquest of the workshops and their economic-technical management by the workforce. In our view, the political forces of the workers needed to take the lead by launching assaults on the police stations and State prefectures in order to spark the large-scale movement, by the proclamation of a victorious and total general strike, which was required in order to achieve and install the political dictatorship of the proletariat. This vision of a possible outcome was clearly sensed by the shrewd and capable head of the Italian forces of the

bourgeoisie, Giovanni Giolitti. Indeed, when the industrialists called for armed intervention by the public forces to expel the workers occupying the factories, and to restore the factories to their legitimate owners, it was he who made sure the request fell on deaf ears. Giolitti's view at the time was that leaving the plants in the hands of the workers meant leaving them with a weapon which was totally ineffective since it didn't threaten to overturn the power and privilege of the capitalist minorities; and as for the workers' management of the instruments of production, it certainly wouldn't open the door to a non-private regime of social production. Our tactical line therefore required that the class party of the proletariat should prioritize extending its influence and control not over the factory councils and electoral slates of the internal commissions, which is what "Ordinovism" wanted, but rather over the traditional trade-union organizations of the working class. That, then, is what clearly separated me from Gramsci during that phase. I never accepted that the general occupation of the factories was taking us, or might have taken us, closer to the social revolution which we wanted.

The Ordinovist militants from Turin only drew partial lessons from this conflict. Gramsci, after having adulated the occupation of the factories, realized the impasse into which the workers had been placed by the Maximalist-reformist leadership and recognized, therefore, the necessity of the revolutionary party. The Turinese group, furthermore, hadn't played any leading role in the movement, and a profound crisis had broken out in June due to a dispute arising between Gramsci and Tasca. This crisis drew the majority of the

Ordinovist group into the struggle for the founding of the class party (Terracini, Togliatti, Tasca, Leonetti), whilst Gramsci preferred to abstain from disputes and “observe and evaluate”. At the elections of the new Executive Commission of the Turinese socialist section (July 24) two motions would be presented: the winning motion (receiving 141 votes) was put forward by the “communist electionists” and called for, “a purge, to be conducted not in a sectarian spirit, but with the maximum energy”. The other one, submitted by the “Communist Abstentionists” gained fifty-four votes, and re-proposed the theses which had just been passed at the fraction’s congress. It put forward as its primary objective the constitution of the Communist Party, and the elimination of the “reformists and counter-revolutionaries” from the Socialist Party. Gramsci, along with six other comrades, limited himself to presenting a declaration for the constitution of a group distinct from the other two tendencies (which, it is well to note, both demanded the constitution of the Communist Party with the purging of the reformist tendencies). This group led by Gramsci, called itself “communist education” and received seventeen votes for its statement.

The real lesson of the occupation of the factories was it confirmed that the working class, even if weakened by years of poorly led struggles, still possessed an extraordinary capacity for resistance against the bosses’ attacks, but that it was still in thrall to a political and trade-union leadership which maximalism was incapable of opposing.

This state of affairs was blocking all serious attempts at revolutionary preparation for favorable situations in the future, however near or far off they might be. It also prevented the defense of working-class positions from the moment that opportunism encouraged the councilist and democratic illusions of workers’ control. For these reasons, following the

harsh experience of September 1920, the best proletarian elements, even if they held very different positions to “Il Soviet”; even if they were badly prepared from a theoretical point of view, orientated themselves towards a party split.

The balance-sheet of the factory occupation movement was an unhappy one, but valuable lessons were learnt.

The Political Tendencies Inside the PSI

The Turatian Right

The episode of the factory occupations showed that the PSI was dominated by its right wing both on the political, and on the trade-union and organizational levels. The mass of the party, as “Il Soviet” would write on October 24, 1920, was even more the prisoner of the right than it had been at the end of the war.

In Moscow, Serrati had defended the reformists Turati, Treves, D’Aragona etc... endlessly repeating to Lenin that they represented only themselves and, furthermore, that they couldn’t be compared with the Russian Mensheviks, who the party would have subjected to its discipline and who wouldn’t have been able to sabotage the revolution!

As a consequence, and in clear contravention of the regulations issued at the Second Congress of the Communist International, the Italian Socialist Party didn’t take any measures to purge the party of counter-revolutionary elements. Although the Second Congress of the CI had finished on August 7, 1920, the PSI

Directorate didn't meet until September 28 to discuss its conclusions, and the famous letter from the International's Executive Committee to the Italian socialists (a letter the PSI was careful not to publish – so at that time it was the socialists who were keeping the archive documents secret!). It would take three days of discussion – until October 1 – to finally pass a resolution declaring acceptance of the Moscow's 21 Conditions and agreeing to a “radical purging” of the reformists in the party, referring to procedures and ways and means to the national congress.

In the meantime, the Turatian Right had organized itself into the “Concentration Fraction”, and in Milan, on August 30, it issued a manifesto attacking the Maximalists for their demagoguery and inertia and blamed them for reinforcing the power of the ruling class. At its congress in Reggio Emilia on October 10 to 11, 1920, the Concentration Fraction declared that only they were truly revolutionary and accused maximalism of having, by its inaction, dispersed the revolutionary impetus. In their final motion, drawn up by Baldesi and D'Aragona, the reformists laid claim to *«the name of the party, the intentions and educational spirit of its propaganda, the good day to day administrative and organizational work, and the work within the cooperatives and trade-unions»*.

They confirmed their adherence to the Third International, their acceptance of the 21 Conditions in respect of “interpretative autonomy” and the “conditions in each country” and asked for the expulsion from the party of the masons and groups with anarchistic leanings. They even recognized the dictatorship of the proletariat (though only as a transitory necessity and not as a programmatic obligation), and the use of violence and illegal methods in the class struggle.

The motion declared that the reformists would support, “all

possible attempts at approximation to the socialist regime.” In “Critica Sociale”, Treves finally noticed that, polemics aside, the reformist theses were in substantial agreement with Serrati’s. And it was true. By leaning in the direction of Maximalist centrism, the reformists were trying to don a mantle of political virginity in order to ward off their expulsion from the party.

This puerile maneuver was unmasked by the right fraction itself. In the December 24 edition of “La Giustizia”, its newspaper, the Right professed to support, *«the major part of the theoretical assertions of the Mensheviks, with the exception of the proposal to constitute a Fourth International. On the contrary, we must enter the Third International and work in such a way that the decisions taken at the Second Congress are modified in order to allow the International to bring all the socialist forces together»*. Opportunism could hardly have enunciated its programme more clearly: to penetrate the International with the aim of removing its historical character of harsh selection of the “socialist” forces!

The Maximalists

The Maximalist current, led by Serrati, appeared lifeless compared with the dynamic Right. If in France and Germany a considerable number of centrists accepted Moscow’s 21 Conditions for entering the new party, in Italy, the representatives of the majority of the PSI, a party which had been a member of the Third International since 1919, took up a stance which rendered the split inevitable. Inadvertently, they thus made possible the constitution of a party founded on theoretical foundations which were untainted by misunderstandings or reservations.

But Moscow’s 21 Conditions didn’t appear in *Avanti!* until September 21, and the review, “Comunismo”, didn’t publish the letter from the ECCI until October 15. According to Serrati, these delays could be explained by the fact that the

resolutions of the Second Congress needed revising for more than one reason; most importantly of all, as Comunismo wrote on September 15, because the congress hadn't been properly prepared and organized, and because the Bolsheviks weren't very well informed.

The meeting of the PSI Directorate finally took place on September 28 and was the first to be held since the Second World Congress. So the unitarian formula of Serrati was:

«It is just a matter of liberating the party by means of an energetic purge of those elements, who, both during and after the war, continually provided weapons to our enemies [...] The unity of our party – along with all the reconstructive organisms that it managed to create in the class revolution – must remain intact, against every attack from right and left. All those who want to be with us, right and left, we must keep them; especially since it is events themselves, more powerful than men, which conduct everybody inevitably to the left, towards revolution».

Serrati maintained that, «ill-advised Russian expressions and norms should be tempered by that Italian shrewdness, which, without abandoning the communist programme, adapts them to the particular circumstances of our country».

The meeting of the PSI Directorate (September 28 – October 1, 1920) marked the beginning of the Maximalist crisis. In response to the vote in favor of the Moscow resolutions, Serrati handed in his resignation to “Avanti!”. As we know it was not accepted by a unanimous decision. A few days later, however, Serrati would tender his resignation as the director of the Turinese edition of the paper following an article about D’Aragona, Colombino, etc., (who were members of the trade union delegation to the Second Congress in Moscow).

Some days earlier, in Milan, there had been a meeting of

representatives of the extremist fractions within the PSI at which the Communist Fraction had been officially constituted. A further controversy, of far greater importance, was subsequently sparked off between Serrati on the one side, and Lenin and Zinoviev on the other.

Two open letters to Serrati, written by Zinoviev on October 22 and 23, stated that the destiny of the Italian revolution would depend on the capacity of the Socialist Party to free itself from the reformist elements who were sabotaging the proletarian revolution. Zinoviev affirmed, furthermore, that anyone who, at that moment, was trying to unite with the reformists or semi-reformists was, as far as the revolution was concerned, committing a crime. A message from the ECCI to the Communist Fraction (October 23, 1920) stated: «If Serrati and his friends want to defend the Communist International, if they want to make an effective contribution to the formation of a real Communist Party in Italy, they must join your fraction. This is the only possibility, and the ECCI is unable to agree to, or approve, any other solution [...] We recognize no other Communist fraction in Italy apart from yours. All those who aren't with us are against us». The text of the message appeared in "Il Comunista" (the fraction's organ) on November 21. In the same number, notice was given of the convocation, at Imola, of the Communist Fraction's congress on November 28-29.

In two related articles on the Italian Socialist Party (November 4 & December 11, 1920), Lenin wrote:

What constitutes this specific feature of Italy is the fact that the reformists have already proved incapable in practice of carrying out party decisions and pursuing party policy. By evading this fundamental issue, the resolution of the

advocates of unity with the reformists utterly defeats itself. By this fact alone, Serrati, Baratonò, Zannerini, Bacci and Giacomini have already shown quite clearly and irrefutably that they are fundamentally wrong, that their political line is fundamentally false. The discussion in the Italian party's Central Committee has ever more forcefully revealed the total falsity of Serrati's line. The Communists were right in saying that as long as the reformists remained what they were they could not but sabotage the revolution, as they had already sabotaged it during the recent revolutionary movement of the Italian workers who were taking over the factories. That is the pith and marrow of the question! How is it possible to prepare for revolution and advance towards decisive battles, when there are people in the party who sabotage the revolution? That is not merely a mistake but a crime.

In the December 11 article, he wrote: *«On the eve of the proletarian revolution, the liberation, the freedom, of the parties of the revolutionary proletariat from opportunists and 'Centrists', from their influence, their prejudices, their weaknesses and vacillations, is the main and essential condition of success».*

Assembled in congress on November 20-21 in Florence, the Communist Unitarian Fraction of the PSI voted on a motion which stated that the Socialist Party had, «already effectively conquered political power», and therefore it alone could, *«assure the proletariat of the overthrow of the bourgeois regime, reconstruction, and the communist order».* What's more, it was stated that, following the congresses at Reggio Emilia, in 1912 (expulsion of the reformists), and Ancona, in 1914, (expulsion of the masons), *«the revolutionary and totally intransigent tendency has dominated the*

party unopposed, drawing behind it the Right fractions and the confederated trade union organizations by subordinating the former with strict discipline, and the latter with a clear pact of alliances». In conclusion, the Maximalist convention declared, «the necessity for our party to conserve its unitary membership in order that by our action we achieve the best, and most rapid, revolutionary outcome». On the relations with the International it was said that the PSI accepted Moscow's 21 Conditions in their entirety, but that these conditions should be interpreted, «according to the particular historical conditions of our country».

The Maximalist convention in Florence was held shortly after a new socialist “victory” in the administrative elections, and at the same time as the fascist offensive in Bologna against “red power”. As a consequence of this latest electoral victory, maximalism would argue for uniting the party with the right wing which controlled a good part of the municipal and provincial administrations. Thus, from the columns of “Avanti!”, on December 16 Serrati responded to Lenin in the following terms: *«The only country – after Russia – which finds itself socialistically in a favorable condition to fight against the bourgeoisie, is Italy [...] Our party has a membership of 250,000, 150 members of parliament, and controls 2,500 municipalities. The organizations of economic resistance have more than two and a half million members. We control around a thousand cooperatives. We have the terrain and the materials for the reconstruction».*

On December 7, Serrati sent a letter to the CI in which he declared:

The position we are in, in Italy, is very different to that in countries. Here there is nobody asking to leave the Third International, and nobody supports the Berne Congress. If there were a split, it would be entirely to the advantage of our

enemies, and our movement would find it absolutely impossible to emerge from the deadlock in which it has been placed due to the inexperience of the left insurrectionists.

Serrati's opportunism didn't just restrict itself to presenting the Italian right wingers as indispensable elements of the party and of the revolutionary cause, it went one step further, accusing the revolutionary Left of having condemned the proletarian movement to political deadlock and even holding it, in consequence, responsible for the failure to take power. Moreover, posing as the true representative of orthodoxy in contrast to the political manipulation and opportunism of...Lenin, Serrati would ingeniously claim that the Noskes and Scheidemanns had already been expelled from the party in 1912, and if there hadn't been a revolution in Italy yet it wasn't Turati's, or Modigliani's, fault. To say that it was, explained Serrati, was tantamount to giving in to *«a belief in miracles and superficial prejudices»*. Only the Italian socialists were capable of being *«the judges of the developing situation and deciding which steps needed to be taken to defend the Italian socialist movements»*. Serrati asked that a "relativist criterion" be applied to Italy, and addressing himself directly to Lenin he declared: *«We ask nothing more, dear comrade. And if afterwards, having pardoned the Zinovievs who opposed the revolution, and the Cachins who proposed class collaboration and were international ambassadors of the great 'democratic' war, you still condemn us – we, who have never hesitated for one moment to defend the proletarian revolution – we will be neither surprised nor will we complain. But we will continue our work»*. ("Comunismo" no. 1, December 15, 1920).

Serrati was feigning ignorance of the fact that the right wing of the PSI formed a homogeneous fraction, with a newspaper of its own, with its own steering committee, which was appearing at the party congress with a motion of its own, and that from

the time of the Bologna Congress onwards it had continuously sabotaged every initiative taken by the Maximalist leadership!

If Serrati was to defend the so-called unity of the party nothing was left to him but the weapons of two-bit polemics. Thus he would declare that the real opportunists were to be found inside the Third International; that the communist parties of France and Germany were full of ex-supporters of the war whilst the Italian reformists were immune from such defects. And he wasn't averse to borrowing a few lies from the bourgeoisie in order to denigrate soviet Russia either.

Eventually it got to a stage where he was talking about, «*Red masonry which operates outside and above the party*».

Lurking behind this hymn to party unity, for whom it served as a convenient disguise, was the left wing of opportunism. Indeed, the Maximalists, in the name of unity, preferred to remain with 14,000 Social Democrats rather than join the 58,000 Communists and the Communist International! The problem lay elsewhere. The Maximalists couldn't support communism since their programme was clearly opposed to that of the Communist International.

On December 20, 1920, acting on behalf of the ECCI, Zinoviev sent a final letter to the Directorate of the PSI, and to Serrati in person. Zinoviev was clearly convinced that Serrati had started down the slippery slope to opportunist and centrist politics: «*Making concessions to the reformists just to keep Serrati happy would ruin the party [...] Only the Italian Communist Fraction which met recently at Imola has posed the problem in a way which is clear and distinct. In Italy, those who want to march with the Communist International must support this fraction [...] Long live the Italian Communist Party purified of reformist and semi-reformist elements!*»

At the Livorno Congress, Turati put up a coherent defence of

reformism showing how deeply rooted it was inside the PSI. A few days earlier, he had written that it wasn't a case of conflicting tendencies in the Socialist Party anymore, but of conflicting ideas. And Serrati's Unitarian Fraction didn't present itself as a right-communist tendency, but as the left wing of social democracy, which had become, in its turn, the left wing of the bourgeoisie.

In the December 19 issue of "Il Comunista", an article entitled "Towards the Communist Party" affirmed that, *«just as the bourgeoisie delegates its defense, at critical moments, to reformism, so reformism, when it is losing ground amongst the masses, is forced to delegate its counter-revolutionary function to that centrism labelled 'right-communism' which we can see at work in all countries. The feeling you get nowadays at party assemblies and congresses is that it is actually the communists and the unitarians who are going to separate from each other once and for all; it is they for whom cohabiting has become impossible»*.

It is a view which was soon to be confirmed at the Livorno Congress.

In the months before the Livorno Congress, the Left would mount a vigorous and determined campaign to unmask the farcical revolutionism of the Maximalists and reveal their role as pacifiers. In the October 24 edition of "Il Soviet", an article entitled "Serrati's Mistake" ("Il torto di Serrati"), would counter all the Maximalist arguments that favored applying Moscow's 21 Conditions in such a way as to render them inoffensive and consequently to allow more fatal equivocating about the destiny of the proletarian movement. Actually the formal unity of the party would serve merely to reinforce the reformists, and consequently weaken the revolutionary energy of the proletariat. The Communist Fraction therefore had to take determined and intransigent action. The article in "Il Soviet"

examined some of the arguments Serrati used and showed they were fundamentally at odds with a good part of the theses approved at the International's Second Congress. Extensive quotations from this article follow:

When it comes to presenting his concluding argument, Serrati gets caught up in contradiction and sophism. We have in our hands, he says, thousands of communes [municipal councils], co-operatives and organizations; so many of them we don't have enough people to fill all the posts. The Third International doesn't condemn such conquests as heretical, in fact it encourages them, but meanwhile it expects all these posts to be filled with authentic communists, even incompetent ones. That would mean wrecking proletarian institutions. Serrati concludes not only that non-communists should remain in the party, but above all they shouldn't be disturbed in the peaceful exercise of the official positions they occupy. The Third International's overall perspective, which lies behind its prescription that the communist parties should utilize all of these forms of action, is that the work carried out to achieve the communists' principal aim, i.e., the overthrow of the bourgeois power (when its historic instrument exists, that is; the political class party responding to all the features and conditions contemplated by the Theses) this revolutionary work, can be usefully carried out in all these institutions. These same institutions are, however, also favorable terrain for opportunists, chiefly insofar as their function within the parameters of the present society can become an end in itself, and end up as a means, under multiple forms, of delaying the precipitation of the revolutionary crisis. Communists however must penetrate them precisely in order to combat the opportunists; in order to denounce their

inability to put forward long-term solutions to questions of interest to the proletariat; in order to spread our propaganda within them; to agitate within them and thereby gaining recruits for the class war led by the Communist Party. And given that this party exists, it has been said in Moscow, and since it responds to determined criteria, one of the most important of which is to be free of social democratic and opportunist elements, such a party is able, and indeed should, penetrate the trade unions, the co-operatives, the local authorities and parliament and put up a fight within them. To have the unions, the co-operatives, the local authorities, etc., but without that fundamental condition which is the Communist Party's existence, that would mean no revolutionary work was possible; in fact, one would run the risk of abetting bourgeois conservation. What Serrati wants, precisely in order to conserve those organizations that are presently playing this opportunistic game, is to renounce the condition, the premise, of forming the party. Even the blind can see that the contradiction lies within him, not in Moscow's prescriptions. One could, from the dialectical Marxist point of view, find the criteria that underlie all the Moscow Congress's tactical decisions too simple. One could, from the critical-historical point of view and through an analysis of the successive conflicts between the various tendencies and various socialist methods; by establishing a continuity in the development of the methods of revolutionary Marxism, like those defended by the left of the International against reformists and anarchists, arrive at the conclusion that the formation of truly revolutionary communist parties, and the progressive differentiation away from petty-bourgeois elements and dissentient schools, is accomplished by means of the exclusion, at given historical moments, of

given methods and forms of action once emptied of any possibility of revolutionary utilization. No criticism could be levelled against Serrati were he – claiming to be a representative of the left fraction of the Socialist Party – to instigate such a critical in-depth examination. But we cannot allow him, in order to support his idea that it is necessary to preserve the unity of the Italian party at all costs, to falsify the meaning of the revolutionary method adopted by the International [...]

