We Defend the Italian Left

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Every so often we need to check our own political assumptions in order to critically evaluate our conduct in relation to what is currently going on. We also need to examine the behaviour of those who believe they are the repositories of who-knows-what coherence, with principles and methods that should be common to us all.

At first our aim was limited to a non-formal adherence to Marxist ideology and its correct application, without intending to carry out any restoration of this doctrine. However we found we had to distinguish ourselves from those who translate the thought of Marx and Lenin into idealistic, voluntarist terms as well as those who formulate it in terms of economism and mechanical determinism, following the precepts of positivism rather than revolutionary dialectics. The "Italian Left" has never endorsed the theoretical argument that says the party is **everything** and the proletarian masses **nothing**, precisely because this is based on an erroneous and sterile premise. This premise makes the party not just the advance guard and guide, something that we all agree with, but also sees it as carrying out the revolutionary rupture and exercising the power of the dictatorship, in the first phase of implementing socialism. In other words, not **with** the proletariat but **for** a proletariat which is unable to carry out this task for itself.

For comrades like that the October Revolution is a kind of a bastard, anti-feudal socialist revolution. It is socialist only insofar as it is based on the armed proletariat and a socialist programme. In short, they are talking about a revolution made only by the Bolshevik Party and not by an expression of the Russian proletariat.

But if we recognise the presence of the armed proletariat, it is precisely because the proletariat alone gives social content to revolution, and real substance to the work of its party. The fact that October is a socialist revolution is not just due to the Bolshevik party, it must be said clearly, but to the Russian proletariat, as a historically revolutionary class under the leadership of Lenin's party. It is clear that wherever the proletariat exists, whatever the extent and power of its development as a class, there is also a historical framework, capitalism, even if it is only a capitalist oasis scattered in the ocean of a backward and primarily agricultural economy. In spite of all this it is still capitalism, a capitalism that had already been the tragic protagonist of an imperialist policy in its first

major conflict with the emerging Japanese capitalism, and had had its days of class terror when faced with the spectre of proletarian revolution, in 1905.

The Bolshevik Party had to take on an alliance of the Russian proletariat and the poor peasantry, which was possible then. It was a fortunate moment of a development that had, of necessity, to be Russian and international at the same time, as part of an international socialist revolution that had managed to break the chain of imperialism at its weakest link. There was a clear awareness that victory would not come about unless the Russian example was the first step in the international extension of the revolution. This would allow the development of socialist construction in Russia in line with a rising revolution in the major, more economically developed, European countries, such as England, Germany and France.

The Italian Left always based its fight on these principles, both within the Party and the Third International. Therefore, these recent theoretical contortions on the question of the party and the revolution are for us merely the amateurish exhibitionism of schoolchildren.

All this explains why, following the collapse of the Communist international, these comrades[01], who held posts of responsibility in the Party maintained that there was nothing further to be done for a whole historic period. So they retired to their tents substituting the tasks of revolutionary militancy, even at a personal level, with a facile intellectual coherence and an easy “sedentary” adhesion to the principles of the class struggle which though, continued without them, and against their very theories, first under fascism, then in the hybrid democracy which followed fascism.

It is precisely at the time of reflux of workers' struggles in Italy that these comrades adopted this mentality. They theorised the tactic of pulling in the oars of the boat, the dissolution of the party and a return to the tasks of the fraction, thus breaking up the one internationalist organisation that had proven itself in the fight against Stalinism. In whose interest?

For us the party is forged day by day through the slow and exhausting work of training cadres who cannot just be selected in periods of struggle or violent repression and disillusionment, especially when you are stabbed in the back by the betrayal of your own comrades.

It is not and never has been historically true that the party only emerges in a time of revolutionary assault. On the contrary, it has to be **militantly active** throughout an entire previous historical period before it can reach its fullness as an organ of leadership and revolutionary action.

In this regard, we must mention the ridiculous confusion that has befallen comrades when there have been spontaneous movements of the working masses, especially in the countries of the Soviet bloc. This confusion came to a head with the Hungarian events[02] which some, like the small group of exiles in France, have considered as a provocation of American capitalism. Others, however, have seen Russian armed intervention in defence

of institutions and conquests that, while they were not Communist, were in any case progressive from the capitalist point of view, and therefore should be protected from Western capitalist attack. Finally still others have seen in these events a national anti-Russian front which supposedly includes the armed forces of the “workers' councils”. The relativism that differentiates between one reactionary and another, between Thiers and Stalin, between Stalin and Khrushchev, between a reaction carried out by a parasitic capitalism and that of a progressive capitalism, leads to the same result.