Precisely because the International still wants all the old forms of action to be utilized, renewing them with a new and oppositional revolutionary content, from the communist movement, the latter needs to be purged of all heterogeneous elements, without which the overall balance sheet of its intervention in these institutions, hitherto the domain of reformists, would be bound to be disastrously negative. For example, a commune like the Milanese one, and organizations like the Confederation of Labour and the National League of Co-operatives, are, according to the method established in Moscow, organizations which Communists must still conquer since the traditional pernicious work of the Second International is still being carried out within them; insofar as the various Caldaras and D’Aragonas, whilst happy to help the bourgeoisie resolve the various problems and difficulties threatening to engulf them, do absolutely nothing in terms of revolutionary propaganda, agitation and action. It is therefore necessary, according to Moscow’s criteria, that the posts within those organizations must be taken over by good communists who are disciplined to their party, who, even if technically less able to resolve contingent matters in the way the bourgeoisie would like, would,

nevertheless, make use of the positions they have won to carry out work conducive to organizing for the revolutionary struggle. To want to resolve this problem – set out very clearly on the basis of the incontrovertible documentation of the work carried out up until now within the aforesaid institutions – by announcing that D’Aragona and Caldara are card carrying members of the Italian Socialist Party, which in turn is part of the Third International, is simply ridiculous. The International can only but respond: expel Caldara and D’Aragona, even if it costs the party the Milan Commune and the Confederation. Especially since it will demonstrate that those champions of reformism only managed to obtain the votes of organized workers due to the prestige of being labelled revolutionary, which party membership bestows on them. So once again, slowly but surely, another of Serrati’s sophisms has been easily dismantled; once again he has shown how he poses as a master of intransigence, but provides only lessons in opportunism [...]

But Serrati is wheeling all this stuff out in support of his favorite thesis, i.e., that although Moscow’s 21 Conditions should be recognized, more time should be given to the member parties, each responsible unto themselves, to start cleansing themselves of opportunist elements. It is on this basis that in Florence Serrati intends to uphold the preservation of party unity, apart from a few personal expulsions to throw dust in people’s eyes. Rather than asking for more time for it to become a revolutionary communist party, I maintain that the Italian Socialist Party is already enormously behind schedule, and that

the break should have happened some time ago. Furthermore, with every day that passes the problem becomes more complicated and difficult to resolve.

All this can be deduced from our party's recent past, and today we will only skim over it quickly, apart from returning to what I mentioned above since it is the nub of the question. Besides, I already wrote that in Moscow – in the minute or two I had to speak about Italian matters – I made a statement recording that such was the opinion of Lenin and Zinoviev and all those who have criticized the Italian party. The particular circumstances in which the war question was posed in Italy allowed too many right-wing elements to save face by passing themselves off as opposers of the war, whilst in fact they differed in no respect from the foreign social-patriots of August 4, 1914. The presence of these people in the party was shown to be especially dangerous at the time of the Austrian invasion, when the question of national defense became a particularly burning issue. As comrade Gennari (a unitarian in Bologna in 1919) often reminds us, the right should have been expelled back in 1918 when they were championing the country's defense. But many of the best comrades of the Left weren't at that congress, and those who were, were naïve enough to be tricked by Modigliani and co. When first the party Directorate then the Bologna Congress voted for the party to join the International, another opportunity to separate from the Right was missed (the thousand and one reasons why it needed to happen we don't wish to go into here). But since it didn't happen, adherence to the International was patchy to say the least [...] The amount of time gone by since Bologna, the time being

spent now leading up to Florence, and the time which, according to Serrati and his most pious desires – or profane vaticinations – should be spent after Florence, represents ever greater difficulties and dangers not only for the renewal of the party but for the historic development of the revolutionary struggle of the Italian proletariat. The bulk of the party is now more a prisoner of the Right than ever it was at the end of the war. The situation invoked by Serrati referring to leadership positions entrusted to non-communists – or rather, defeatists of the revolution – has worsened precisely because of the Unitarians, precisely because of Serrati.

After the war, the big economic organizations reconstituted their membership and cadres, and the Maximalists allowed their enthusiasm for the revolutionary methods established in Russia to be linked up with the horribly opportunist practice of the organizations directed by their own party. After Bologna, the party, bogged down in a unitary approach to the political elections despite everything, ended up with a parliamentary group which, although bigger than ever before, repeated all the mistakes which the previous one had been denounced for over the course of six years of polemics; and once again they were predominantly drawn from the right-wing minority of the party. And so we come to today, skipping over everything else, to the local government elections; elections in which maximalism becomes even more of a prisoner to a thousand and one local situations. The party is identified with its councilors in the communes and provinces, made up of its worst petty bourgeois and opportunist elements, by all the people who stayed

within, or entered, our ranks because tolerant or supportive of demagogic extremism; after they had been totally reassured that the old practice of winning electoral mandates hadn't changed at all – given, that is, that you accept, against the heresy of the present writer, that it is susceptible to change – and that they aren't serious, without which assurance this rabble would retreat ignominiously into the ranks of the timid, or become outright traitors.

I have recently seen a chart illustrating our party's growth. The chart is one of galloping elephantiasis. I have more than two hundred thousand members: that means that in proportion to the population our membership has overtaken the Russian Communist Party, but with the simple difference that here the bourgeoisie can give us a thrashing whenever it feels like it, whilst over there the counter-revolutionary dogs hardly dare draw a breath, let alone bark. And the worst of it is all this is happening – why deny it? – while many of the best proletarian elements, ready to give themselves over to hard struggle rather than engaging in the idiotic and cowardly pursuit of comfortable positions, are going off with the anarchists, whose movement – and I hardly need to repeat my radical disagreement with them – is growing in numbers and combative energy. If it were left to Serrati and the Unitarians, the party would go on to evolve not in a communist direction, as they claim, but relapse into performing the worst of social democratic functions as the stupid servant of the bourgeoisie, holding the working masses in contempt. A good dose of courage is needed... to propose: let's wait a bit longer! The bottom line is, you can wait if you want, but we're not waiting

any longer. At Florence⁽¹⁾, party unity will be buried, without honors; and all the worse for those, however many there are, who, persisting in their error, wish to stick by the corpse, and poison themselves with its noxious exhalations.

(1) - In the course of the article, Florence is often referred to as the venue of the imminent socialist congress; in fact although the PSI's Seventeenth Congress should have been held in the Tuscan capital, it was eventually moved to Livorno for reasons of security.

The Communist Fraction

The article entitled "The Third International and Parliamentarism" published in "Il Soviet" on August 22, 1920, was the last to be inspired by the theme of abstentionism. From that moment onwards the Communist Abstentionist Fraction (CAF) would devote its entire energy to diffusing and applying the decisions of the Second Moscow Congress and thus clear the way of any obstacles to the formation of the Communist Party of Italy. Activity would unfold on two fronts, firstly in polemics with the Center and Right of reformism, secondly in the organization of those forces which sided with the Communist International.

In a bulletin issued by the fraction's Central Committee (CC), appearing in "Il Soviet" on the day after the meeting of the PSI Directorate, it was asserted, word for word:

Since the Committee has heard comrade Bordiga's report on the Moscow Congress, and having considered the political situation in Italy, it considers that recent events, and the development of the metalworkers' conflict, dramatically confirm the Communist Fraction's criticisms of the PSI, regarding both the presence within the PSI of social democratic elements and the ineptitude of

the Maximalist majority, which can neither bring the proletarian movement under its control nor issue robust directives to guide mass action. It considers that the remedy to these extremely grave deficiencies is to apply the decisions taken at the Moscow Congress regarding the situation in the PSI, and to apply them seriously and energetically with a view to breaking up its dubious unity and liquidating the inauspicious inheritance of social democratic and opportunist tactics within parliament and the unions, even if concealed behind a Maximalist label. It invites the fraction's comrades to support any action that the CC and Il Soviet will take in pursuance of this aim in preparation for the next congress, from which the new Communist Party will have to emerge. It also makes a general appeal to all communists who do not belong to the Abstentionist Fraction, with a view to finding common grounds for resolute action, and in order that the forces which will ensure the victory of communism at the next congress may be organized as soon as possible.

In the same edition an important resolution on the Turin abstentionists was published. These comrades, mainly workers who had proved their combativeness and determination to fight on a thousand and one occasions, believed the moment for separating from the PSI had already arrived and that the fraction's CC should immediately convene a national congress.

To these comrades, influenced to a certain degree by councilist spontaneity, the fraction's CC responded that the decisions of the International Congress had to be executed to the letter, and therefore it was necessary to hold on and prepare for the

extraordinary national congress.

«The Turin comrades, from whom we expect much» – wrote “Il Soviet” – «haven’t worked that long for the fraction at whose head they now wish to place themselves. In fact, they have adopted tactical directives we don’t agree with which were advanced by other groups. These directives, despite the marvelous revolutionary work of the Turin comrades, have recently indirectly contributed to the unhappy outcome of two great proletarian battles». (the ones in April and September).

The same paper contained another bulletin, which took up once again the issue of observing discipline towards the International. This was on the eve of the local government elections. The fraction stipulated that comrades should abstain, *«for discipline’s sake, from abstentionist activity»*. “Il Soviet” tackled the underlying problems, the problem of the party, and of the urgent need for it to be formed, linking it to the balance sheet of the factory occupations and the collapse of the myths of councilism and workers’ self-management. On October 3, “Il Soviet” wrote:

The famous question of “control”, and all the agitation started in Turin by a group of comrades whose orientation leaves much to be desired, has never really fired our enthusiasm. From the very earliest stages we could easily predict it would open the way to new reformistic expedients and that workers’ “control” over production, far from being enough to ignite a revolutionary blaze, would end up as some legislative provision of the bourgeois State [...] We don’t mean that such a question is without real content, or that the factory councils and factory occupations are movements/organizations which are artificial. Quite the contrary. We detect in them fundamental manifestations of the bourgeois crisis unravelling; a crisis in which communists, the Communist Party, is duty bound to

intervene precisely in order to introduce the revolutionary content into them that they are “intrinsically” lacking, as is the case in the traditional trade union struggle [...] Some minor breach in purely bourgeois forms of economy and bourgeois law is never revolutionary until the point is reached when the bourgeoisie forcibly represses it, thus posing the question of the concentration of power; we can only move on after the establishment has been overthrown! Thus, once upon a time, postulating the right to strike was “revolutionary” whereas nowadays it is taken for granted. Once these postulates – regarding workers’ control – are accepted by the bourgeoisie their dialectical efficacy becomes counter-revolutionary, in the sense that in the economic field they offer a means of ordering the anarchy of production, whilst in the political field they put a break on the impetus of the masses when heading towards a collision with the bourgeoisie [...] Truly revolutionary struggle will happen when the problem of political power, of social leadership, is posed irrevocably, and the battle is led by the conscious vanguard, the Communist Party [...] In order to get the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat on the agenda, and the masses seem marvelously predisposed to take part in it, precisely such a party will be required in Italy. The prevarications of the Maximalists have perhaps made constituting it more difficult, since dissatisfaction and revolutionary impatience are not sufficient material with which to build it [...] There must be a radical change of direction and the dead weight disposed of without further ado. With every passing day the party’s illness becomes more and more gangrenous. Moscow’s diagnosis is in general correct. The surgeon’s knife is required and the incision needs to be made without false sentiment.

The Milan Meeting of October 15

Attending this meeting were representatives from the Communist Abstentionist Fraction, from Ordine Nuovo, from the Milanese Maximalist Left, from the majority within the Youth Federation, and also a number of Maximalist groups without any clear physiognomy but who opposed Serrati's line. Of those present, the CAF was the only one with a solid organization of its own at a national level, the one grouped around "Il Soviet".

It was from this meeting that the "Manifesto-Program of the Communist Fraction of the PSI" would emerge; on the basis of which programme the so-called Imola fraction of "pure communists" would arise. Addressed to all comrades and sections of the PSI, the Manifesto-Program was published in "Il Soviet" on October 17: it denounced, in the first place, the incompetence of the PSI and declared that the fraction, at the next congress, would resolve the acute party crisis. It stated that the trade-union organizations and political organizations, to which had been entrusted the task of developing a victorious opposition to the bourgeois policy of self-preservation during this period of open class struggle, had proved inadequate, that the party hadn't modified the criteria of its policies and that the masses, having been disappointed, were turning to organizations outside the party, for example to syndicalists and anarchists. It stated that the Second Congress of the CI had established the foundations for party renewal on which the next congress would have to work, namely:

1. Changing the party's name to the Communist Party of Italy (section of the Communist International).
2. Revision of the program, as approved in 1919 at Bologna.

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3. Expulsion of all members and organizations which have pronounced against the communist program.
 4. Revision of the party's internal statutes with a view to introducing into it the criteria of homogeneity, centralization and discipline.
 5. As regards action, discipline towards all the decisions of the CI Congress and the national congress, observance of which will be entrusted with full powers to the CC elected by the congress.
 6. The directives on party action: to prepare for insurrectional action with consequent legal and illegal work; to organize Communist groups in all workers' organizations; to work inside the 'economic organizations'; participation in the political and local government elections to be distinguished by features totally opposed to the old social-democratic practice; control to be exerted over all propaganda activity.

On October 17, "Il Soviet" also published the Abstentionist Fraction's bulletin of adherence to the Manifesto-Program:

The Fraction's Central Committee, reassembled on October 9, 1920, having listened to the report [...] on the agreements reached with the other left fractions and tendencies in the party, regarding preparations for the congress and proposed action to achieve the most efficacious application of the resolutions of the Moscow Congress; and having examined the Manifesto-Program that was issued with this end in view, has decided to fully adhere to this movement in the name of the Communist Abstentionist Fraction. This decision has been communicated to the provisional committee in Bologna [the committee soon moved from there to Imola] and it invites all groups

that adhere to it to examine the above-mentioned program in a special assembly, and then proceed to their relevant sections to seek agreement, on the basis of the program, with similar groups. It wishes to record that [...] the Communist Abstentionist Fraction still retains its own organization and constitution, and, as regards the local council elections, stands by the criteria taken into consideration by recent CC decisions. It hopes, moreover, that the joint effort of all communists will be crowned with success in their work of putting new life into the organizations and revolutionary activity of the Italian proletariat.

A brief comment recorded how the Communist Abstentionist Fraction's adherence to the Manifesto-Program wasn't really that surprising since the abstentionists had proposed an agreement with the electionist communists before, at the Bologna Congress in 1919, at which time it was actually the latter who dropped the proposal, in the name of party unity.

The Milan Manifesto-Program, however, made no reference to the *Ordinovism* that took over all the positions adopted by the abstentionists, except abstentionism itself, abandoned (for reasons we have often mentioned) even by the abstentionists themselves. The emphasis was instead placed on the question of the party, its centralization, and on the question of conquering the trade-union organizations and the national confederations. No special role, however, was attributed to the factory councils.

A provisional CC and a three-man Executive Committee had been nominated with a provisional headquarters in Bologna; it was also decided to publish the weekly "Il Comunista", and to convene the fraction's Imola Congress for November 28.

That the influence of the abstentionists, at both the theoretical

and organizational levels, would be a determining factor in every aspect of the work of forming the Communist Fraction, and making preparations for the Socialist's national congress, is something no-one can deny. At the same time nobody can accuse them of using their theoretical, organizational, and numerical superiority to impose their personnel on the governing body. As a matter of fact, then as now, our fraction has always rejected petty personalistic politics and, in 1924, in reply to a slanderous campaign against the Left incited by future Stalinists, one of our comrades insisted that the abstentionists had never demanded a presence within the leadership organs which was disproportionate to their forces. The comrades of the Left never saw making bids for leadership roles as one of their political functions. On the contrary, whilst getting ready for the Imola Congress the abstentionists would maintain a certain detachment towards the fraction's official organs, keeping their own organization intact right up to the Livorno Congress. In fact, the fraction's entire network was entrusted to comrade Fortichiari, who would work perfectly well with the abstentionists even though he wasn't an abstentionist himself.

A Historical Necessity

The great questions of principle had been cleared up once and for all with the theses and conditions of admission to the International and with the theses and writings of the Communist Abstentionist Fraction. Now it was a case of conducting an all-out battle against the opportunism of the Right and Center. In the second half of 1920 the fraction fulfilled this task, through *Il Soviet*, with great energy and gusto. "*Il Soviet*" also published a whole series of articles aimed at unmasking opportunism and the duplicity of the CGL

leadership, which whilst underwriting the documents of the Red Unions in Moscow continued to adhere to Amsterdam, thanks in part to Serrati's support.

The internal party polemics took place while the Giolitti government was discussing "control of industry" with the unions, and offered police operations to the reformists to control subversives whilst the fascist groups started to launch their "punitive expeditions". The October 24 edition of "Il Soviet" explained that it was a matter of a single counter-revolutionary policy, not opposed and contradictory government policies; and that the bourgeois tendency of the moment was in fact more predisposed to social-democratic government. To this end, the part of the bourgeoisie supporting the social democratic solution played its final card. On December 9, "Il Soviet" published an article, entitled "Defeatist Maneuvers", denouncing Turati's parliamentary speech, in which, following the events in Palazzo d'Accursio in Bologna, he had condemned not only the black-shirts, but also the "red flag fanatics". Turati affirmed the urgent need to "disarmare gli spiriti – quell high spirits", "deporre le armi e pacificare gli animi – lay down arms and pacify souls", thus allowing free rein to the fascist groups, armed to the teeth and protected by the State. Even the party center indulged in pacifism, and declared loudly against liberties trampled underfoot, invoking the protection of the public powers, and advising workers not to respond to "provocation"!

All of which would confirm the urgent necessity of constituting the Communist Party, a necessity dictated by considerations of principle: as long as the proletariat remains under the influence of a party which orders it to disarm precisely when the class enemy is mustering its forces, it will never be able to defend itself if the workers' struggle to defend itself against fascist and State repression was inseparable from the liquidation of the

socialist Right and Center. The victory of reaction was largely the product of the excessive delay in achieving the split and the consequence of the reformist influence over the working masses.

The Imola Congress

In the autumn of 1920, there was held a congress of Communists who believed in acceptance without reserve of the resolutions of the International's Second Congress, and consequently in the expulsion of the reformists from the party. Present at the conference were representatives of the CAF, "Ordine Nuovo," and the left Maximalists. The CAF's representative gave an introductory speech in which he declared that it wasn't just the social-patriots who had deserted the proletarian cause but also the social democrats, who rejected the violent destruction of the bourgeois power and the dictatorship of the proletariat in the same way they refused to accept the new communist program elaborated by the International.

His speech was seconded by the delegates from the other groups. Naturally, there was argument and differences of opinion on certain points, but not such as to erode the principles on which the Communist Fraction was built. It was an open secret that the Communists had met at Imola to organize the Communist Party of Italy, not to win votes at the next congress of the PSI. The overriding question, which had been deliberated on in Moscow, was that of the purging of the party: nothing remained now but to put it into practice, severing links both with the reformists and the Maximalists, whichever way the vote went at Livorno. At Imola it had already been accepted, even if not decided on formally, that if

the congress vote put the Communists in a minority, the latter, already organized in the fraction, would abandon the congress and the Socialist Party in order to constitute the new Communist Party of Italy (section of the Third International). Indicative of the underlying consistency is the fact that the motion approved unanimously at Imola would be the same as that presented by the Communists to the Livorno Congress.

The article which follows poses in the clearest possible way the question of the split as a historical necessity independent from any considerations of a numerical character, that war-horse of the usual traitors. The article, entitled “Towards the Communist Party” was published by the fraction’s newspaper “Il Comunista” on December 19 and 23, and also in “Avanti!”

Towards the Communist Party

The Imola Convention believed it opportune not to pronounce on the attitude that our fraction should take if the vote at the national congress puts us in a minority. This was because it would have contradicted the convention’s character as one based on fractional work, which aimed to organize the conquest of the majority of the party at the congress.

On the other hand, as Gramsci observed, there was a sense in which the convention was not just working towards a congressional victory, but towards the constitution of a new party. And the true objective of our entire work is precisely that. We need to bear in mind that a matter as important as the constitution in Italy of the Communist Party will not, in the final analysis, be settled by a majority at the national

congress; rather it will be after the congressional vote that the matter can be tackled directly, and resolved. The elements of the solution are to be found in the entire experience and political preparation of the Left of the present party, the Left party, or rather, the two of them that have co-existed up to now, and even more are contained within the Communist International's program of action.

Anti-democratic even as regards this, we cannot accept as 'ultima ratio' the arithmetic expression of the consultation of a party which isn't a party. We can start to recognize the correct opinion of the majority at the point where homogeneity of program and purpose begin; in a society divided into classes we cannot accept it; not within a proletariat necessarily dominated by bourgeois influences; not within a party with far too many petty bourgeois members, and which historically has oscillated between the old and the new internationals; which, therefore, isn't, either in its thinking or its practice, the class party of Marx.

And so we need to immediately start thinking about all the possible situations which could arise immediately after the vote; which must not, and cannot, cause a break in the continuous development of our activity towards that fundamental objective. Let us set out from this initial consideration in which is summed up precisely the most important result of the Imola Convention: the Communists will vote for the motion already deliberated on at the convention. There must be no changes introduced or any kind of softening or toning down of the motion. If certain elements end up oscillating between us and the Unitarians, we won't be making any concessions to win their votes. Nothing therefore remains but to examine the two

hypotheses: of our motion gaining a majority, or a minority, of the votes.