Rather, this is an experience that must be sieved by a Marxist critique to delimit what are undoubtedly predominant, positive class aspects, and also point out the negatives. This separates us from those who seek to transfer to factory bodies which lack political tradition, a complete vision of the fundamental tasks of the class and especially organisational continuity and leadership tasks that belong to the party of the working class.

It has to be said, and we have already said it many times, that the “councils” really are the highest organic expression of the workers' struggle and their revolutionary consciousness, despite the fact that, in the absence of the class party, they can only go as far as insurrection, but not on to socialist revolution.

In short, we reject the conception of the party as an abstract entity that is not tied to the objective possibilities, that is not a living thing nor tested in the changing reality of the struggle. In short, one that does not translate the objectives of the revolutionary struggle into the terms of working class life. Such a party would just be an easy way out, a cultural circle functioning like Thespis' cart[03], in which one lectures whilst other comrades, reduced to the rank of mere cultural helots, nod in agreement.

No, this concept of a party is not that of Lenin who spent all his life among books, in struggle and exile, to prepare the human material without which the international proletariat might not have carried out those October days; if the Bolshevik Revolution is an undeniable historical fact, it is due to the fact that this party was tied to the working class, and the latter to this party, as an inseparable whole, in a time that had become objectively favourable to the revolutionary solution thanks to the collapse of one of the pillars of war and imperialism.

Is it not here, in these issues, that we can see what differentiates Blanquism and Leninism? Needless to say our place, the position of our party, has always been, and remains, on Lenin’s side.

The Party

In line with the historical tradition of the class party, we have considered the problems inherent in its existence, convinced that in raising them we do not immediately solve them, but only make a start in doing so.

The main thing, therefore, is to address the central problem that has been, and is, the subject of our concerns, the existence of the party, or what is the same thing, its cadres, and how to adapt to tasks which change with the situation, whatever its numerical importance, its capacity for influence and the reach of its activity amongst the working masses in the anti-capitalist struggle.

The important thing is that we constantly confirm the precision of our ideas and our critique in events as they happen, monitoring closely the corruption that the class dialectic exercises on the body of those mass parties, which still claim to be socialist, and to help fight this corruption with a relentless and sharp Marxist critique. Above all, we also do this without tactical expedients or administrative solutions, i.e. without compromises, to bring towards the party those who prove to be ready to fight against capitalism and the parties that support it, starting from the premises formulated by Marx, Engels and Lenin.

In this sense, we do not share the mindset of those who will not get their hands dirty. We do not fear, we even seek dialogue with class elements who say they are interested in the problems of socialism and revolution and who want to engage in the hard work of rebuilding the party of the working class, and we are not particularly irritated or disgusted by those comrades who, having put an end to a long, sometimes too long, Stalinist experience have finally broken or intend to break with the party of Togliatti, provided they have a clear awareness of wanting to appropriate the ideology, tactics and discipline of the party of Lenin.

Basically, while in some ways the situation is different, today the same problems are again present, the same concerns about people and currents which emerged in the preparatory phase of the Imola Meeting[04] and the Congress of Livorno, out of which emerged the Communist Party of Italy.

There is no doubt that at that time the Abstentionist Fraction of the Socialist Party, given the impressive theoretical nature of its platform and effectiveness of its local groups at a national level, was the organisation that most actively opposed the political line of the party leadership and could now be considered, in embryo, as a party within the party. However, at the moment of the most acute crisis of the First World War, when the appeal of the experience of the first proletarian state which had emerged out of the October Revolution was strongest, Bordiga was fully aware that, though a specifically revolutionary party was needed the chances of success of the Abstentionist Fraction to become a party of the working class were limited. Although the split had taken place at the Congress of Bologna (1919), the Abstentionist Fraction, as such, could not objectively lead a party appropriate to the situation and the pressing tasks of the revolution. Given that the Abstentionist Fraction split had been possible at Bologna, not to have carried it out would have been a mistake of such proportions that would have forever compromised the theoretical orientation of the fraction, as well as its organisation and the name of its

biggest promoter.