In both cases, we must make sure we follow the same directives. The Italian proletarian movement is at a crossroads, but the choice before it is not between the politics of Reggio Emilia or the politics of communism but between our program of action, and that of the Unitarian social-communists. Despite the latter constantly assuring us that we only diverge on minor points, and that we are all chips off the same programmatic block, the truth is that it is through them that the right conducts its politics: a pure reformism if it emerged would be immediately ruled out, whilst the effort of the reformists is applied according to the laws of least resistance, i.e., aiming to get their method to permeate the majority of our plethoric party under the label of intermediate tendencies.

The Unitarians cannot be clearly distinguished from the reformists. The whole of their argumentation during these fervent and extremely animated debates has been virtually identical. Everywhere the Unitarians defend the policies of the right fraction and above all of the General Confederation of Labour. They emphasize that their purging of the party of the extreme right is on the same level as purging it of extreme left elements.

Yet more proof: the Unitarians are in favor of hitting out at the present party leadership for the stance they have taken from Bologna up till now, blaming it for the failure of the revolutionary bids made by the Italian proletariat, and clearing the reformists of all blame. It is almost as though,

politically and historically – leaving aside any personal positions taken by any of its members today – the present leadership wasn't the executor of the Maximalist and Unitarian majority led by Serrati at Bologna. The Unitarians fail to see that the leadership couldn't pursue a purely Maximalist policy precisely because it was impossible to do on the basis of the ambiguous Unitarian positions. They can't see that in such a way they produce arguments against their own theses and against their political direction, and they can't see it because in fact they have more or less taken over all of reformism's polemical positions against maximalism; as is proved too by the fact that they address the entire problem of what the conditions and possibilities of revolution are in the same way as the right-wingers. One part of the Maximalist majority therefore goes beyond Bologna, and the abyss is opening up between them.

There is a clear split between Unitarians and Communists, and discussion between them is sometimes immeasurably violent. This clear split isn't attenuated at all by those subtle differences which may exist amongst the extremists, but which are usefully integrated into the elaboration of a better awareness for all of the best way to go forward, compact and united. In local discussions, therefore, we see Communists and Unitarians lining up into two opposed camps, with the Right maneuvering in the background and not very easily distinguishable from the Unitarians. And it's not that surprising. Just as the bourgeoisie delegates its defense, at critical moments, to reformism, so reformism, when it is losing ground among the masses, is forced to delegate its counter-revolutionary function to the centrism, labelled right-wing communism, which we can see at work in all countries. When attending the party assemblies and conferences the feeling you get today is that it is really the

Communists and Unitarians who are heading for a definitive split; they for whom existing alongside one another has become an impossibility.

The conclusion is this: we must strive to form a communist party which is not influenced by today's kind of politics based on the thesis of party unity, one not led in collaboration with the exponents of today's Unitarian communisms. Lenin in his article explained this to us very well, and it must be our open objective.

I hope that not all Unitarian Communists break away from us in order to form an independent party, or a social-democratic party with the reformists. I think our situation is at least as mature as the situation in Germany. The mass of the Unitary Communists, our home-grown independents, need to be set free, and their leaders put out to grass.

If we end up in the majority, therefore, we will set them free by means of the steady application of our Imola motion, ostracizing the right and the right-leaning, and making sure that all the leading party organs are exclusively under the sway of extremist communism.

But what if we find ourselves in the minority? We could neither put up with a party led by the Unitarians, nor sharing the leadership with them. Our task as a fraction is over. With the present massing of the party's extremist groups on the base of the deliberations in Moscow, of our program, of our motion, and, based on the latter, of the struggle inside the party against both reformism's direct and indirect manifestations, our duty as a party is starting.

We are not going to stay, resuming the hard work of proselytism, if it means the proletariat and ourselves are immobilized until the next congress is called. And neither will we make the criminal blunder of entrusting the leadership of Italian proletarian movement to a confused and imprecise mixture of communist and centrist directives: this would be the triumph of the Unitarian theses, already condemned both in Italy and within the Communist International.

It is therefore strikingly obvious that immediate departure from the party and the congress, as soon as the vote has put us in the minority, is the logical, courageous and tactically appropriate solution. From this there would follow, in line with the norms we have indicated, the setting free of the Center: in fact I think that this important objective of ours is more likely to be achieved under these circumstances.

Let us therefore be prepared for such a resolution. More than any other it corresponds to the directives of the Communist International, it is therefore inappropriate to suppose that it wouldn't meet with the latter's approval; and to invoke this supposition to postpone an act which, once delayed, would undermine its beneficial and positive effects.

I think that the groups in the fraction should confront this issue and say something about it to their congress delegates. However, on this basis our fraction – which is the kernel of a genuine and viable party – cannot and must not under any circumstances be divided. It must make its move, intentionally and deliberately, all together, as one body. I am

certain that this stance will be met with your virtually unanimous approval.

Let us therefore look at the situation squarely in the face and let's take full responsibility for it. What we are conducting is a battle without quarter against all wavering and all misunderstanding.

PART II

**THE UNITARY AND
INVARIANT BODY OF
PARTY THESES**

The Platform of The Communist International

March 6, 1919

The contradictions of the capitalist world system which were hidden deep within it have burst forth with tremendous force in a single huge explosion—the great imperialist World War.

Capitalism tried to overcome its own anarchic nature by organizing production. Instead of numerous enterprise-owners competing with one another, powerful associations of capitalists (syndicates, cartels, trusts) were created; banking capital united with industrial capital; economic life as a whole came under the influence of the finance-capital oligarchy, its power and its organization giving it exclusive dominance. Free competition gave way to monopoly. The individual capitalist was transformed into a member of a capitalist association. Organization took the place of reckless anarchy.

But, while in each individual country the anarchy of the capitalist mode of production gave way to capitalist organization, at the level of the world economy, the anarchy, the competition and the contradictions intensified. The struggle between the largest and most organized exploiting states led, with iron necessity, to the horrors of the imperialist World War. Greed for profit drove world capital to fight for new markets, new spheres of investment, new sources of raw material, and

the cheap labour power of the colonial slaves. The imperialist states which divided the whole world between them, turning many millions of African, Asian, Australian and American proletarians and peasants into beasts of burden, had, sooner or later, to discover the real, anarchic nature of capital in a full-scale conflict. This was how the greatest crime of all—the murderous World War—came about.

Capitalism also tried to overcome the contradictions of its social structure. Bourgeois society is a class society. Capital in the great “civilized” powers wanted to veil its social contradictions. By plundering the colonial peoples, capital was able to buy off its own hired slaves. It created a community of interest between the exploiters and the exploited at the expense of the oppressed colonies—of their yellow, black, and red-skinned populations. In this way the European and American working classes were tied to their imperialist “fatherlands”.

But when war came, this method of bribery, previously securing the patriotism of the working class and its spiritual servitude, had the opposite effect. Peace between classes was finally paid for by physical annihilation, the complete enslavement of the proletariat, terrible repression, impoverishment and physical degeneration and world famine. Civil peace was shattered. The imperialist war turned into a civil war.

A new system has been born. Ours is the epoch of the breakdown of capital, its internal disintegration, the epoch of the Communist revolution of the proletariat.

The imperialist system is collapsing. There is unrest in the colonies and among the small nations which have recently gained independence. This is a time of proletarian uprisings, and of triumphant proletarian revolutions in some countries. The imperialist armies are demoralized, the ruling classes are

completely incapable of continuing to govern. Such is the present state of affairs throughout the world.

Human culture has been destroyed and humanity is threatened with complete annihilation. There is only one force able to save humanity and that is the proletariat. The old capitalist “order” has ceased to function; its further existence is out of the question. The final outcome of the capitalist mode of production is chaos. This chaos can only be overcome by the productive and most numerous class—the working class. The proletariat has to establish real order—Communist order. It must break the rule of capital, make wars impossible, abolish the frontiers between states, transform the whole world into a community where all work for the common good and realize the freedom and brotherhood of peoples.

World capital, on the other hand, is preparing for the final battle. Behind the cover of its “League of Nations” and pacifist chatter, it is making a last attempt to piece together the capitalist system now in the process of spontaneous disintegration and to direct its energies against the steady advance of the proletarian revolution.

The proletariat must reply to this new and gigantic conspiracy of the capitalist classes with the seizure of political power. The workers must use this power as a weapon against their class enemies and as a lever to effect the economic reconstruction of society. The final victory of the world proletariat signifies the beginning of the real history of human liberation.

1. The Conquest of Political Power

The conquest of political power by the proletariat means the destruction of the political power of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeois state apparatus with its capitalist army commanded by the bourgeois-Junker officers, with its police and gendarmerie, its jailers and judges, its priests and civil servants

is the strongest weapon the bourgeoisie possesses. The capture of state power must not mean simply a change of personnel in the ministries, but the elimination of the hostile state apparatus, the concentration of real power in the hands of the proletariat, the disarming of the bourgeoisie, the counter-revolutionary officers and the White Guard, and the arming of the proletariat, the revolutionary soldiers and the Red Workers' Guard; the removal of all bourgeois judges and the organization of a proletarian court; the abolition of the rule of the reactionary civil service and the creation of new proletarian organs of administration. The victory of the proletariat is guaranteed by the disruption of the enemy's power and the organization of proletarian power. The bourgeois state apparatus has to be shattered and a proletarian state machine constructed. Only when the proletariat has finally broken the resistance of the bourgeoisie and is clearly the victor can former opponents be gradually brought under control and made to contribute to the construction of communist society.

2. Democracy and Dictatorship

The proletarian state is, like every other state, an apparatus of repression, but its repression is directed against the enemies of the working class. Its purpose is to break, once and for all, the resistance of the exploiters, who will stop at nothing in their desperate struggle to drown the revolution in rivers of blood. The dictatorship of the proletariat, which gives this class the leading position in society, is, however, a temporary form of government.

As the resistance of the bourgeoisie is overcome, its property expropriated, and its members gradually drawn into working for society, so the proletarian dictatorship disappears, the state withers away and the division of society into classes is ended.

So-called democracy, i.e., bourgeois democracy, is nothing

but the veiled dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The much-vaunted “general will of the people” is no more a reality than “the people” or “the nation”. Classes exist and they have conflicting and incompatible aspirations. But as the bourgeoisie represents an insignificant minority it makes use of this illusion, this imaginary concept, in order to consolidate its rule over the working class. Behind this mask of eloquence it can impose its class will. The proletariat, which forms the vast majority of the population is, on the contrary, completely open about using the class power of its mass organizations and Soviets to eliminate the privileges of the bourgeoisie and guarantee the transition to the classless, communist society.

Bourgeois democracy consists essentially of a purely rhetorical and formal recognition of rights and freedoms, which are in fact inaccessible to the working people—the proletariat and semi-proletarian elements—on account of their lack of material means. The bourgeoisie at the same time has every opportunity to use its material means, its press and organization to cheat and deceive the people. However, the new type of state power, known as the Soviet system, ensures the proletariat the opportunity of guaranteeing its rights and freedom in practice. Soviet power provides the people with the best palaces, houses, printing works, stocks of paper, etc. for their press, and clubs for their meetings. Only such measures make proletarian democracy really possible. It is only on paper that bourgeois democracy and its parliamentary system give the masses the opportunity to participate in the running of the state. In actual fact, the masses and their organizations have absolutely no access to real power and are denied any genuine participation in the state administration. Under the Soviet system it is the mass organizations, and through them the masses themselves, that are running things, inasmuch as the Soviets attract an ever-increasing number of workers into government. This is the only way the entire working population can gradually be drawn

into the work of state administration. The Soviet system is thus based on the mass organizations of the proletariat, on the Soviets themselves, the revolutionary trade unions, the cooperatives, etc.

The separation of legislative and executive power and the absence of the right of recall, characteristic of bourgeois democracy and parliamentarianism, widen the gulf between the masses and the state. The Soviet system, with its right of recall, the combination of legislative and executive power and the consequent position of the Soviets as working bodies, is able to link the masses with the administrative organs. This link is further strengthened by the electoral system which is based on production units rather than artificial territorial constituencies.

Thus the Soviet system makes possible genuine proletarian democracy—a democracy for the proletariat, by the proletariat, and against the bourgeoisie. In this system the industrial proletariat is guaranteed a privileged position as the leading, best organized and politically most mature class, under whose hegemony the level of the semi-proletarian elements and the poorer peasants in the rural areas is gradually raised. The industrial proletariat must use its temporary privileges to free the poorer petty-bourgeois masses in the countryside from the influence of the rural *kulaks* and bourgeoisie, to organize and draw them to the cause of communist construction.

3. The Expropriation of the Bourgeoisie and the Socialization of Production

Given the dissolution of the capitalist system and capitalist labour discipline, and the present state of relations between classes, the reconstruction of the economy on the old basis is impossible. Workers' struggles for wage increases, even where successful, do not result in the anticipated rise in living standards, because the rising prices on all consumer goods cancel out any gains. The living conditions of workers can only

be improved when production is administered by the proletariat instead of the bourgeoisie. In countries where the crisis situation is clearly insurmountable the militant fight for better wages inevitably develops into a bitter struggle which tends to escalate. The continued existence of the capitalist system is consequently impossible. Before the productive forces of the economy can be raised the resistance of the bourgeoisie has to be broken. This must be done as swiftly as possible, since bourgeois rule prolongs the death agony of the old society, creating the danger of the complete destruction of economic life. The proletarian dictatorship must expropriate the big bourgeoisie and landowners and make the means of production and exchange the common property of the proletarian state.

Communism is now rising from the ruins of the capitalist system; this new system is the only way out of the historic crisis that faces humanity. Opportunists who put forward the utopian demand for the reconstruction of the capitalist economic system in order to defer socialization only postpone a resolution of the crisis and create the possibility of utter ruin. Communist revolution is the best—is indeed the only possible—means by which society's truly productive force, the proletariat, and society itself can be saved.

Proletarian dictatorship does not involve any sharing out of the means of production and exchange. On the contrary, the greatest possible centralization of the productive forces and the subordination of all production to a single plan is the aim.

The first steps towards the socialization of the whole economy include: the socialization of the apparatus of those big banks at present controlling production; the seizure of all the economic institutions of the capitalist state by bringing them under the control of proletarian state power; the nationalization of all industries organized in syndicates and trusts and of those branches of industry in which the concentration and centralization of capital makes nationalization technically

possible; and the nationalization of agricultural estates and their transformation into publicly managed agricultural units.

As regards the smaller holdings, the proletariat must gradually amalgamate them in ways appropriate to their size.

It must be emphasized that small properties will not be expropriated and force will not be used against small property-owners who do not exploit hired labour. This layer must be drawn into the sphere of socialist organization gradually. Example and practice will show them the advantage of the new system, which frees the small peasant from the economic yoke of the *kulaks* and the landowners, and the urban petty bourgeoisie from the weight of taxes (the cancellation of state debts is an important measure in this connection) etc.

In the economic sphere, the tasks of the proletarian dictatorship can be carried out only to the extent that the proletariat is able to create centralized organs for the management of production and introduce workers' management. In its attempt to achieve this goal the proletariat will have to make use of those mass organizations which are most closely connected with the production process.

In the sphere of distribution the proletarian dictatorship must replace trading by a fair distribution of products. Measures necessary to this end include the following: the socialization of large commercial enterprises, the transfer of all bourgeois state and municipal organs of distribution to the proletariat, introduction of control over large co-operative associations, whose organizational apparatus will still have a big economic significance in the transitional period, the gradual centralization of all these organs and their transformation into a single system, responsible for the rational distribution of products.

In the sphere of distribution, as in that of production, qualified technicians and specialists are to be used once their

political resistance has been broken and they prove themselves prepared to work with the new system of production instead of capital.

The proletariat has no intention of oppressing these people—on the contrary, it will give them, for the first time, the opportunity to develop their creative energies. Under the proletarian dictatorship the separation of physical and mental labour, characteristic of capitalism, will be superseded by their integration, and in this way labour and science will be unified. Besides the expropriation of factories, mines, estates, etc., the proletariat must also put an end to the exploitation of the population by capitalist landlords, placing the large houses in the hands of the local Soviets, moving workers into the apartments of the bourgeoisie, etc.

In the course of effecting these great changes, Soviet power must steadily build up a huge administrative apparatus and centralize its organization, and, at the same time, draw increasing layers of the working people into direct administrative work.

4. The Road to Victory

The revolutionary epoch demands that the proletariat use methods of struggle capable of focusing its militancy—namely, methods of mass struggle which lead logically to direct confrontation and open battle with the bourgeois state machine. All other methods, including the revolutionary utilization of the bourgeois parliament, must be subordinated to this aim.

An essential condition of victory in this struggle is that the proletariat make a break not only with the outright lackeys of capital and the hangmen of the communist revolution, such as the right-wing social democrats, but also with the “Center” (the Kautskyites), which abandons the proletariat at the critical

moment to compromise with its avowed enemies.

It is vital at the same time to form a bloc with members of the revolutionary workers' movement—certain syndicalist elements, for example—who, in spite of the fact that they did not earlier belong to the socialist party, have more or less accepted the platform of the proletarian dictatorship through Soviets.

There are several factors which make the creation of a truly revolutionary and proletarian Communist International essential: the growth of the revolutionary movement in all countries, the danger that the revolution will be suppressed by an alliance of the capitalist states, the attempts by the parties of the social-traitors to unify their ranks (the establishment of the scab “International” in Berne is an example) and so better serve Wilson’s League of Nations and finally, the absolute necessity of coordinating proletarian action.

Only an International, capable of subordinating so-called national interests to the interests of international revolution, will organize aid on an international scale, for without economic and other kinds of mutual support the proletariat is not in a position to build a new society. Unlike the scab socialist International, the International of the Communist proletariat will support the exploited peoples of the colonies in their struggle with the imperialists, in the knowledge that this action will promote the final collapse of the world imperialist system.

At the outbreak of the World War the capitalist criminals maintained that they were concerned only with the defense of their fatherland. It was not long, however, before German imperialism showed its brutal nature in a series of bloody actions in Russia, Ukraine, and Finland. Now it is the Entente powers who are being exposed, even in the eyes of the most backward layers of the population, as international robbers and murderers of the proletariat. Together with the German

bourgeoisie and the social-patriots, and with hypocritical phrases about peace on their lips, they use their tanks and brutalized, barbaric colonial troops in an attempt to crush the revolution of the European proletariat. The White Terror unleashed by the bourgeois cannibals is indescribable. Its victims in the working class are innumerable. The bravest fighters, including Liebknecht and Luxemburg, have been lost.

The proletariat must defend itself at all costs. The Communist International calls the whole world proletariat to the last fight. We must meet arms with arms, force with force.

Down with the Imperialist Conspiracy of Capital!
Long Live the International Republic of Proletarian
Soviets!

Theses of the Communist Abstentionist Fraction

May 1920

I

1. Communism is the doctrine of the social and historical preconditions for the emancipation of the proletariat.

The elaboration of this doctrine began in the period of the first proletarian movements against the effects of the bourgeois system of production.

It took shape in the Marxist critique of the capitalist economy, the method of historical materialism, the theory of class struggle and the conception of the development which will take place in the historical process of the fall of the capitalist regime and the proletarian revolution.

2. It is on the basis of this doctrine which found its first and fundamental systematic expression in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 that the Communist Party is constituted.

3. In the present historical period, the situation created by bourgeois relations of production, based on the private ownership of the means of production and exchange, on the private appropriation of the products of collective labour and

on free competition in private trade of all products, becomes more and more intolerable for the proletariat.

4. To these economic relations correspond the political institutions characteristic of capitalism: the state based on democratic and parliamentary representation. In a society divided into classes, the state is the organization of the power of the class which is economically privileged. Although the bourgeoisie represents a minority within society, the democratic state represents the system of armed force organized for the purpose of preserving the capitalist relations of production.

5. The struggle of the proletariat against capitalist exploitation assumes a succession of forms going from the violent destruction of machines of the organization on a craft basis to improve working conditions, to the creation of factory councils, and to attempts to take possession of enterprises.

In all these individual actions, the proletariat moves in the direction of the decisive revolutionary struggle against the power of the bourgeois state, which prevents the present relations of production from being broken.

6. This revolutionary struggle is the conflict between the whole proletarian class and the whole bourgeois class. Its instrument is the political class party, the Communist Party, which achieves the conscious organization of the proletarian vanguard aware of the necessity of unifying its action, in space by transcending the interests of particular groups, trades or nationalities and in time by subordinating to the final outcome of the struggle the partial gains and conquests which do not modify the essence of the bourgeois structure.

Consequently, it is only by organizing itself into a political party that the proletariat constitutes itself into a class struggling for its emancipation.

7. The objective of the action of the Communist Party is the violent overthrow of bourgeois rule, the conquest of political power by the proletariat, and the organization of the latter into a ruling class.

8. Parliamentary democracy in which citizens of every class are represented is the form assumed by the organization of the bourgeoisie into a ruling class. The organization of the proletariat into a ruling class will instead be achieved through the dictatorship of the proletariat, that is, through a type of state in which representation (the system of workers' councils) will be decided only by members of the working class (the industrial proletariat and the poor peasants), with the bourgeois being denied the right to vote.

9. After the old bureaucratic, police and military machine has been destroyed, the proletarian state will unify the armed forces of the laboring class into an organization which will have as its task the repression of all counter-revolutionary attempts by the dispossessed class and the execution of measures of intervention into bourgeois relations of production and property.

10. The process of transition from the capitalist economy to a communist one will be extremely complex and its phases will differ according to differing degrees of economic development. The end-point of this process will be the total achievement of the ownership and management of the means of production by the whole unified collectivity, together with the central and rational distribution of productive forces among the different branches of production, and finally the central administration of the allocation of products by the collectivity.

11. When capitalist economic relationships have been entirely eliminated, the abolition of classes will be an accomplished fact and the state, as a political apparatus of power, will be

progressively replaced by the rational, collective administration of economic and social activity.

12. The process of transforming the relations of production will be accompanied by a wide range of social measures stemming from the principle that the collectivity takes charge of the physical and intellectual existence of all its members. In this way, all the birth marks which the proletariat has inherited from the capitalist world will be progressively eliminated and, in the words of the Manifesto, in place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.

13. The pre-condition for the victory of proletarian power in the struggle for the realization of communism are to be found not so much in the rational use of skills in technical tasks, as in the fact that political responsibilities and the control of the state apparatus are confided to those people who will put the general interest and the final triumph of communism before the particular and limited interests of groups.

Precisely because the Communist Party is the organization of proletarians who have achieved this class consciousness, the aim of the party will be, by its propaganda, to win elective posts for its members within the social organization. The dictatorship of the proletariat will therefore be the dictatorship of the Communist Party and the latter will be a party of government in a sense totally opposed to that of the old oligarchies, for communists will assume responsibilities which will demand the maximum of sacrifice and renunciation and they will take upon their shoulders the heaviest burden of the revolutionary task which falls on the proletariat in the difficult labour through which a new world will come to birth.

II

1. The critique which communists continuously make on the basis of the fundamental methods of Marxism, and the propagation of the conclusions to which it leads, have as their objective the extirpation of those influences which the ideological systems of other classes and other parties have over the proletariat.

2. First of all, communism sweeps away idealist conceptions which consider the material of the world of thought as the base, and not the result, of the real relations of human life and of their development. All religious and philosophical formulations of this type must be considered as the ideological baggage of classes whose supremacy which preceded the bourgeois epoch rested on an ecclesiastical, aristocratic or dynastic organization receiving its authority only from a pretended super-human investiture.

One symptom of the decadence of the modern bourgeoisie is the fact that those old ideologies which it had itself destroyed reappear in its midst under new forms. A communism founded on idealist bases would be an unacceptable absurdity.

3. In still more characteristic fashion, communism is the demolition of the conceptions of liberalism and bourgeois democracy by the Marxist critique. The juridical assertion of freedom of thought and political equality of citizens, and the idea that institutions founded on the rights of the majority and on the mechanism of universal electoral representation are a sufficient base for a gradual and indefinite progress of human society, are ideologies which correspond to the regime of private economy and free competition, and to the interests of the capitalist class.

4. One of the illusions of bourgeois democracy is the belief that the living conditions of the masses can be improved through

increasing the education and training provided by the ruling classes and their institutions. In fact it is the opposite: raise the intellectual level of the great masses demands, as a pre-condition, a better standard of material life, something which is incompatible with the bourgeois regime. Moreover through its schools, the bourgeoisie tries to broadcast precisely the ideologies which inhibit the masses from perceiving the present institutions as the very obstacle to their emancipation.

5. Another fundamental tenet of bourgeois democracy lies in the principle of nationality. The formation of states on a national basis corresponds to the class necessities of the bourgeoisie at the moment when it establishes its own power, in that it can thus avail itself of national and patriotic ideologies (which correspond to certain interests common in the initial period of capitalism to people of the same race, language and customs) and use them to delay and mitigate the conflict between the capitalist state and the proletarian masses.

National irredentisms are thus born of essentially bourgeois interests.

The bourgeoisie itself does not hesitate to trample on the principle of nationality as soon as the development of capitalism drives it to the often violent conquest of foreign markets and of the resulting conflict among the great states over the latter. Communism transcends the principle of nationality in that it demonstrates the identical predicament in which the mass of disinherited workers find themselves with respect to employers, whatever may be the nationality of either the former or the latter; it proclaims the international association to be the type of political organization which the proletariat will create when it, in turn, comes to power.

In the perspective of the communist critique, therefore, the recent World War was brought about by capitalist imperialism.

This critique demolishes those various interpretations which take up the viewpoint of one or another bourgeois state and try to present the war as a vindication of the national rights of certain peoples or as a struggle of democratically more advanced states against those organized on pre-bourgeois forms, or finally, as a supposed necessity of self-defense against enemy aggression.

6. Communism is likewise opposed to the conceptions of bourgeois pacifism and to Wilsonian illusions on the possibility of a world association of states, based on disarmament and arbitration and having as its precondition the Utopia of a sub-division of state units by nationality. For communists, war will become impossible and national questions will be solved only when the capitalist regime has been replaced by the International Communist Republic.

7. In a third area, communism presents itself as the transcendence of the systems of utopian socialism which seek to eliminate the faults of social organization by instituting complete plans for a new organization of society whose possibility of realization was not put in relation to the real development of history.

8. The proletariat's elaboration of its own interpretation of society and history to guide its action against the social relations of the capitalist world, continuously gives rise to a multitude of schools or currents, influenced to a greater or lesser degree by the very immaturity of the conditions of struggle and by all the various bourgeois prejudices. From all this arise the errors and setbacks in proletarian action. But it is due to this material of experience that the communist movement succeeds in defining with ever greater clarity the central features of its doctrine and its tactics, differentiating itself clearly from all the other currents active within the

proletariat itself and openly combating them.

9. The formation of producers' cooperatives, in which the capital belongs to the workers who work for them, cannot be a path towards the suppression of the capitalist system. This is because the acquisition of raw materials and the distribution of products are affected according to the laws of private economy and consequently, credit, and therefore private capital ultimately exercises control over the collective capital of the cooperative itself.

10. Communists cannot consider economic trade or craft organizations to be sufficient for the struggle for the proletarian revolution or as the basic organs of the communist economy.

The organization of the class through trade unions serves to neutralize competition between workers of the same trade and prevents wages falling to the lowest level. However it cannot lead to the elimination of capitalist profit, still less to the unification of the workers of all trades against the privilege of bourgeois power. Further, the simple transfer of the ownership of the enterprises from the private employer to the workers' union could not achieve the basic economic features of communism, for the latter necessitates the transfer of ownership to the whole proletarian collectivity since this is the only way to eliminate the characteristics of the private economy in the appropriation and distribution of products.

Communists consider the union as the site of an initial proletarian experience which permits the workers to go further towards the concept and the practice of political struggle, which has as its organ the class party.

11. In general, it is an error to believe that the revolution is a question of forms of organizations which proletarians group into according to their position and interests within the

framework of the capitalist system of production.

It is not a modification of the structure of economic organizations, then, which can provide the proletariat with an effective instrument for its emancipation.

Factory unions and factory councils emerge as organs for the defense of the interests of the proletarians of different enterprises at the point when it begins to appear possible that capitalist despotism in the management of the enterprises could be limited. But obtaining the right of these organizations to supervise (to monitor) production to a more or less large degree is not incompatible with the capitalist system and could even be used by it as a means to preserve its domination.

Even the transfer of factory management to factory councils would not mean (any more than in the case of the unions) the advent of the communist system. According to the true communist conception, workers' supervision of production will not be achieved until after the overthrow of the bourgeois power, and it will be a supervision over the running of every enterprise exercised by the whole proletariat unified in the state of workers' councils. Communist management of production will be the direction of every branch and every productive unit by rational collective organs which will represent the interests of all workers united in the work of building communism.

12. Capitalist relations of production cannot be modified by the intervention of the organs of bourgeois power.

This is why the transfer of private enterprises to the state or to the local government does not correspond in the slightest to the communist conception. Such a transfer is invariably accompanied by the payment of the capital value of the enterprise to the former owners who thus fully retain their right to exploit. The enterprises themselves continue to function as private enterprises within the framework of the capitalist

economy, and they often become convenient instruments in the work of class preservation and defense undertaken by the bourgeois state.

13. The idea that capitalist exploitation of the proletariat can be gradually diminished and then eliminated by the legislative and reformist action of present political institutions, be it elicited by representatives of the proletarian party inside those institutions or even by mass agitation, leads only to complicity in the defense of the privileges of the bourgeoisie. The latter will on occasion pretend to give up a minimum of its privileges to try to appease the anger of the masses and to divert their revolutionary attempts against the bases of the capitalist regime.

14. The conquest of political power by the proletariat, even if such an objective is considered as the final, total aim of its action, cannot be achieved by winning a majority within bourgeois elective organs.

Thanks to the executive organs of the state, which are the direct agents of the bourgeoisie, the latter very easily ensures a majority within the elective organs for its delegates or for those elements which fall under its influence or into its game because they want to individually or collectively win elective posts. Moreover, participation in such institutions requires the agreement to respect the juridical and [political bases of the bourgeois constitution. This agreement is merely formal but nevertheless it is sufficient to free the bourgeoisie from even the slightest embarrassment of an accusation of formal illegality at the point when it will logically resort to its real means of armed defense rather than abandon power and permit the proletariat to smash its bureaucratic and military machine of domination.

15. To recognize the necessity of insurrectionary struggle for the seizure of power, while at the same time proposing that the

proletariat exercise its power by conceding representation to the bourgeoisie in new political organizations (constituent assemblies or combinations of these with the system of workers' councils) is an unacceptable programme and is opposed to the central communist demand, the dictatorship of the proletariat. The process of expropriating the bourgeoisie would be immediately compromised if this class retained a means to influence somehow the formation of the representative organs of the expropriating proletarian state. This would permit the bourgeoisie to use the influence which it will inevitably retain because of its experience and its intellectual and technical training, in order to deploy its political activity towards the reestablishment of its power in a counter-revolution. The same consequences would result if the slightest democratic prejudice was allowed to survive in regard to an equality of treatment which is supposedly to be granted to the bourgeois by the proletarian power in such matters as freedom of association, propaganda and the press.

16. The programme which proposes an organ of political representation based on delegates from the various trades and professions of all the social classes is not even in form a road leading to the system of workers' councils, since the latter is characterized by the exclusion of the bourgeois from electoral rights and its central organization is not chosen on the basis of trade but by territorial constituency. The form of representation in question is rather an inferior stage even in comparison with present parliamentary democracy.

17. Anarchism is profoundly opposed to the ideas of communism. It aims at the immediate installation of a society without a state and political system and advocates, for the economy of the future, the autonomous functioning of units of production, rejecting any concept of a central organization and regulation of human activities in production and distribution. Such a conception is close to that of the bourgeois private

economy and remains alien to the fundamental essence of communism. Moreover the immediate elimination of the state as a machinery of political power would be equivalent to a failure to offer resistance to the counter-revolution, unless one pre-supposes that classes have been immediately abolished, that is to say that there has been the so-called revolutionary expropriation simultaneous with the insurrection against bourgeois power.

Not the slightest possibility of this exists, given the complexity of the proletarian tasks in the substitution of the communist economy for the present one, and given the necessity that such a process be directed by a central organization representing the general interest of the proletariat and subordinating to this interest all the local and particular interests which act as the principal conservative force within capitalism.

III

1. The communist doctrine and economic determinism do not see Communists as passive spectators of historical destiny but on the contrary as indefatigable fighters. Struggle and action, however, would be ineffective if divorced from the lessons of doctrine and of experience seen in the light of the communist critique.
2. The revolutionary work of Communists is based on the organization into a party of those proletarians who unite a consciousness of communist principles with the decision to devote all their energy to the cause of the revolution. The party, organized internationally, functions on the basis of discipline towards the decisions of the majority and towards the decisions of the central organs chosen by that majority to lead the movement.
3. Propaganda and proselytism in which the party accepts new members only on the basis of the most sure guarantees are fundamental activities of the party. Although it bases the success of its action on the propagation of its principles and final objectives and although it struggles in the interest of the immense majority of

society, the communist movement does not make the approval of the majority a precondition for its action. The criterion which determines the occasion to launch a revolutionary action is the objective evaluation of our own forces and those of our enemies, taking into consideration all the complex factors of which the numerical element is not the sole or even the most important determinant.

4. The Communist Party develops an intense work of study and political critique intimately linked to the exigencies of action and to historical experience, and it strives to organize this work on an international basis. Externally, in all circumstances and with the means at its disposal, it works to diffuse the lessons of its own critical experience and to refute enemy schools and parties. Above all, the party conducts its activity and propaganda among the proletarian masses and works to polarize them around it, particularly at those times when they are set in motion in reaction against the conditions capitalism imposes upon them and especially within organizations formed by proletarians to defend their immediate interests.

5. Communists therefore penetrate proletarian cooperatives, unions, factory councils, and form groups of Communist workers within them. They strive to win a majority and posts of leadership so that the mass of proletarians mobilized by these associations subordinate their action to the highest political and revolutionary ends of the struggle for communism.

6. The Communist Party, on the other hand, remains outside all institutions and associations in which bourgeois and workers participate in common, or worse still, which are led and sponsored by members of the bourgeoisie (societies of mutual assistance, charities, cultural schools, popular universities, Freemasons' Lodges, etc.). It combats the action and influence of these institutions and associations and tries to divert proletarians from them.

7. Participation in elections to the representative organs of bourgeois democracy and participation in parliamentary activity, while always presenting a continuous danger of deviation, may be utilized for propaganda and for schooling the movement during the period in which there does not yet exist the possibility of overthrowing

bourgeois rule and in which, as a consequence, the party's task is restricted to criticism and opposition. In the present period, which began with the end of the World War, with the first communist revolutions and the creation of the Third International, communists pose, as the direct objective of the political action of the proletariat in every country, the revolutionary conquest of power, to which end all the energy and all the preparatory work of the party must be devoted.

In this period, it is inadmissible to participate in these organs which function as a powerful defensive instrument of the bourgeoisie and which are designed to operate even within the ranks of the proletariat. It is precisely in opposition to these organs, to their structure as to their function, that Communists call for the system of workers' councils and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Because of the great importance which electoral activity assumes in practice, it is not possible to reconcile this activity with the assertion that it is not the means of achieving the principal objective of the party's action, which is the conquest of power. It also is not possible to prevent it from absorbing all the activity of the movement and from diverting it from revolutionary preparation.

8. The electoral conquest of local governmental bodies entails the same inconveniences as parliamentarism but to an even greater degree. It cannot be accepted as a means of action against bourgeois power for two reasons:

- 1) these local bodies have no real power but are subjected to the state machine, and 2) although the assertion of the principle of local autonomy can cause some embarrassment for the ruling bourgeoisie, such a method would have the result of providing it with a base of operations in its struggle against the establishment of proletarian power and is contrary to the communist principle of centralized action.

9. In the revolutionary period, all the efforts of the Communists concentrate on enabling the action of the masses to attain a maximum of intensity and efficiency. Communists combine propaganda and revolutionary preparation with the organization of large and frequent proletarian demonstrations above all in the major

centers and strive to use economic movements in order to organize demonstrations of a political character in which the proletariat reaffirms and strengthens its will to overthrow the bourgeois power.

10. The Communist Party carries its propaganda into the ranks of the bourgeois army. Communist anti-militarism is not based on a sterile humanitarianism. Its aim instead is to convince proletarians that the bourgeoisie arms them to defend its own interests and to use their force against the cause of the proletariat.

11. The Communist Party trains itself to act as the general staff of the proletariat in the revolutionary war. For this reason it prepares and organizes its own network of intelligence and communication. Above all, it supports and organizes the arming of the proletariat.

12. The Communist Party concludes no agreements or alliances with other political movements which share with it a specific immediate objective, but diverge from it in their programme of further action. It must equally refuse the alliance otherwise known as the "united front" with all working-class tendencies which accept insurrectionary action against the bourgeoisie but diverge from the communist programme in the development of subsequent action.

Communists have no reason to consider the growth of forces tending to overthrow bourgeois power as a favorable condition when the forces working for the constitution of proletarian power on communist directives remain insufficient, since only a communist leadership can assure its success.

13. The soviets or councils of workers, peasants and soldiers, constitute the organs of proletarian power and can exercise their true function only after the overthrow of bourgeois rule.

Soviets are not in themselves organs of revolutionary struggle. They become revolutionary when the Communist Party wins a majority within them.

Workers' councils can also arise before the revolution, in a period of acute crisis in which the state power is seriously threatened.

In a revolutionary situation, it may be necessary for the party to take

the initiative in forming soviets, but this cannot be a means of precipitating such a situation. If the power of the bourgeoisie is strengthened, the survival of councils can present a serious danger to the revolutionary struggle the danger of a conciliation and a combination of proletarian organs with the organs of bourgeois democracy.

14. What distinguishes Communists is not that, in every situation and in every episode of the class struggle, they call for the immediate mobilization of all proletarian forces for a general insurrection. What distinguishes them is that they clearly say that the phase of insurrection is an inevitable outcome of the struggle, and that they prepare the proletariat to face it in conditions favorable to the success and the further development of the revolution.

Depending on the situation which the party can better assess than the rest of the proletariat the party can therefore find itself confronted with the necessity to act in order to hasten or to delay the moment of the decisive battle. In any event, the specific task of the party is to fight against those who, desiring to hasten revolutionary action at any price, could drive the proletariat into disaster, and against the opportunists who exploit every occasion in which decisive action is undesirable in order to block the revolutionary movement by diverting the action of the masses towards other objectives. The Communist Party, on the contrary, must lead the action of the masses always further in an effective preparation for the final and inevitable armed struggle against the defensive forces of bourgeois rule.

Preamble to the Statutes

Third International, Second Congress, June–August 1920

In London, in 1864, was established the first International Association of Workers, later known as the First International. The Statutes of the International Association of Workers read as follows:

That the emancipation of the working class must be carried out by the working class itself.

That the struggle for the emancipation of the working class does not imply a struggle for class privileges and monopolies, but for equal rights and equal obligations and the abolition of all class domination.

That the economic subjection of the workers to the monopolists of the means of production, the sources of life, is the cause of servitude in all its forms, the cause of all social misery, mental degradation and political dependence.

That, consequently, the economic emancipation of the working class is the great aim to which every political movement must be subordinated.

That all endeavors directed to this great aim have hitherto failed because of the lack of solidarity between the various branches of industry in each country and because of the absence of a fraternal bond of unity between the working classes of the different

countries.

That the emancipation of labour is neither a local nor a national problem, but one of a social character embracing every civilized country, and the solution of which depends on the theoretical and practical cooperation of the most progressive countries.

That the present revival of the workers' movement in the industrial countries of Europe, while awakening new hopes, contains a solemn warning against a relapse into old errors, and calls for an immediate union of the hitherto disconnected movement.

The Second International, which was established in Paris in 1889, undertook to continue the work of the First International. At the outbreak of the world slaughter in 1914 the Second International perished—undermined by opportunism and betrayed by its leaders who rallied to the side of the bourgeoisie.

The Third (Communist) International, established in March 1919, in Moscow, the capital city of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, solemnly proclaims to the whole world that it takes upon itself the task of continuing and completing the great cause begun by the First International Association of Workers.

The Third (Communist) International was formed at a moment when the imperialist slaughter of 1914–1918, in which the imperialist bourgeoisie of the various countries sacrificed twenty million men, had come to an end.

Remember the imperialist war! This is the first appeal of the Communist International to every toiler wherever he may live and whatever language he may speak. Remember that owing to the existence of the capitalist system a small group of imperialists had the opportunity during four long years of compelling the workers of various countries to cut each other's throats. Remember that this imperialist war had reduced

Europe and the whole world to a state of extreme destitution and starvation. Remember that unless the capitalist system is overthrown a repetition of this criminal war is not only possible but is inevitable.

The Communist International sets itself the aim of fighting with all means, also with arms in hand, for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie and the creation of an international soviet republic as a transition to the complete abolition of the state. The Communist International considers the dictatorship of the proletariat an essential means for the liberation of humanity from the horrors of capitalism; and regards the Soviet form of government as the historically necessary form of this dictatorship.

The imperialist war linked the fate of the workers of each country particularly closely with the fate of the workers of every other country; it emphasized once again what was pointed out in the Statutes of the First International: that the emancipation of labour is neither a local nor a national problem, but one of a social and international character.

The Communist International breaks once and for all with the traditions of the Second International which, in reality, only recognized the white race. The task of the Communist International is to emancipate the workers of the whole world. In its ranks are fraternally united men of all colors—white, yellow and black—the toilers of the entire world.

The Communist International fully and unreservedly upholds the gains of the great proletarian revolution in Russia, the first victorious socialist revolution in the world's history, and calls upon all workers to follow the same road. The Communist International makes it its duty to support, by all the power at its disposal, every Soviet Republic wherever it may be formed.

The Communist International is aware that for the purpose of the speedy achievement of victory, the international association

of the workers which is struggling for the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of communism, must possess a firm and centralized organization.

To all intents and purposes the Communist International should represent a single universal Communist Party, of which the parties operating in the different countries form individual sections. The organization of the Communist International is directed towards securing for the workers of every country the possibility, at any given moment, of obtaining the maximum of aid from the organized workers of the other countries.

Conditions of Admission to the Communist International

Third (Communist) International, Second Congress, July 30, 1920

Foreword

The First Congress of the Communist International did not draw up precise conditions for admission to the Communist International. Until the time the First Congress was convened there were in most countries only communist trends and groups. The Second Congress of the Communist International meets under different conditions. At the present time there are in most countries not only communist trends and tendencies, but communist parties and organizations.

Now parties and groups which have not in fact become communist often turn to the Communist International in the hope of joining it after recently belonging to the Second International. The Second International has been finally smashed to pieces. The parties in between and the “Center” groups, which realize the hopelessness of the Second International, now try to lean upon the Communist International, which is becoming more and more powerful. In the process, however, they hope to retain an ‘autonomy’ that will permit them to continue their previous opportunist or “centrist” policies. To a certain extent the Communist International is becoming fashionable.

The desire of certain leading “centrist” groups to join the Communist International is an indirect confirmation of the fact that

the Communist International has gained the sympathy of the overwhelming majority of class-conscious workers all over the world and that it is becoming a force that grows more powerful each day.

The Communist International is threatened by the danger of being watered down by elements characterized by vacillation and half measures, forces which have not yet finally discarded the ideology of the Second International.

Moreover, to this very day there remains in some big parties (Italy, Sweden, Norway, Yugoslavia, among others), whose majorities have adopted the standpoint of communism, a significant reformist and social-pacifist wing which is only waiting for the opportunity to raise its head again, to start active sabotage of the proletarian revolution and thus to help the bourgeoisie and the Second International.

Not a single Communist may forget the lessons of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The fusion of the Hungarian Communists with the so-called "left" social democrats cost the Hungarian proletariat dear.

Consequently, the Second Congress of the Communist International considers it necessary to establish quite precisely the conditions for the admittance of new parties and to point out to those parties that have been admitted to the Communist International the duties incumbent on them.

The Second Congress of the Communist International lays down the following conditions of membership of the Communist International:

1. All propaganda and agitation must bear a really communist character and correspond to the programme and decisions of the Communist International. All the party's press organs must be run by reliable Communists who have proved their devotion to the cause of the proletariat. The dictatorship of the proletariat must not be treated simply as a current formula learnt off by heart. Propaganda for it must be carried out in such a way that its necessity is comprehensible to every simple worker, every woman worker, every soldier and peasant from the facts of their daily lives, which must be observed by

our press and used day by day.

The periodical and other press and all the party's publishing institutions must be subordinated to the party leadership, regardless of whether at any given moment, the party as a whole is legal or illegal. The publishing houses must not be allowed to abuse their independence and pursue policies that do not entirely correspond to the policies of the party.

In the columns of the press, at public meetings, in the trades unions, in the co-operatives—wherever the members of the Communist International can gain admittance—it is necessary to brand not only the bourgeoisie but also its helpers, the reformists of every shade, systematically and pitilessly.

2. Every organization that wishes to affiliate to the Communist International must regularly and methodically remove reformists and centrists from every responsible post in the labour movement (party organizations, editorial boards, trades unions, parliamentary factions, co-operatives, local government) and replace them with tested Communists, without worrying unduly about the fact that, particularly at first, ordinary workers from the masses will be replacing “experienced” opportunists.

3. In almost every country in Europe and America the class struggle is entering the phase of civil war. Under such conditions the Communists can place no trust in bourgeois legality. They have the obligation of setting up a parallel organizational apparatus which, at the decisive moment, can assist the party to do its duty to the revolution. In every country where a state of siege or emergency laws deprive the Communists of the opportunity of carrying on all their work legally, it is absolutely necessary to combine legal and illegal activity.

4. The duty of propagating communist ideas includes the special obligation of forceful and systematic propaganda in the army. Where this agitation is interrupted by emergency laws it must be continued illegally. Refusal to carry out such work would be tantamount to a betrayal of revolutionary duty and would be incompatible with

membership of the Communist International.

5. Systematic and methodical agitation is necessary in the countryside. The working class will not be able to win if it does not have the backing of the rural proletariat and at least a part of the poorest peasants, and if it does not secure the neutrality of at least a part of the rest of the rural population through its policies. Communist work in the countryside is taking on enormous importance at the moment. It must be carried out principally with the help of revolutionary Communist workers of the town and country who have connections with the countryside. To refuse to carry this work out, or to entrust it to unreliable, semi-reformist hands, is tantamount to renouncing the proletarian revolution.

6. Every party that wishes to belong to the Communist International has the obligation to unmask not only open social-patriotism but also the insincerity and hypocrisy of social-pacifism, to show the workers systematically that, without the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, no international court of arbitration, no agreement on the limitation of armaments, no “democratic” reorganization of the League of Nations will be able to prevent new imperialist wars.

7. The parties that wish to belong to the Communist International have the obligation of recognizing the necessity of a complete break with reformism and “centrist” politics and of spreading this break among the widest possible circles of their party members. Consistent communist politics are impossible without this.

The Communist International unconditionally and categorically demands the carrying out of this break in the shortest possible time. The Communist International cannot tolerate a situation where notorious opportunists as represented by Turati, Modigliani, Kautsky, Hilferding, Hillquit, Longuet, MacDonald, etc., have the right to pass as members of the Communist International. This could only lead to the Communist International becoming something very similar to the wreck of the Second International.

8. A particularly marked and clear attitude on the question of the colonies and oppressed nations is necessary on the part of the communist parties of those countries where bourgeoisies are in

possession of colonies and oppress other nations. Every party that wishes to belong to the Communist International has the obligation of exposing the dodges of its “own” imperialists in the colonies, of supporting every liberation movement in the colonies not only in words but in deeds, of demanding that their imperialist compatriots should be thrown out of the colonies, of cultivating in the hearts of the workers in their own country a truly fraternal relationship to the working population in the colonies and to the oppressed nations, and of carrying out systematic propaganda among their own country’s troops against any oppression of colonial peoples.

9. Every party that wishes to belong to the Communist International must systematically and persistently develop communist activities within the trade unions, workers’ and works councils, the consumer co-operatives and other mass workers’ organizations. Within these organizations it is necessary to organize Communist cells the aim of which is to win the trades unions etc. for the cause of communism by incessant and persistent work. In their daily work the cells have the obligation to expose everywhere the treachery of the social patriots and the vacillations of the “centrists”. The Communist cells must be completely subordinated to the party as a whole.

10. Every party belonging to the Communist International has the obligation to wage a stubborn struggle against the Amsterdam “International” of scab trade union organizations. It must expound as forcefully as possible among trade unionists the idea of the necessity of the break with the scab Amsterdam International. It must support the International Association of Red Trades Unions affiliated to the Communist International, at present in the process of formation, with every means at its disposal.

11. Parties that wish to belong to the Communist International have the obligation to subject the personal composition of their parliamentary factions to review, to remove all unreliable elements from them and to subordinate these factions to the party leadership, not only in words but also in deeds, by calling on every individual Communist member of parliament to subordinate the whole of his activity to the interests of really revolutionary propaganda and

agitation.

12. The parties belonging to the Communist International must be built on the basis of the principle of democratic centralism. In the present epoch of acute civil war the Communist Party will only be able to fulfil its duty if it is organized in as centralist a manner as possible, if iron discipline reigns within it and if the party center, sustained by the confidence of the party membership, is endowed with the fullest rights and authority and the most far-reaching powers.

13. The communist parties of those countries in which the Communists can carry out their work legally must from time to time undertake purges (re-registration) of the membership of their party organizations in order to cleanse the party systematically of the petty-bourgeois elements within it.

14. Every party that wishes to belong to the Communist International has the obligation to give unconditional support to every Soviet republic in its struggle against the forces of counter-revolution. The communist parties must carry out clear propaganda to prevent the transport of war material to the enemies of the Soviet republics. They must also carry out legal or illegal propaganda, etc., with every means at their disposal among troops sent to stifle workers' republics.

15. Parties that have still retained their old social-democratic programmes have the obligation of changing those programmes as quickly as possible and working out a new communist programme corresponding to the particular conditions in the country and in accordance with the decisions of the Communist International.

As a rule the programme of every party belonging to the Communist International must be ratified by a regular congress of the Communist International or by the Executive Committee. Should the Executive Committee of the Communist International reject a party's programme, the party in question has the right of appeal to the Congress of the Communist International.

16. All decisions of the congresses of the Communist International

and decisions of its Executive Committee are binding on all parties belonging to the Communist International. The Communist International, acting under conditions of the most acute civil war, must be built in a far more centralist manner than was the case with the Second International. In the process the Communist International and its Executive Committee must, of course, in the whole of its activity, take into account the differing conditions under which the individual Parties have to fight and work, and only take generally binding decisions in cases where such decisions are possible.

17. In this connection all those parties that wish to belong to the Communist International must change their names. Every party that wishes to belong to the Communist International must bear the name Communist Party of this or that country (Section of the Communist International). The question of the name is not formal, but a highly political question of great importance. The Communist International has declared war on the whole bourgeois world and on all scab social democratic parties. The difference between the communist parties and the old official “social-democratic” or “socialist” parties that have betrayed the banner of the working class must be clear to every simple toiler.

18. All the leading press of the Parties in every country have the duty of printing all the important official documents of the Executive Committee of the Communist International.

19. All Parties that belong to the Communist International or have submitted an application for membership have the duty of calling a special congress as soon as possible, and in no case later than four months after the Second Congress of the Communist International, in order to check all these conditions. In this connection all party centers must see that the decisions of the Second Congress are known to all their local organizations.

20. Those parties that now wish to enter the Communist International but have not yet radically altered their previous tactics must, before they join the Communist International, see to it that no less than two thirds of the Central Committee and of all their most

important central institutions consist of comrades who even before the Second Congress of the Communist International spoke out unambiguously in public in favor of the entry of the party into the Communist International. Exceptions may be permitted with the agreement of the Executive Committee of the Communist International. The Executive Committee of the Communist International also has the right to make exceptions in relation to the representatives of the centrist tendency mentioned in paragraph seven.

21. Those party members who fundamentally reject the conditions and Theses laid down by the Communist International are to be expelled from the party. The same will apply particularly to delegates to the special party congress.

Theses on The Role of The Communist Party in The Proletarian Revolution

Third (Communist) International, Second Congress, July 24, 1920

The international proletariat faces decisive struggles. The epoch in which we now live is the epoch of open civil war. The decisive hour is approaching. In almost every country in which there is a workers' movement of any importance, the working class faces a series of bitter struggles, arms in hand. More than ever before the working class requires strict organization. It must prepare itself untiringly for this struggle now, without wasting a single hour of valuable time.

If the working class had possessed a disciplined communist party, even a small one, at the time of the Paris Commune of 1871, the first heroic uprising of the French proletariat would have been much more powerful and many mistakes and weaknesses could have been avoided. The struggles which the proletariat is now facing in a different historical situation will be far more fateful than those of 1871.

The Second Congress of the Communist International therefore draws the attention of the revolutionary working class

throughout the world to the following:

1. The Communist Party is a part [in French edition: fraction] of the working class, and moreover its most advanced, most class-conscious and therefore its most revolutionary part. The Communist Party is created by the method of the natural selection of the best, the most class-conscious, the most self-sacrificing, and the most far-sighted workers. The Communist Party has no interests that differ from the interests of the whole working class. The Communist Party differs from the whole working class because it has an overall view of the whole historical road of the working class in its totality and because at every turn in this road it strives to defend not just the interests of a single group or a single trade, but the interests of the working class in its totality. The Communist Party is the organizational and political lever with whose help the advanced part of the working class can steer the whole mass of the proletariat and the semi-proletariat on to the correct road.

2. Until the time when state power has been conquered by the proletariat, and the proletariat has established its rule once and for all and secured it from bourgeois restoration, until that time the Communist Party will only have the minority of the working class organized in its ranks. Until the seizure of power and during the period of transition the Communist Party is able, under favorable conditions, to exercise undivided mental and political influence over all the proletarian and half-proletarian layers of the population, but is not able to unite them organizationally in its ranks. Only after the proletarian dictatorship has wrested out of the hands of the bourgeoisie such powerful media of influence as the press, education, parliament, the church, the administrative machine and so on, only after the defeat of the bourgeois order has become clear for all to see, only then will all or almost all workers start to enter the ranks of the Communist Party.

3. The concept of the party and that of the class must be kept strictly separate. The members of the “Christian” and liberal trades unions of Germany, England and other countries are undoubtedly part of the working class. The more or less significant sections of workers who still stand behind Scheidemann, Gompers and company are undoubtedly part of the working class. It is very possible that, under certain historical circumstances, the working class can become interspersed with numerous reactionary layers. The task of communism does not lie in accommodating these backward parts of the working class, but in raising the whole of the working class to the level of the communist vanguard. The confusion of these two concepts—party and class—can lead to the greatest mistakes and confusion.

Thus it is clear, for example, that during the imperialist war, despite the moods and prejudices of a certain section of the working class, the workers’ party had to oppose these moods and prejudices at any cost and represent the historical interests of the working class, which demanded that the proletarian party declared war on war.

Thus, at the beginning of the imperialist war in 1914, the parties of the social traitors in every country, in supporting their “own” bourgeoisie, could point to corresponding expressions of the will of the working class. But in the process they forgot that, even if that was the case, the duty of the proletarian party in such a state of affairs would have to be to oppose the mood of the majority and to represent, despite everything, the historical interests of the proletariat. In the same way at the beginning of the twentieth century the Russian Mensheviks of the day (the so-called Economists) rejected the open political struggle against Tsarism with the argument that the working class as a whole had not yet ripened to an understanding of the

political struggle.

And in the same way the right-wing Independents in Germany in all their half-measures point to the fact that 'the masses wish it', without understanding that the party is there for the purpose of going in advance of the masses and showing them the way.

4. The Communist International remains firmly convinced that the collapse of the old "social democratic" parties of the Second International can under no circumstances be portrayed as the collapse of the proletarian party type of organization in general. The epoch of the direct struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat brings a new party of the proletariat into the world: The Communist Party.

5. The Communist International rejects most decisively the view that the proletariat can carry out its revolution without having an independent political party. Every class struggle is a political struggle. The aim of this struggle, which inevitably turns into civil war, is the conquest of political power. Political power can only be seized, organized and led by a political party, and in no other way. Only when the proletariat has as a leader an organized and tested party with well-marked aims and with a tangible, worked-out programme for the next measures to be taken not only at home but also in foreign policy, will the conquest of political power not appear as an accidental episode but serve as the starting point for the permanent communist construction of society by the proletariat.

The same class struggle demands in the same way the centralization and common leadership of the different forms of the proletarian movement (trades unions, co-operatives, works committees, cultural work, elections and so forth).

Only a political party can be such a unifying and leading center. To renounce the creation and strengthening of such a party, to renounce subordinating oneself to it, is to renounce unity in the

leadership of the individual battle units of the proletariat who are advancing on the different battlefields. The class struggle of the proletariat demands a concerted agitation that illuminates the different stages of the struggle from a uniform point of view and at every given moment directs the attention of the proletariat towards specific tasks common to the whole class. That cannot be done without a centralized political apparatus, that is to say outside of a political party.

The propaganda carried out by the revolutionary syndicalists and the Industrial Workers of the World against the necessity of such a party therefore contributes and has contributed objectively only to the support of the bourgeoisie and the counterrevolutionary “social democrats”. In their propaganda against a Communist Party, which they wish to replace exclusively by trades unions or some formless ‘general’ workers’ unions, the syndicalists and industrialists rub shoulders with open opportunists.

For several years after the defeat of the 1905 revolution the Russian Mensheviks preached the idea of the so-called Workers’ Congress, which was supposed to replace the revolutionary party of the working class. The “yellow Labourites” of every kind in Britain and America preach to the workers the creation of formless workers’ organizations or vague, merely parliamentary associations instead of the political party and at the same time put completely bourgeois policies into deeds. The revolutionary syndicalists and industrialists want to fight against the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, but do not know how. They do not see that without an independent political party the working class is a rump without a head.

Revolutionary syndicalism and industrialism mean a step forward only in comparison with the old, musty, counter-revolutionary ideology of the Second International. In comparison however with revolutionary Marxism, that is to say with communism, syndicalism and industrialism mean a step

backwards. The declaration by the “left” Communist Workers’ Party of Germany (KAPD) at its founding conference in April, that it is founding a party, but “not a party in the traditional sense” means an ideological capitulation to those views of syndicalism and industrialism that are reactionary.

With the general strike alone, with the tactic of folded arms, the working class cannot achieve victory over the bourgeoisie. The proletariat must take on the armed uprising. Whoever understands that will also have to grasp that an organized political party is necessary and that formless workers’ unions are not sufficient.

The revolutionary syndicalists often talk about the great role of the determined revolutionary minority. Well, a truly determined minority of the working class, a minority that is communist, that wishes to act, that has a programme and wishes to organize the struggle of the masses, is precisely the Communist Party.

6. The most important task of a truly Communist Party consists in always remaining in the closest contact with the broadest layers of the proletariat.

In order to achieve this, the Communists can and should work in those associations that are non-party but nonetheless embrace big layers of the proletariat, such as for example the organizations of war invalids in the various countries, the ‘Hands off Russia’ Committees in Britain, proletarian tenants’ associations, etc. The Russian example of conferences of so-called “non-party” workers and peasants is particularly important. Such conferences are organized in almost every town, in every workers’ district and also in the countryside. The broadest masses even of the backward workers take part in the elections to these conferences. The most important current questions are placed on the agenda: the food question, the housing question, military questions, education, the political tasks of the day, etc. The Communists influence these

“non-party conferences most zealously—and with great success for the party.

The Communists think that one of their most important tasks is the work of organization and education within these broad workers’ organizations. But precisely in order to organize this work successfully, to prevent the enemies of the revolutionary proletariat from taking over these broad workers’ movements, the advanced communist workers must form their own, independent, closed Communist Party, which always proceeds in an organized fashion and is able to perceive the general interests of communism at every turn of events and in all forms of the movement.

7. Communists by no means avoid non-party mass organizations of workers. Under certain conditions they do not hold back from participating in them and using them even if they are of an emphatically reactionary character (yellow unions, Christian unions, etc.). The Communist Party constantly carries out its propaganda within these organizations and tirelessly convinces the workers that the idea of not joining a party on principle is consciously encouraged among the workers by the bourgeoisie and their assistants to divert the proletarians from the organized struggle for socialism.

8. The old “classical” division of the workers’ movement into three forms—the party, the trades unions and the co-operatives—has obviously been overtaken. The proletarian revolution in Russia has created the basic form of the proletarian dictatorship—the soviets. The new division that we are everywhere encountering is (1) the party, (2) the soviet, (3) the productive association (the trade union).

But the workers’ councils too, as well as the revolutionary production associations, must constantly and systematically be led by the party of the proletariat, that is to say by the Communist Party. The organized vanguard of the working

class, the Communist Party, which must lead the struggle of the whole working class to the same extent in the economic and political and also in the cultural field, must be the guiding spirit not only of the producers' associations and of the workers' councils, but also in all the other forms of proletarian organization.

The rise of the soviets as the basic historical form of the dictatorship by no means decreases the leading role of the Communist Party in the proletarian revolution. If the 'left' Communists of Germany (cf. their appeal to the German proletariat of April 14, 1920 signed "Communist Workers' Party of Germany") declare: "That the party too adapts more and more to the idea of Soviets, and takes on a proletarian character" (*Kommunistische Arbeiterzeitung*, no. 54), then this is a confused expression of the idea that the Communist Party must dissolve itself into the soviets, that the soviets can replace the Communist Party.

This idea is fundamentally false and reactionary.

In the history of the Russian revolution, we experienced a whole period in which the soviets marched against the proletarian party and supported the policies of the agents of the bourgeoisie. The same thing could be observed in Germany. The same thing is also possible in other countries.

On the contrary, the existence of a powerful Communist Party is necessary in order to enable the soviets to do justice to their historic tasks, a party that does not simply "adapt itself" to the soviets, but is in a position to make them renounce "adaptations" of their own to the bourgeoisie and White Guard social democracy, a party which, by means of the communist factions in the soviets, is in a position to take the soviets under the leadership of the Communist Party.

Whoever suggests to the Communist Party that it should "adapt" to the soviets, whoever sees a strengthening of the

party's 'proletarian character' in such an adaptation, is doing the party and the soviets a highly questionable favor, and understands the significance neither of the soviets nor of the party. The "soviet idea" will be all the sooner victorious, the stronger are the parties that we create in every country. Many "Independents" and even right-wing socialists announce their support for the "soviet idea" in words now. We will only be able to prevent these elements from distorting the soviet idea if we have a strong Communist Party that is in a position to influence decisively the policies of the soviets.

9. The working class does not only need the Communist Party before and during the conquest of power, but also after the transfer of power into the hands of the working class. The history of the Communist Party of Russia, which has been in power for almost three years shows that the importance of the Communist Party does not diminish after the conquest of power by the working class, but on the contrary grows extraordinarily.

10. On the day the working class conquers power its party nevertheless remains as before only a part of the working class. It is precisely that part of the working class that organized the victory. For two decades in Russia and for a number of years in Germany the Communist Party has carried out its fight not only against the bourgeoisie but also against those "socialists" who are the bearers of the bourgeois influence in the working class. It took into its ranks the most steadfast, far-sighted and advanced fighters in the working class. Only the existence of such a close organization of the élite of the working class makes it possible to overcome all the difficulties that place themselves in the path of the workers' dictatorship on the day following the victory.

In the organization of a new proletarian Red Army, in the actual liquidation of the bourgeois state apparatus and its replacement by the nucleus of a new proletarian state apparatus,

in the fight against the craft tendencies of individual groups of workers, in the fight against local and regional 'patriotism' and in opening up paths to the creation of a new work discipline – in all of these areas the decisive word of the Communist Party belongs. Its members must fire and lead the majority of the working class by their own example.

11. The need for a political party of the proletariat will only disappear with the complete dissolution of the classes. On the way to the final victory of communism it is possible that the historical significance of the three fundamental forms of proletarian organization of the present (party, soviets, production associations) will change, and that the uniform type of the workers' organization will gradually crystallize out. The Communist Party will not however completely dissolve into the working class until communism has ceased to be an object of struggle and the whole of the working class has become communist.

12. The Second Congress of the Communist International not only confirms the historical tasks of the Communist Party in general, but tells the international proletariat, if only in general outline, what kind of Communist Party we require.

13. The Communist International is of the opinion that, particularly in the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the Communist Party must be built on the basis of an iron proletarian centralism. To lead the working class successfully in the long and hard civil wars that have broken out, the Communist Party must create an iron military order in its own ranks. The experiences of the Communist Party that led the working class during three years of the Russian civil war have shown that, without the strictest discipline, complete centralism and full comradesly confidence of all the party organizations in the leading party center, the victory of the workers is impossible.

14. The Communist Party must be built up on the basis of democratic centralism. The chief principle of democratic centralism is the election of the higher party cells by the lower, the unconditional and indispensable binding authority of all directives from the higher bodies to the lower, and the existence of a strong party center whose authority cannot be contested by anybody, are generally recognized for all leading party comrades in the period from one party conference to another.

15. A series of communist parties in Europe and America have been forced as a result of the “state of siege” declared against the Communists by the bourgeoisie, to lead an illegal existence. It must be remembered that in such a state of affairs one is from time to time obliged to abandon the strict observance of the principle of election and to permit the leading party institutions the right of co-option, as was the case in Russia on occasion. Under a “state of siege” the Communist Party is not able to use a democratic referendum to solve every serious question, but is rather forced to give its leading center the right whenever necessary to make important decisions which are binding on every party member.

16. The advocacy of widespread “autonomy” for the individual local party branches can only weaken the ranks of the Communist Party, undermines its ability to act and favors the petty-bourgeois, anarchist, and disruptive tendencies.

17. In the countries in which the bourgeoisie or counter-revolutionary social democracy is still in power, the communist parties must learn to link the illegal work with the legal in a planned manner. In the process the legal work must constantly be under the actual control of the illegal party. The communist parliamentary factions, not only in the central (national), but also in the local (regional and local council) institutions of the state, must be subordinate to the control of the whole party—regardless of whether the whole party is legal

or illegal at any given moment. Those members of parliament who refuse in any shape or form to subordinate themselves to the party must be expelled from the ranks of the Communist Party.

The legal press (newspapers and publishing) must be subordinated totally and unconditionally to the whole party and its Central Committee.

18. The basis of the organizational activity of the Communist Party must everywhere be the creation of a communist cell, however small the number of proletarians and semi-proletarians involved may be from time to time. In every soviet, in every trade union, in every factory, in every co-operative society, in every residents' committee (tenants' association), wherever there are even only three people who side with communism a communist cell must be formed immediately. Only the unity of the Communists gives the vanguard of the proletariat the possibility of leading the whole working class. All Communist Party cells that work in non-party organizations are unconditionally subordinated to the whole party organization, completely irrespective of whether the party is working legally or illegally at that given moment. The communist cells of every kind must be subordinated the one to the other in a strictly hierarchical order of rank, according to the most precise system possible.

19. The Communist Party arises almost everywhere as an urban party, as a party of industrial workers who for the main part live in towns. For the easiest and quickest possible victory of the working class it is necessary for the Communist Party to become not only the party of the towns but also the party of the villages. The Communist Party must develop its propaganda and its organizational activity among rural workers and the small and middle peasants. The Communist Party must work with especial care on the organization of communist cells in the

countryside.

The international organization of the proletariat can only be strong if the views on the role of the Communist Party formulated above take root in every country in which Communists live and fight. The Communist International has invited to its congress every trade union that recognizes the principles of the Communist International and is prepared to break with the yellow international. The Communist International will organize an international section of trades unions standing on the foundation of communism. The Communist International will not refuse to work with any non-party workers' organization that wishes to carry out a serious revolutionary fight against the bourgeoisie. In the process, however, the Communist International will make the following points to the proletarians of the whole world:

1. The Communist Party is the main and fundamental weapon for the liberation of the working class. In every country we must have not just groups or currents, but a Communist Party.
2. In every country there should exist only one single united Communist Party.
3. The Communist Party should be built up on the principle of the strictest centralization, and in the epoch of the civil war it should have military discipline reigning in its ranks.
4. Wherever there are only a dozen proletarians or semi-proletarians the Communist Party must have an organized cell.
5. There must be in every non-party institution a communist cell which is strictly subordinate to the whole party.
6. Firmly and persistently defending the programme and revolutionary tactics of communism, the Communist Party must constantly be linked as closely as possible with the broad workers' organizations and avoid sectarianism as much as lack of principles.

Theses on Parliamentarism

Third (Communist) International, Second Congress, 1920

Presented by the Communist Abstentionist Fraction of the Italian Socialist Party

1.

Parliamentarism is the form of political representation characteristic of the capitalist regime. In the field of principle the critique of the Marxist Communists in regards to parliamentarism and bourgeois democracy in general shows that the franchise granted to all citizens of all social classes in the elections of the representative organs of the State cannot prevent the whole governmental machinery of the State constituting the committee of defense of the interests of the ruling capitalist class, nor can it prevent the State from organizing itself as the historical instrument of the bourgeoisie in the struggle against the proletarian revolution.

2.

The Communists categorically reject the possibility of the working-class conquering power by a majority in parliament instead of attaining it by an armed revolutionary struggle. The conquest of political power by the proletariat, which is the starting point of the work of communist economic construction, implies the violent and immediate suppression of the democratic organs, which will be replaced by the organs of

the proletarian power, the workers' councils. With the exploiting class being thus deprived of all political rights, the dictatorship of the proletariat, that is to say, a system of class government and representation, will be realized. The suppression of parliamentarism is therefore a historic goal of the communist movement; still more, it is precisely representative democracy which is the first structure of bourgeois society which must be overthrown, before capitalist property, before even the bureaucratic and governmental State machinery.

3.

The same goes for the municipal or communal institutions of the bourgeoisie, which are falsely regarded as liable to be opposed to the governmental organs. In fact their machinery is identical with the state mechanism of the bourgeoisie. They must also be destroyed by the revolutionary proletariat and replaced by local Soviets of the workers' deputies.

4.

While the executive, military and police machinery of the bourgeois State organizes direct action against the proletarian revolution, representative democracy constitutes a means of indirect defense which works by spreading among the masses the illusion that their emancipation can be attained through a peaceful process, and the illusion that the form of the proletarian State can also have a parliamentary basis with the right of representation for the bourgeois minority. The result of this democratic influence on the proletarian masses has been the corruption of the socialist movement of the Second International in the domain of theory as well as in that of action.

5.

The task of Communists at the present moment in their work

of ideological and material preparation for the revolution is above all to remove from the minds of the proletariat those illusions and prejudices, which have been spread with the complicity of the old social-democratic leaders in order to turn it away from its historical path. In the countries where a democratic regime has held sway for a long time and has penetrated deeply into the habits and mentality of the masses, no less than into the mentality of the traditional socialist parties, this work is of a very great importance and comes among the first problems of revolutionary preparation.

6.

Possibilities of propaganda, agitation and criticism could be offered by participation in elections and in parliamentary activity during that period when, in the international proletarian movement, the conquest of power did not seem to be a possibility in the very near future, and when it was not yet a question of direct preparation for the realization of the dictatorship of the proletariat. On the other hand in a country where the bourgeois revolution is in course of progress and is creating new institutions, communist intervention in the representative organs can offer the possibility of wielding an influence on the development of events in order to make the revolution end in victory for the proletariat.

7.

The present historical period was opened by the end of the World War with its consequences for the social bourgeois organization, by the Russian Revolution which was the first realization of the conquest of power by the proletariat, and by the constitution of a new International in opposition to the social democracy of the traitors. In this historical period, and in those countries where the democratic regime achieved its formation a long time ago, there is no possibility of using the parliamentary tribune for the communist revolutionary work,

and the clarity of propaganda, no less than the efficiency of the preparation for the final struggle for the dictatorship, demand that Communists conduct an agitation for an election boycott by the workers.

8.

In these historical conditions, where the main problem of the movement is the revolutionary conquest of power, the whole political activity of the class party must be devoted to this direct end. It is necessary to shatter the bourgeois lie according to which every clash between opposing political parties, every struggle for power, must necessarily take place within the framework of the democratic mechanism, that is through elections and parliamentary debates. We cannot succeed in destroying that lie without breaking with the traditional method of calling the workers to vote in elections side by side with members of the bourgeoisie, and without putting an end to the spectacle where the delegates of the proletariat act on the same parliamentary ground as the delegates of its exploiters.

9.

The dangerous idea that all political action consists of electoral and parliamentary action has already been spread too widely by the ultra-parliamentary practice of the traditional socialist parties. On the other hand, the distaste of the proletariat for the treacherous practice has lent favorable ground to the mistakes of syndicalism and anarchism which deny all value of party's political action and role. For that reason the communist parties will never obtain great success in propagandizing the revolutionary Marxist method if the severing of all contacts with the machinery of bourgeois democracy is not put at the basis of their work for the dictatorship of the proletariat and the workers' councils.

10.

In spite of all the public speeches and all the theoretical statements, the very great importance which is attached in practice to the electoral campaign and its results, and the fact that for a long period the party has to devote to that cause all its means and all its resources in men, in the press, and even in money, helps to strengthen the feeling that this is the true central activity to achieve the aims of communism; on the other hand, it leads to complete cessation of the work of revolutionary organization and preparation. It gives to the party organization a technical character quite in opposition to the requirements of revolutionary work, legal as well as illegal.

11.

For the parties which have gone over, by a majority resolution, to the Third International, the allowance of the continuation of electoral action prevents the necessary sorting out and elimination of social-democratic elements, without which the Third International would fail in its historic role, and would no longer be a disciplined and homogeneous army of the worldwide revolution.

12.

The very nature of the debates which have parliament and other democratic organs for their theatre excludes every possibility of passing from a criticism of the policy of the opposing parties, to a propaganda against the very principle of parliamentarism, and to an action which would overstep parliamentary rules—just as it would not be possible to get the right to speak if we refused to submit to all the formalities established by electoral procedure. Success in the parliamentary fencing will always depend only on the skill in handling the common weapon of the principles on which the institution itself is based, and in dealing with the tricks of parliament procedure—just as the success in the electoral struggle will always be judged only by the number of votes or seats obtained.

Every effort of the communist parties to give a completely different character to the practice of parliamentarism cannot but lead to failure the energies spent in that Sisyphean labour, whereas the cause of the communist revolution calls these energies without delay on the terrain of the direct attack against the regime of capitalist exploitation.

The Programme of the Communist Party of Italy

Livorno, January 1921

The International Communist Party is constituted on the basis of the following principles established at Livorno in 1921 at the foundation of the Communist Party of Italy (section of the Communist International).

1. Under the present social regime of capital, the conflict between the productive forces and the relations of production develops at an ever-increasing rate, giving rise to antithetical interests and to the class struggle between the proletariat and the ruling bourgeoisie.
2. Production relations today are protected by the power of the bourgeois State: whatever the form of representative system and employment of elective democratic, the bourgeois State remains the organ for the defense of the interests of the capitalist class.
3. The proletariat can neither smash nor modify the system of capitalist relations of production which exploits it without violently overthrowing the bourgeois power.
4. The indispensable organ of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat is the class party. The Communist Party, which contains the most advanced and resolute part of the proletariat, unifies the efforts of the laboring masses and transforms their struggles for particular group interests and immediate gains into

the general struggle for the revolutionary emancipation of the proletariat. The party is responsible for propagating the revolutionary theory amongst the masses, for organizing the material means of action, and for leading the working class through the course of its struggles by ensuring the historical continuity and the international unity of the movement.

5. After overthrowing the capitalist power, the proletariat must completely destroy the old State apparatus in order to organize itself as dominant class and install its own dictatorship: that is to say, it will deny all rights to the bourgeois class and individuals within it for as long as they socially survive, and will found the organs of the new regime on the producing class alone. The Communist Party, having set itself this fundamental aim as the distinctive feature of its program, at the same time represents, organizes and directs the proletarian dictatorship.
6. Only by means of force will the proletarian State be able to systematically intervene in the social economy, and adopt those measures with which the collective management of production and distribution will take the place of the capitalist system.
7. This transformation of the economy and consequently of the whole of social life will gradually eliminate the necessity for the political State, whose machinery will gradually give way to the rational administration of human activities.

With regard to the capitalist world and the workers' movement in the aftermath of the Second World War, the party's position is based on the following points:

8. During the first half of the twentieth century, capitalist economy has seen the introduction of monopolistic trusts amongst the employers. Attempts have been made to control and manage production and exchange by centralized planning, right up to State management of whole sectors of production. In the political field, there has been an increase in the strength of the police and military arms of the State and in government totalitarianism. None of the latter are new types of social

organization of a transitional nature between capitalism and socialism, and neither are they revived forms of pre-bourgeois political systems. They are instead particular forms of a more and more direct and exclusive management of power and the State by the most advanced forces of capital.

This process rules out the pacific, progressivist, and evolutionist interpretations of the bourgeois regime's course, and confirms our forecasts about the classes concentrating and marshalling their forces on opposite sides. For the proletariat to match its enemy's strength with rekindled revolutionary energy, it must reject, either as a demand or as a means of agitation, the illusory return to democratic liberalism and constitutional guarantees; the class revolutionary party must take the historic step of liquidating once and for all the practice of making alliances, even for transitory issues, both with the bourgeois and middle-class parties, and with pseudo-workers' parties who have adopted reformist programs.

9. The imperialist wars have shown that the crisis of capitalist disintegration is inevitable by decisively inaugurating a phase in which its expansion no longer signifies a continual growth in the productive forces, but rather an alternation of accumulation and destruction. These wars have been the cause of a series of profound crises in the workers' international organizations, with the dominant classes having managed to impose military and national solidarity on them by getting them to line up on one or other of the war-fronts. There is only one historically viable alternative that can be posed to this situation and that is the rekindling of class struggle within nations, leading to the civil war of the working masses to overthrow the power of bourgeois States everywhere, along with all their international coalitions. The indispensable condition for this lies in the reconstitution of the International Communist Party as an autonomous force independent of any existing political or military power.
10. The apparatus of the proletarian State, insofar as it is a means and arm of struggle in a transitional period between two social systems, does not derive its organizational strength from any

existing constitutional canons or schemas that aim to represent all classes. The most complete historical example of a proletarian State up to the present is the Soviets (workers' councils) during the October Revolution of 1917, when the working class armed itself under the leadership of the Bolshevik party, when the conquest of power was accomplished by totalitarian means and the Constituent Assembly dispersed, and when the struggle took place to repel the attacks by foreign bourgeois governments, and stamp out the internal rebellion of the vanquished classes, of the middle classes and opportunist parties—the inevitable allies of the counter-revolution at decisive moments.

11. The full accomplishment of socialism is inconceivable within the borders of one country alone and the socialist transformation cannot be effected without failures and momentary setbacks. The defense of the proletarian regime against the ever-present dangers of degeneration can be ensured only if the running of the proletarian State is continually coordinated with the international struggle of the working class of each country against its own bourgeoisie, State and military apparatus; there can be no let up in this struggle even in wartime. The necessary coordination can be ensured only if the World Communist Party controls the politics and program of the States where the working class has attained power.

Theses on Tactics

Communist Party of Italy

Second Congress, Rome, March 1922

I. Organic Nature of the Communist Party

1.

The Communist Party, political party of the proletarian class, presents itself in its action as a collectivity operating with a unitary approach. The initial motives which lead the elements and groups of this collectivity to incorporate themselves into an organism with a unitary action are the immediate interests of groups of the working class, arising out of their economic conditions. The essential characteristic of the Communist Party's function is utilization of the energies incorporated in this way for the attainment of objectives which are common to the entire working class and situated at the culmination of all its struggles; objectives which thus transcend—by integrating them—the interests of single groups, and such immediate and contingent aims as the working class may propose.

2.

The integration of all elemental thrusts into a unitary action occurs by virtue of two main factors: one of critical consciousness, from which the party draws its programme; the

other of will, expressed in the instrument with which the party acts, its disciplined and centralized organization. It would be erroneous to consider these two factors of consciousness and will as powers that can be obtained by, or are to be expected of, individuals since they are only realizable through the integration of the activity of many individuals into a unitary collective organism.

3.

The precise definition of the theoretical and critical consciousness of the communist movement, contained in the programmatic declarations of individual parties and of the Communist International, as well as the organization of the one and the other, was and still is being arrived at through the examination and study of the history of human society and its structure in the present capitalist epoch, carried out on the basis of facts, experience, and through active participation in the actual proletarian struggle.

4.

The announcement of these programmatic declarations, and the appointment of the men to whom are entrusted the various positions in the party organization, is formally carried out by means of a consultation, democratic in form, of the party's representative assemblies, but in reality they must be understood as a product of the real process which accumulates elements of experience and realizes the preparation and selection of leaders, thus shaping both the programmatic content and the hierarchical constitution of the party.

II. The Communist Party's Process of Development

5.

The organization of the proletarian party takes form and develops insofar as there exists—because of the level of maturity to which the social situation has evolved—the

possibility of a unitary collective consciousness and action in the direction of the general and ultimate interests of the working class. On the other hand, the proletariat appears and acts as a class in history precisely when the tendency to construct a programme and a common method of action, and hence to organize a party, takes form.

6.

The process of formation and development of the proletarian party does not present a continuous and regular course, but is susceptible both nationally and internationally of highly complex phases and periods of general crisis. Many times there has occurred a process of degeneration whereby the action of the proletarian parties has lost, or has moved away from rather than towards, that indispensable character of a unitary activity inspired by the highest revolutionary aims. It has become fragmented in pursuit of the satisfaction of interests of limited groups of workers, or in achieving contingent results (reforms) at the cost of adopting methods which have compromised the work for revolutionary objectives and the preparation of the proletariat for such objectives. Thus the proletarian parties have often ended by extending the frontiers of their organization to the spheres of elements that could not yet place themselves upon the terrain of unitary and Maximalist collective action. This process has always been accompanied by a deforming revision of doctrine and programme, and by such a slackening of internal discipline that instead of having a general staff of capable leaders resolute in the struggle, the proletarian movement has been placed in the hands of hidden agents of the bourgeoisie.

7.

The path back from a situation of this kind towards the organization of a true class party, under the influence of new situations and new pressures to act exercised by events upon

the working masses, takes place in the form of a separation of a part of the party which through debates on the programme, a critique of unfavorable experiences in the struggle, and the formation within the party of a school and an organization with its own hierarchy (fraction) reconstitutes that living continuity of a unitary organism, founded on the possession of a consciousness and a discipline, from which the new party arises. This is the process which, in general, led from the failure of the Second International parties to the birth of the communist Third International.

8.

The development of the Communist Party after the resolution of such a crisis, allowing for the possibility of subsequent critical phases produced by new situations, can facilitate analysis be defined as “normal” development of the party. By displaying the maximum continuity in upholding a programme, and in the life of its leading hierarchy (apart from individual replacement of disloyal or worn-out leaders), the party will also perform the maximum of effective and useful work in winning the proletariat to the cause of revolutionary struggle. This is not simply a question of exerting a didactic effect upon the masses; and even less is it a desire to exhibit an intrinsically pure and perfect party. It is rather a question of achieving the maximum yield in the real process whereby—as will be seen better below—through the systematic work of propaganda, proselytism, and above all active participation in social struggles, the action of an ever increasing number of workers is caused to shift from the terrain of partial and immediate interests to the organic and unitary terrain of the struggle for the communist revolution. For only when a similar continuity exists is it possible, not merely to overcome the proletariat’s mistrustful hesitations with respect to the party, but rapidly and effectively to channel and incorporate the new energies gained into a common thought and action, thus creating that unity of

movement which is an indispensable revolutionary condition.

9.

For all the same reasons, the aggregation to the party of other parties or parts detached from parties must be seen as entirely abnormal. A group which up to that moment was distinguished by a different programmatic position and independent organization does not bring with it an ensemble of elements that can be effectively assimilated *en bloc*; on the contrary, it impairs the solidity of the old party's political position and internal structure, so that the increase in overall numbers is far from corresponding to an increase in the party's strength and potential—indeed could on occasion paralyze its work of organizing the masses rather than facilitate it.

It is desirable that as soon as possible it should be declared inadmissible within the world communist organization to depart from two fundamental principles of organization: in each country, there can only be a single communist party; and it is only possible to join the Communist International by individual admission to the communist party of the country in question.

III. Relations between the Communist Party and the Proletarian Class

10.

The specification and definition of the characteristics of the class party, which is the basis for its constitutive structure as organ of the most advanced part of the proletarian class, does not mean that the party need not be bound by close relations with the remainder of the proletariat—indeed it demands that it should be.

11.

The nature of these relations derives from the dialectical way of viewing the formation of class consciousness and a unitary

organization of the class party, which transports a vanguard of the proletariat from the terrain of partial, spontaneous movements provoked by the interests of groups on to the terrain of general proletarian action; and which does not achieve this by rejecting those elemental movements, but accomplishes their integration and transcendence through living experiences, by pushing for their realization, taking active part in them, and following them attentively throughout their development.

12.

The work of propagating its ideology and proselytizing for its ranks which the party continuously carries on is thus inseparable from the reality of the proletariat's activity and movement in all its myriad forms. It is a banal error to see as contradictory: participation in struggles for contingent and limited objectives, and the preparation of the final and general revolutionary struggle. The very existence of the party's unitary organism, with its indispensable conditions of clarity of programmatic vision and solidity of organizational discipline, gives a guarantee that partial demands will never be accorded the value of ends in themselves, and that the struggle to fulfil them will only be seen as a means of experience and training for useful and effective revolutionary preparation.

13.

Hence, the Communist Party participates in the organizational life of all forms of the proletariat's economic organization open to workers of all political faiths (unions, factory councils, cooperatives, etc.). If the party is to carry out its work effectively, it is a fundamental position to maintain that all organs of this nature must be unitary, in other words must include all those workers who are to be found in a specific economic situation. The party participates in the life of such organs by organizing those of its members who belong to them

into groups or cells linked to the party organization. These groups, participating in the front line in the actions of the economic organs to which they belong, draw to themselves—and hence into the ranks of the political party—those elements who become ready for this as the action develops. They aim to win majority support and leading positions in their organizations, thus becoming the natural vehicle for transmitting the party's slogans. A whole activity is thus carried on, which is one of conquest and organization; this is not limited to propaganda or proselytism or internal electoral campaigns in the proletarian assemblies, but above all involves entering into the thick of struggle and action and helping the workers to derive the most useful experience from them.

14.

The entire work and organization of the communist groups is designed to give the party definitive control over the leading bodies of the economic organisms, and first and foremost over national union executives, which seem the most secure mechanism for leading movements of the proletariat not integrated in the ranks of the party. The Communist Party—seeing it as its primary interest to avoid splits in the unions and other economic organs, so long as their leadership remains in the hands of other parties and political currents—will not enjoin its members to comport themselves, in the field of execution of movements led by such organisms, in contrast with the latter's directives as regards action, though they must express the most open criticism of the action itself and the work of the leaders.

15.

Apart from taking part in this way in the life of those proletarian organisms that have arisen naturally through the pressure of real economic interests, and facilitating their extension and reinforcement, the party will strive to bring to

the fore through its propaganda those problems of real interest to the workers which, in the evolution of social situations, can give life to new organisms of economic struggle. By all these means, the party expands and strengthens the influence which via a thousand bonds stretches from its organized ranks to the proletariat as a whole, taking advantage of all its manifestations and potential manifestations in social activity.

16.

Any conception of the party organism based on the requirement of perfect critical consciousness and a complete spirit of sacrifice from the part of each of its members, individually considered, and that restricted the layer of the masses linked to the party to revolutionary unions of workers constituted in the economic field by a secessionist criterion and including only those proletarians who accepted given methods of action, would be totally erroneous.

On the other hand, one cannot insist that by a given time, or on the eve of undertaking general actions, the party must have realized the condition of incorporating under its leadership—or actually in its own ranks—the majority of the proletariat. Such a postulate cannot be put forward aprioristically, abstracting from the real dialectical course of the party's process of development. And it is quite meaningless, even in the abstract, to compare the number of workers incorporated into the disciplined and unitary organization of the party, or following the latter, with the number of those who are unorganized and dispersed or attached to corporative organisms incapable of linking them together organically. The remainder of the present exposition will be an attempt to define the conditions to which relations between the party and the working class must correspond, in order to render given actions possible and effective, and how those conditions may be established.

IV. Relations between the Communist Party and other Proletarian Political Movements

17.

One part of the proletariat is especially resistant to incorporation into the ranks of the Communist Party or into its periphery, because it is organized in other political parties or sympathizes with them. All the bourgeois parties have proletarian supporters, but here we are above all interested in the social-democratic parties and syndicalist and anarchist currents.

18.

Faced with these movements, an incessant criticism of their programmes must be carried out, demonstrating their inadequacy for the purposes of proletarian emancipation. This theoretical polemic will be all the more effective if the Communist Party can show that the criticism long made by it of such movements, in accordance with its own programmatic conceptions, are confirmed by proletarian experience. For this reason, in polemics of this kind it is essential not to hide the conflict between our respective methods—including that part which does not apply solely to problems of the moment, but reflects the subsequent developments of the proletariat's action.

19.

Such polemics must, moreover, be reflected in the field of action. Communists taking part in struggles in proletarian economic organisms led by socialists, syndicalists, or anarchists will not refuse to follow their actions unless the masses as a whole, in a spontaneous movement, should rebel against it. But they will demonstrate how this action, at a certain point in its development, was rendered impotent or utopian because of the incorrect method of the leaders, whereas with the communist method better results would have been achieved, serving the

aims of the general revolutionary movement. In their polemics the Communists will always distinguish between leaders and masses, leaving the former all responsibility for their errors and faults; moreover, they will not omit to denounce with equal vigor the activity of those leaders who, albeit with sincere revolutionary feelings, propose dangerous and incorrect tactics.

20.

If it is an essential aim of the Communist Party to win ground among the proletariat by increasing its strength and influence at the expense of proletarian political parties and currents with which it disagrees, this aim must be achieved by taking part in the reality of the proletarian struggle upon a terrain which can be simultaneously one of common action and of mutual conflict—always on condition that the programmatic and organizational physiognomy of the party is never compromised.

21.

In order to draw to itself those proletarians who support other political movements, the Communist Party cannot follow the method of constituting within them organized groups and fractions of Communists or communist sympathizers. In the trade unions, this method is logically applied to carry out penetration work, without any aim of causing the communist groups organized in the unions to leave them; with political movements, a method of this kind would compromise the party's organic unity, for the reasons already mentioned with respect to the development of the party's organization.

22.

In propaganda and polemics, it is opportune to bear in mind that many workers who are militants in the syndicalist and anarchist ranks were ready to understand the unitary revolutionary struggle, but were set on the wrong path solely through a reaction to the past degeneration of the political

parties led by social-democrats. The bitterness of polemics and struggle directed against the socialist parties will be an element of prime importance in bringing these workers back on to the revolutionary terrain.

23.

The obvious incompatibility for a member of the Communist Party with simultaneously being a member of another party extends beyond political parties, to other organisms which, though they do not have the name or organization of a party, nevertheless have a political character, and to all associations which base their acceptance of members on political theses: the most important of these is freemasonry.

V. Elements of the Communist Party's Tactics derived from Study of the Situation

24.

With the preceding elements, the general criteria which govern organizational relations between the Communist Party and other proletarian organisms have been established, in accordance with the former's essential nature. Before coming to the more properly tactical terms of the question, it is necessary to dwell on those elements for resolving any tactical problem that are provided by examination of the momentary situation through which one is passing. The Communist Party's programme contains the perspective of a series of situations related to a series of actions which in the course of an unfolding process are generally attributed to them. There is, therefore, a close connection between the programmatic directives and the tactical rules. Studying the situation thus appears as an integral part of resolving tactical problems, considering that the party, on the basis of its consciousness and critical experience, has already predicted how various situations

might unfold, and hence defined the tactical possibilities corresponding to the actions to be followed in the various phases. Examination of the situation serves as a check on the accuracy of the party's programmatic positions. On the day that any substantial revision of them should become necessary, the problem will be far more serious than any that could be resolved by means of a simple tactical switch, and the inevitable rectification of programmatic outlook cannot but have serious consequences on the strength and organization of the party. The latter must therefore strive to forecast how situations might unfold, in order to exercise the maximum possible degree of influence on them; but waiting for situations to arise in order to subject them, in an eclectic and discontinuous manner, to the guidelines and suggestions they have prompted, is a method characteristic of social-democratic opportunism. If communist parties were forced to adapt themselves to this, they would underwrite the ruin of the ideological and militant construction of communism.

25.

The Communist Party succeeds in possessing its character of unity, and its tendency to realize a whole programmatic process, only insofar as it assembles in its ranks that part of the proletariat which, by becoming organized, has overcome the tendency to move only under the direct impulses of limited economic situations. The influence of the situation on general movements of the party ceases to be direct and deterministic, becoming a rational and voluntary dependence, insofar as critical consciousness and the initiative of will, which have only the most limited value for individuals, are realized in the organic collectivity of the party. This is all the more true in that the Communist Party presents itself as the forerunner of those forms of human association which will draw from their transcendence of the existing formless economic organization the faculty to direct rationally—instead of passively

undergoing—the play of economic facts and their laws.

26.

The party, however, cannot utilize its will and its initiative in a capricious way or to an arbitrary degree; the limits which it can and must set to both the one and the other are imposed upon it precisely by its programmatic directives, and by the existing possibilities and opportunities for action, which can be deduced from an examination of the contingent situation.

27.

Having examined the situation, an assessment needs to be made of the party forces and the relation between these and those of enemy movements. Above all, it is necessary to take care to assess the degree of support the party could expect from the proletariat if the latter undertook an action or engaged in a struggle. This means forming a precise idea of the repercussions and spontaneous actions which the economic situation produces among the masses, and of the possibility of developing these actions, as a result of the initiatives of the Communist Party and the attitude of the other parties. The forms of influence of the economic situation on the class combativity of the proletariat are very complex, depending on whether we are passing through a period of growing prosperity of the bourgeois economy, or of crisis with sharpening consequences. The effect of these phases on the activity and organizational life of the proletarian organisms is complex, and cannot be considered simply by embarking on an examination of the economic situation at one given moment, and deducing from it the proletariat's level of combativity. For it is necessary to take account of the influence of the whole course of previous situations, in all their oscillations and variations. For instance, a period of prosperity can produce a powerful trade-union movement, which in a subsequent crisis of immiseration can be rapidly drawn on to revolutionary

positions, while preserving the breadth of its mass organization and thus favoring the success of the revolution. Or a period of progressive immiseration can disperse the trade-union movement, in such a way that in a subsequent period of prosperity it finds itself at a stage of construction that does not offer a sufficient framework for revolutionary organization. These examples, which could equally well be reversed, go to prove that “the curves of the economic situation and of class combativity are determined by complex laws, the latter by the former, but do not resemble each other in form”. To the rise (or fall) of the former, there may correspond in given cases indifferently a rise or a fall of the latter.

28.

The integrative elements of this study are extremely varied. They consist of examining the real tendencies involved in the constitution and development of the proletariat’s organizations and the reactions—including psychological reactions—produced upon it by, on the one hand, economic conditions, and on the other, by the specific attitudes and social and political initiatives of the ruling class and its parties. Examination of the situation is affected in the political field by examining the positions and forces of the various classes and parties in relation to the power of the State. With respect to this it is possible to classify the situations in which the Communist Party may find itself taking action into fundamental phases; situations which in the normal course of things lead it to grow stronger, by extending its membership, and at the same time define ever more precisely the limits of its tactical field. These phases can be specified as follows: Absolutist feudal power; democratic bourgeois power; social-democratic government; intermediate period of social war in which the bases of the State become unstable; proletarian power in the dictatorship of the Councils. In a certain sense, the question of tactics consists not just in choosing the right course for an effective action, but

also in preventing the party's activity from going beyond the appropriate limits, and falling back upon methods that correspond to past situations—the consequence of which would be to arrest the party's process of development to the detriment of its revolutionary preparation. The considerations which follow will refer above all to the party's action in the second and third of the above-mentioned political phases.

29.

The Communist Party's possession of a critical method and a consciousness which lead to the formulation of its programme is a condition of its organic life. For that very reason, the party and the Communist International cannot limit themselves to establishing the greatest liberty and elasticity of tactics, by entrusting their execution to the relevant leading bodies, subject to examination of the situation, in their judgement. Since the party programme cannot be characterized as a straightforward aim to be achieved by whatever means but rather as a historical perspective of mutually related pathways and points of arrival, the tactics adopted in successive situations must be related to the programme, and thus the general tactical norms adopted in successive situations need to be clearly specified within not too rigid limits, becoming clear and clearer and fluctuating less and less as the movement gains in strength and approaches the final victory. Only such a criterion as this can allow us to approach ever closer to the optimum level of genuine centralization within the parties and the International needed to direct action effectively; in such a way that orders emanating from the center will be willingly accepted, not just within the communist parties but also within the mass movement they have managed to organize. One must not however forget that, having once accepted the movement's organic discipline, there is still the factor of initiative on the part of individuals and groups which is dependent on how situations develop and what arises out of them; and on a continual, logical advance in terms of

experiences, and changes to the course being followed, to discover the most effective way of combating the conditions of life imposed on the proletariat by the existing system. Thus it is incumbent upon the party and the International to explain the totality of its general tactical rules in a systematic manner—since it might eventually call upon those within its own ranks, and within the strata of the proletariat which have rallied around them, to put these tactical rules into practice and to make sacrifices on their behalf—showing how such rules and prospects for action constitute the inevitable route leading to victory. It is, therefore, a practical and organizational necessity, and not the desire to theorize and schematize the complexity of the maneuvers that the party may be called upon to undertake, which leads us to establish the terms and limits of the party's tactics. And it is for these entirely concrete reasons that the party must take decisions which appear to restrict its possibilities for action, but which alone provide a guarantee of the organic unity of its activity in the proletarian struggle.

VI. "Indirect" Tactical Activity of the Communist Party

30.

When the conditions are lacking for a tactical activity that can be defined as direct, having the character of an assault on bourgeois power with the forces at the Communist Party's disposal, and which will be discussed below, the party can and must—far from restricting itself to a pure and simple work of proselytism and propaganda—exert an influence on events through its relations with and pressures upon other parties and political and social movements, with the aim of determining developments of the situation in a direction favorable to its own objectives, and in such a way as to hasten the moment when resolute revolutionary action will be possible.

The initiatives and attitudes to adopt in such a case constitute a delicate problem, and the basic condition which must be laid down that they must on no account be or appear to be in contradiction with the long-term requirements of the party's specific struggle, in accordance with the programme of which it is the sole proponent and for which at the decisive moment the proletariat will need to fight. Any stance which causes or entails the demotion to a secondary level of the complete affirmation of this propaganda, which not only has theoretical value, but is mainly derived from day-to-day positions adopted within the actual proletarian struggle, and which continually has to emphasize the need for the proletariat to embrace the communist programme and methods; any stance which made the reaching of given contingent benchmarks appear to be an end in itself rather than a means to proceed further would lead to a weakening of the party structure and its influence in preparing the masses for the revolution.

31.

In the historical-political situation which corresponds to democratic bourgeois power there generally takes place a division in the political field into two currents or "blocs"—the left and the right—which vie with each other to run the State. The left bloc is normally supported more or less openly by the social-democratic parties, which favor coalitions on principle. How this contest unfolds is not a matter of indifference to the Communist Party, both because it concerns points and demands which affect the proletarian masses and attract their attention, and because its settlement in a victory of the left really can smooth the path to the proletarian revolution. In examining the problem of the tactical advisability of coalitions with the left political elements—and wanting to avoid all falsely doctrinaire or stupidly sentimental and puritanical apriorism—one must above all bear in mind that the

Communist Party enjoys freedom of movement insofar as it is capable of pursuing with continuity its process of organization and preparation, from which it draws that influence upon the masses which permits it to call them to action. It cannot propose a tactic with an occasional and transitory criterion, reckoning that it will be able subsequently, at the moment when such a tactic ceases to be applicable, to execute a sudden switch and change of front, transforming its allies of yesterday into enemies. If one does not wish to compromise one's links with the masses and their reinforcement at the very moment when it is most essential that these should come to the fore, it will be necessary to pursue in all public and official declarations and attitudes a continuity of method and intention that is strictly consistent with the uninterrupted propaganda and preparation for the final struggle.

32.

An essential task of the Communist Party, in preparing the proletariat ideologically and practically for the revolutionary struggle for the dictatorship, is to engage in a ruthless criticism of the programme of the bourgeois left and of any programme that seeks to resolve social problems within the framework of bourgeois parliamentary democratic institutions. The substance of the disagreements between the bourgeois right and left for the most part affect the proletariat only insofar as they are demagogic falsifications, which naturally cannot be disarmed purely by theoretical criticism, but must be revealed for what they are in practice, in the thick of struggle. In general the political demands of the left, whose aims certainly do not at all include taking one step up the ladder to some intermediary rung between the economic and political system of capitalism and that of the proletariat, correspond to conditions which give more breathing space to modern capitalism and ensure its more effective defense, as much in their intrinsic value as because they tend to give the masses the impression that the existing

institutions can be utilized to achieve their emancipation. This is true of the demands for extension of the suffrage and for other guarantees and improvements of liberalism, as it is of the anti-clerical struggle and the whole baggage of “masonic” politics. Legislative reforms in the economic or social fields have a similar value: either they will not be carried through, or they will be carried through only insofar as they create an obstacle to the revolutionary dynamic of the masses and with that intention.

33.

The advent of a left bourgeois or even a social-democratic government may be seen as a preliminary to the final struggle for the proletarian dictatorship; but not in the sense that their practical activity would create useful preconditions of an economic or political kind, and certainly not in the expectation that they would allow the proletariat greater freedom to organize, prepare and engage in revolutionary action. The Communist Party knows and has the duty to proclaim, by force of critical reason and of bloody experience, that these governments will only respect the freedom of movement of the proletariat when it recognizes them and defends them as its own representatives, whereas faced with an assault by the masses against the machinery of the democratic State, they would respond with the most ferocious reaction. It is thus in a very different sense that the advent of such governments may be useful: insofar as, that is, that their activity allows the proletariat to deduce from harsh experience that only the installation of its dictatorship can really defeat capitalism. Clearly the exploitation of such an experience will only be effective to the extent that the Communist Party has denounced the government’s failure in advance, and preserved a strong independent organization around which the proletariat can regroup, after it is forced to abandon the groups and

parties which it would have partly supported in their government experiment.

34.

Thus not only would a coalition of the Communist Party with parties of the bourgeois left or of social-democracy damage revolutionary preparation and make it difficult to utilize a left government experiment, but also in practice it would normally postpone the victory of the left over the right bloc. These are rivals for the support of the bourgeois center, which moves to the left because it is rightly convinced that the left is no less anti-revolutionary and conservative than the right, proposing concessions that are largely apparent and only minimally effective in order to brake the pressing revolutionary movement against the identical institutions accepted by right and left alike. Thus the presence of the Communist Party in a left coalition would lose the latter more support, above all on the terrain of electoral and parliamentary struggle, than it would bring it through its backing, and the whole experiment would probably be delayed rather than accelerated by such a policy.

35.

On the other hand, the Communist Party does not disregard the undeniable fact that the demands around which the left bloc focuses its agitation attract the interest of the masses and, in their formulation, often correspond to their real requirements. The Communist Party will not uphold the superficial thesis that such concessions should be rejected on the grounds that only the final and total revolutionary conquest merits the sacrifices of the proletariat. There would be no sense in proclaiming this since the only result would be that the proletariat would be sure to go behind the democrats and social-democrats and end up enslaved to them. The Communist Party will thus call upon the workers to accept the

left's concessions as an experiment but emphasize in its propaganda its pessimistic forecast as to that experiment's outcome, and the necessity for the proletariat, if it is not to be ruined by this venture, not to stake its organizational and political independence upon it. The Communist Party will the masses to demand of the social-democratic parties—who guarantee the possibility of the promises of the bourgeois left being achieved—that they honor their commitments, and, with its independent and incessant criticism, it will prepare to reap the harvest of the negative outcome of such experiments by showing how the entire bourgeoisie is in fact arrayed in a united front against the revolutionary proletariat and how those parties which call themselves workers' parties, but which support the coalition with part of the bourgeoisie, are merely its accomplices and agents.

36.

The demands put forward by the left parties, and especially by the social-democrats, are often of a sort that it is appropriate to urge the proletariat to move directly to implement them; since if a struggle did get underway the inadequacy of the means by which the social-democrats proposed to arrive at a programme of benefits for the proletariat would at once become apparent. The Communist Party would then highlight those same demands, making them more specific, and raise them as a banner of struggle for the whole of the proletariat, urging the latter to compel the parties which talk of such demands purely for opportunist reasons to demonstrate their commitment to winning them. Whether these are economic demands or of a political nature, the Communist Party will propose them as the objectives of a coalition of trade-union organisms, shunning the setting up of committees to lead the struggle and agitation in which the Communist Party would be represented and involved alongside other political parties; the aim being always to focus the attention of the masses on the distinctive communist

programme, and maintain its own freedom of movement so it can choose the right moment to widen its sphere of activity when it needs to by ousting the other parties who had revealed their impotence and been abandoned by the masses. The trade-union united front, understood in this way, offers the possibility of combined actions by the whole of the working class from which the communist method can only emerge victorious, it being the only method susceptible of lending the unitary movement of the proletariat real substance, free from any co-responsibility for the activity of parties which express their verbal support for the proletariat's cause merely out of opportunism, and with counter-revolutionary intentions.

37.

The situation which we are considering may take the form of an assault by the bourgeois right upon a democratic or social-democratic government. Even in this case the stance of the Communist Party cannot be one of proclaiming solidarity with governments of this sort since we cannot present to the proletariat as a gain to be defended a political order whose experiment we greeted, and are following, with the intention of accelerating in the proletariat the conviction that it is not one designed in its favor but for counter-revolutionary ends.

38.

It may happen that the left government allows the right-wing organizations, the bourgeois white gangs, to engage in their dramatic exploits against the proletariat and its institutions, and not only does not ask for the proletariat's support, but insists that the latter has no right to respond by organizing armed resistance. In such a case the Communists will demonstrate that it can only be actual complicity, indeed a division of functions between liberal government and reactionary irregular forces. The bourgeois is then no longer discussing whether the method of democratic and reformist lullabies or that of violent

repression suits it best, but utilizes them both at the same time. In this situation, the real and most deadly enemy of revolutionary preparation is the liberal side in government: it tricks the proletariat into taking its side in the name of legality so that it can render it defenseless and disorganized, and so it can defeat it, in full collusion with the whites, on the day the proletariat finds itself forced by events to struggle against the legal apparatus which presides over its exploitation.

39.

Another hypothesis is that the government and the left-wing parties which compose invite the proletariat to participate in the armed struggle against a right-wing attack. This invitation is inevitably a trap, and the Communist Party will reply to it by proclaiming that weapons in the hands of proletarians means advent of the proletarian power and State, and the disarming of the traditional bureaucratic and military machinery of the State, since the latter will never follow the orders of a left government which has attained power by legal means when it summons the people to armed struggle, and since only the proletarian dictatorship could lend a stable character to a victory over the white bands. As a consequence no "loyalism" should be proclaimed or practiced towards such a government, and, most important of all, the masses will need to be made aware that the consolidation of the latter's power with the help of the proletariat against a right-wing rising or attempted coup d'état, would be very dangerous, because it would mean the consolidation of the very organization that will oppose the proletariat's revolutionary advance when this has become its only way out; if control of the armed organization of the State had been left in the hands of the democratic parties in government, in other words, if the proletariat had laid down its arms without having used them to overturn the existing political and state forms, against all the forces of the bourgeois class.

VII. “Direct” Tactical Activity of the Communist Party

40.

In other cases, however, immediate and pressing demands of the working class, whether for conquest or for defense, find the left and social-democratic parties indifferent. Not having at its disposal sufficient forces to call the masses directly to those conquests, because of the influence upon them of the social-democrats, the Communist Party—avoiding offering any alliance to the social-democrats, indeed proclaiming that they betray even the contingent and immediate interests of the workers—in formulating these objectives of proletarian struggle will invoke a proletarian united front realized on the trade union terrain for their attainment. The implementation of this front will find at their posts the communist militants in the unions; but at the same time it will leave the party the possibility of intervening when the struggle takes a further development, against which the social democrats will inevitably come out—and at times the syndicalists and anarchists too. On the other hand, the refusal of the other proletarian parties to implement a trade-union united front for these objectives will be utilized by the Communist Party to strike down their influence—not merely with criticism and propaganda which shows how what is involved is real complicity with the bourgeoisie, but above all by participating in the front line in those partial actions of the proletariat which the situation will not fail to provoke, by doing so on the basis of those precise strong points for which the party had proposed the trade union united front of all local organizations and all categories, and by drawing from this a concrete demonstration that the social-democratic leaders by opposing the extension of activity

are preparing its defeat. Naturally, the Communist Party will not limit itself to this task of pinning the responsibility for an incorrect tactic on the other parties; but with extreme caution and tight discipline it will study whether the moment has not arrived to overcome the resistance of the counterrevolutionaries, when in the course of the action a situation is produced among the masses such that they would follow a call to action of the Communist Party against any resistance. An initiative of this kind can only be a central one, and it is never admissible for it to be taken locally by organisms of the Communist Party or trade unions controlled by the Communists.

41.

The expression “direct” tactics is applied more specially to the activity of the party in a situation which suggests to it that it should take the independent initiative of an attack on bourgeois power, in order to bring it down or to strike it a blow which will gravely weaken it. The party, in order to be able to undertake an action of this kind, must have a solid internal organization at its disposal, which will give absolute certainty of strict discipline to the orders of the central leadership. It must, in addition, be able to count on the same discipline from the union forces which it leads, so as to be sure of the support of a broad segment of the masses. It also needs a military type of organization of a certain degree of efficiency, and all the equipment for illegal activity—above all for communications and forms of contact that cannot be checked by the bourgeois government—that will allow it to preserve its leadership of the movement securely in the predictable situation of being outlawed under emergency provisions. But above all, in taking a decision for offensive action upon which may depend the fate of a whole, extremely long labour of preparation, the Communist Party must base itself on a study of the situation which does not just ensure it the discipline of the forces directly organized and led by it;

which does not just encourage it to predict that the links which bind it to the best of the proletarian masses will not break in the struggle; but which gives it confidence that the party's support among the masses and the breadth of the proletariat's participation in the movement will grow progressively in the course of the action, since the order for this will serve to awaken and set in operation tendencies naturally diffused in the deepest layers of the masses.

42.

It will not always be possible for a general movement initiated by the Communist Party for an attempt to overturn bourgeois power to be announced as having this open objective. The directive to engage the struggle may (other than in the case of an exceptional precipitation of revolutionary situations stirring the proletariat) refer to strong points which are something less than the conquest of proletarian power, but which are in part only to be realized through this supreme victory—even though the masses merely see them as immediate and vital demands: objectives which to a limited extent, insofar as they can be realized by a government which is not yet that of the proletarian dictatorship, leave open the possibility of halting the action at a certain point which leaves the level of organization and combativity of the masses intact, if it appears to be impossible to continue the struggle to the end without compromising, through the outcome, the conditions for resuming it effectively in subsequent situations.

43.

It is not even to be excluded that the Communist Party may find it opportune to give the word for an action directly even though it knows that there is no question of arriving at the supreme revolutionary conquest, but only of waging a battle from which the enemy will emerge with his prestige and his organization damaged, and the proletariat materially and

morally strengthened. In such a case, the party will call the masses to struggle by formulating a series of objectives which may either be the actual ones to be achieved, or appear more limited than those which the party proposes to achieve if the struggle is crowned with success. Such objectives, above all in the party's plan of action, must be arranged in progression, so that the attainment of each of them constitutes a position of possible reinforcement through a halt on the path towards successive struggles. It is necessary to avoid as far as possible the desperate tactic of launching oneself into struggle in conditions such that only the supreme triumph of the revolution constitutes the favorable alternative, while in the opposite event there is a certainty of defeat and dispersal of the proletarian forces for a period impossible to foresee. Partial objectives are thus indispensable to maintain safe control over the action, and to formulate them does not conflict with criticism of their specific economic and social content, insofar as the masses might welcome them not as opportunities for struggle which are a means and a preliminary to the final victory, but as ends of intrinsic value with which to be satisfied once they have been won. Naturally, it is always a delicate and terrible problem to fix these goals and limits to action; it is through the exercise of its experience and the selection of its leaders that the party tempers itself for this supreme responsibility.

44.

The party must avoid harboring or spreading the illusion that, in a situation of stagnation of the proletariat's combativity, it is possible to bring about the awakening of the masses for struggle through the simple effect of the example given by a group of brave men launching themselves into combat, and attempting coups de main against bourgeois institutions. The reasons why the proletariat may lift itself out of a situation of depression are to be sought in the real unfolding of the

economic situation; the party's tactics can and must contribute to this process, but with work that is far more profound and continuous than the dramatic deeds of a vanguard hurled into the attack.

45.

The party, however, will use its strength and organization for actions that are properly controlled both in their conception and in their execution, on the part of armed groups, working-class organizations and street-crowds, which have a demonstrative and defensive value in giving the masses concrete proof that it is possible with organization and preparation to confront certain forms of resistance and offensive sallies by the ruling class, whether in the form of terrorist outrages by reactionary armed groups or in the form of police obstruction of given types of proletarian organization and activity. The aim will not be to provoke a general action, but to raise the depressed and demoralized masses up again to the highest level of combativity, with a series of actions designed to reawaken within them sentiments and a need for revolt.

46.

The party will absolutely avoid, in such local actions, any infraction of the internal discipline of the trade-union organisms on the part of the local organs and the militants within them who are members of the Communist Party, since these must never be allowed to break with the national executive bodies led by other parties. For as has already been stated, they must serve as indispensable footholds for winning those bodies to the party. The Communist Party and its members will, however, follow the masses actively and offer them all their help when they respond through a spontaneous impulse to bourgeois provocations, even if they go beyond the limits of discipline to the criteria of inaction and passivity of the

reformist and opportunist union leaders.

47.

In the situation which is characteristic of the moment in which the power of the State is shaken to its foundations, and is about to fall, the Communist Party, amid the full unfurling of its forces and of the agitation of the masses around its banner of maximum demands, will not miss the possibility of influencing moments of unstable equilibrium in the situation by taking advantage of all such forces as may momentarily be acting in harmony with its own independent activity. When it is quite certain that it will win control of the movement as soon as the traditional State organization has collapsed, it can have recourse to transitory and contingent agreements with other movements which have forces at their disposal in the field of struggle—but without raising such alliances to themes of propaganda or slogans addressed by the party to the masses. Success will in any case be the sole yardstick for assessing the correctness of having yielded to such contacts, and for judging what calculations are to be made in this respect. It is not theoretical preconceptions or ethical and aesthetic preoccupations that dictate the tactics of the Communist Party; its entire tactics are dictated solely by the real appropriateness of the means to the end and to the reality of the historical process, applying that dialectical synthesis of doctrine and action which is the patrimony of a movement destined to play the lead role in an immense social renewal, the commander of the great revolutionary war.

VIII. The Italian Communist Party and the Present Moment

48.

The phase, and thus the problem, of the party's formation has now been completely surmounted in Italy. With the Socialist congress of Milan—prior to which, the possibility was not definitively excluded of a substantive modification of the constitutive basis of the Italian Communist Party, through fusion with a left faction of the Socialist Party, which would have assumed the significance of an essential and integrative element—with the Milan Congress and its decisions this possibility has vanished entirely. It now seems evident that only the far-left faction which split away at Livorno could constitute the party's creative nucleus. And it is now equally clear that its normal progressive development will, in future, not proceed through a rapprochement with organized groups splitting off from other political formations; instead, it will proceed solely through individual recruitment of single persons who, as they enter its ranks designed precisely to receive them, will not introduce disorder or changes, but simply greater strength—in numbers, and hence in action.

49.

The party, therefore, freed from the cares inherent in every period of initiation, must devote itself completely to its work of ever more extensive penetration among the masses, establishing and multiplying the linking organs between them and itself. No field of proletarian activity must remain unknown to the Communists: the trade unions, the cooperatives, the savings trusts, must be penetrated ever more deeply—with the establishment of communist groups and their linking together—and won to the party's directives. While the various Aid Committees, for political victims, for Russia, etc., must see the Communists represented and enjoy their collaboration. This, however, is simply because the party must not remain indifferent to any instrument which will put it in closer contact with the proletariat; and because it must take care to satisfy the

latter's contingent necessities. It is never in order to establish lasting relations with other political parties, even subversive ones.

50.

With respect to the latter, the polemics aimed at clarifying their attitude in the eyes of the workers, and at breaking the ambiguity of their programmatic declarations, must continue. Socialists and libertarians pursue the weakening of the proletarian class in two different ways in Italy today: the former with their tactics of submission and disarmament in the face of capitalism's attack; the latter with their struggle against the Republic of Soviets and against the principle of dictatorship of the proletariat, to which they counterpose the empty and theoretical apotheosis of an abstract freedom.

The present Italian situation, characterized by the ever vaster and more complete offensive of the bourgeoisie, daily offers a thousand unhappy documents for our polemics against the anarchists and social democrats, who give manifest proof of their lack of understanding of the moment. For this, rather than representing anything exceptional and transitory, is in reality a natural and predictable stage of development of the capitalistic order: a specific manifestation of the function and purposes of the democratic State.

51.

Today, in Italy, one can perceive a characteristic involution of the State with respect to its mode of functioning. The constitutive period of the bourgeois State, which marked a progressive centralization of all the functions of rule within the organization of a central authority, finds its counterpart and its negation in the present period, in which the stable unity of all powers—previously removed from the arbitrary decision of individuals—now crumbles and scatters. The powers of the State are once again exercised individually by each private

person. And it would no longer even be necessary for the State to place its organs explicitly—though it does so—at the disposal of bourgeois conservation: from the army to the magistrature, from parliament to the functionaries of the executive power. For each of these, in the person of its practitioners, uses its own powers to the same end, in an autonomous and uncontrollable manner.

In order to prevent an unexpected halt in this crisis of dissolution from allowing the State to regain any control over the activity of individuals, the bourgeois class proceeds hastily to the establishment of supplementary organs. These, perfectly in agreement with the statutory organs—when these function according to the explicit desires of conservation—instead counterpose themselves to those organs and replace them whenever they show signs of moving away from the most supine acquiescence (Civil Committees, Defense Committees, etc.).

To invoke, as the social-democrats do, a return to the authority of the State and to respect for the law shows that, even though they do assert that the democratic parliamentary State is a class State, they do not succeed in understanding that precisely for this reason it is today carrying out its essential task—by violating the written laws which were necessary to its progressive consolidation, but which would henceforward damage its conservation.

52. The present Italian situation contains synthetically within itself all the constitutive elements of the coup d'état, even though the external probative fact of the military deed has not occurred. The progressive occurrence of episodes of violence which successively annuls the normal conditions of social life for a whole class of citizens; the superposition of the capricious will of groups and individuals over the dispositions of the written law; the immunity guaranteed to such groups and individuals; and the persecution ordained for their enemies—all

this has produced the same results as would have been produced by a more grandiose and more violent single act, which set more numerous forces in motion simultaneously.

The bourgeois class is perfectly aware of this state of affairs, but its interests require that the outward appearance of a formal democracy should not be destroyed; and that the general economy should not be deeply shaken by a violent change which ultimately would not offer any greater safeguard for its privilege than that which it enjoys today. It is thus probable that divided as it is on its evaluation of the necessity for it, and still being powerful enough to break it, the bourgeois class would oppose a disruptive military putsch motivated almost solely by personal ambitions. No new form of government could have more contempt than the present one for freedom; for rights already won and sanctioned; for the lives of the workers. Only in a further perfecting of the democratic State, rendering it more able to conceal the real substance of the bourgeoisie's dictatorial régime, can it find its goal. This will be achieved with the formation of a social-democratic government.

To invoke, as social democrats do, a return to State authority and to respect of the law indicates that they, though stating that the parliamentary democratic State is a class State, don't get to understand that it is precisely for this reason that it fulfils today its essential duty, by breaking the written laws that were instrumental to its gradual stabilization, but which would today endanger its conservation.

53.

The present Italian situation engenders and brings to fruition precisely this further stage in the martyrdom of the proletariat. Work is proceeding towards this result from two sides: a strong current in the Socialist Party and the left parties of the bourgeoisie are alike testing the ground, in order to find the most favorable spot for a meeting and an alliance. Both, in fact,

motivate their actions solely by the necessity of finding and constructing a defense against destructive fascist violence. And on this terrain they seek the assent of all the subversive parties, demanding an end to polemics and mutual attacks.

If a social-democratic government would have the strength to fight and defeat fascism—which we strongly doubt, both through our theoretical convictions and because of the examples of recent history—and it therefore becomes necessary to prepare a terrain favorable to its formation, this will be all the more easily and rapidly constituted insofar as the Communists continue their present determined and unflagging polemic against the Socialist Party. The communist attack gives the Socialist Party credit in bourgeois eyes, as a target of revolutionary violence and as an impediment and obstacle to the unfurling of the class struggle, and thus makes more probable an agreement and an alliance between them. For it must not be forgotten that left groups of the bourgeoisie began to present socialist collaboration as attainable in Italy from the time that the Livorno split liberated the Socialist Party from any communist current. A quietening down of the struggle between Communists and Socialists would restore the latter to the ostensible, though false, position of being favorable to the doctrine and practice of the Third International; it would thus impede the reinforcement of that trust which is the precondition for creation of the social-democratic bloc.

Hence, the most absolute intransigence towards the subversive parties should be practiced in the field of political struggle, even allowing the perspective—which for us is fallacious—that a change of men in a formally unchanged State could conceivably occur in a sense that would favor the proletariat.

54.

As for fascism, the P.C.I., though considering it as an inevitable

consequence of the régime's development, does not draw the conclusion that an attitude of inert passivity should be taken up with respect to it. To combat fascism does not mean to believe that it is possible to annul one function of bourgeois society without destroying the latter's existence; nor to delude oneself that fascism can be defeated in itself, as an episode cut off and isolated from the overall offensive activity of capitalism. It aims instead at rendering less serious and painful the damage which enemy violence inflicts upon the combative and unyielding spirit of the working class.

55.

The P.C.I. does not exclude but indeed bears in mind the possibility that from the present unstable situation there may arise the opportunity for violent action by a part of the bourgeoisie. Preparing, therefore, a minimum of means necessary to confront and overcome this, it takes up with respect to the problem of direct action an attitude of preparation.

The world crisis of the capitalist economy has had a negative influence on the advance of the proletariat, which has seen its most solid organizations broken. For they had not foreseen the crisis, and hence had not prepared themselves to surmount it victoriously. The party believes that today it is necessary to reconstruct that former solidity, guided by the conviction that in a situation analogous to the one recently traversed, a proletariat solidly organized and led by a revolutionary party could justly go over to the attack. Thus to construct this party and enlarge its influence over the masses; to give its own members coherence, discipline and preparation; to draw behind it ever broader layers of the working class: these are the essential tasks of the Italian Communists, who will accomplish them taking as their norm the theses on the various questions (trade union, agricultural, etc.) which will be approved and

discussed by the present congress.