This was why Imola was a compromise meeting, a concrete anticipation of the Gramscian “historic bloc” of the left tendencies in the Socialist Party, in short, a centre where currents converged from diverse backgrounds, differing from each other on many issues, some critical. The Abstentionist Fraction was not really the focal point of convergence of these forces, even if it was its most important nucleus. The main focus was Lenin’s ideas and the attraction of the October Revolution and the organisational needs of the Communist International.

Moreover, this did not contradict the Abstentionist Fraction’s thinking but was in perfect harmony with its own decisions. In this connection we should remember the third part of the motion that concluded the National Conference of the Fraction in Florence (8-9 May, 1920), which mandated the Central Committee to

> convene, immediately after the International Congress, the Congress establishing the Communist Party, inviting all groups that fall within the field of the communist programme to adhere, both within and outside the Italian Socialist Party.

But what happened was that soon after, at Imola and Livorno, this tactical policy was given a narrower theoretical-organisational interpretation.

These are the groups and currents which participated as equals in the Congress of Imola and formed the skeleton of the party at Livorno:

1) The already mentioned Abstentionist Fraction which deserves to be studied separately, given the positive factor it represented in this preparatory phase of the party and also given the negative factor of its eclecticism when it came to formulating and implementing its thesis on absententionism on the terrain of political activity. In the pre-Livorno phase, which was not very different from the current period, the essential problem was the formation of the revolutionary party and not abstentionism, and it was not historically possible to form this party on a programmatic basis in which the ideology of abstention had a predominant role.

2) The group L'Ordine Nuovo (The New Order). Given its social and especially intellectual composition, this group already anticipated a trend which would emerge later, giving a key role to intellectuals rather than workers, both in the factories and in the broader arena of revolutionary action. Influenced by the neo-idealism that prevailed at the time in the world of bourgeois culture, this group tended to Marxism, but a Marxism riddled with an idealism that contradicted the traditional schemes of socialism and the socialist left itself.

Indeed, while the Left Fraction thought that the revolution is subordinate to the existence of a party and tried to conquer its governing bodies to impart revolutionary will and leadership, continuing the traditional line of the class party, the Ordinovists thought

less about the fundamental role of the party and focused their attention on the capitalist factory, regarding it as “the necessary form of working class political organisation, the ‘territory’ of workers' opposition.” For these comrades, unlike the party and the union, the council

> does not develop arithmetically, but morphologically, and tends, in its most developed forms, to promote the proletarian conquest of the productive and exchange apparatus created by capitalism for its own benefit.
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> The need for these new powers [the organisation of councils] to immediately flourish, irresistibly driving the great working masses, will cause a violent clash between the two classes in the course of which the proletarian dictatorship will prevail. If the foundations of the revolutionary process are not laid in the midst of proletarian life, the revolution will be reduced to a sterile voluntarist appeal.

The differences between these two currents focused on this idea: party and councils; the party has its historical setting in the territorial structure and political-administrative organs that capitalist development provides, while the councils embody the vital breath, the rhythm of progress of communist society. The highest form of consciousness of the proletariat condenses in the party, its doctrine and the theory of class revolution, whilst in the councils, worker solidarity

> is embodied even in the smallest details of industrial production, it is an organic whole, a homogeneous and compact system affirming its sovereignty, power and historical freedom.

We conclude, therefore, that these two currents, the most important in the Communist Party, had in common the perspective of the final outcome of revolutionary action, but they could not be further apart in terms of their original impulses, their methods, and even their understanding of Marxism: some professed orthodoxy and integrity, others were leaning towards syndicalist conceptions of the De Leonist kind[05], which even today attract workerist trends.

The circle of theoretical and tactical confusion of the groups that came together at the meeting of Imola was later expanded, if we take into account the minority currents and individual members, ranging from the Graziadei-Marabini[06] formation through the electoral maximalism of many actual or aspiring deputies, to young revolutionary combatants solidly anchored to revolutionary Marxism but not in any particular school or tendency.

We will have to come back to the experience of Imola when faced with the issue of rebuilding the party, since parliamentary opportunism, the corruption of those who sought to do well for themselves and the fact that opposing class interests predominated

within the party ended up draining the struggle of its strength and clouded its aims after corrupting its ideological heritage. The reasons for the limits, shortcomings and contradictions that accompanied the formation of the Communist Party of Italy can only be understood by basing them on this critique.

Will these negative outcomes be avoided in the future?

Our view is that, rather than the organisational, statutory provisions and the dissolution of groups as such, we should stress the dissolution of their ideology, whenever they are alien to Marxism, to achieve unity not only in the purely formal organisational aspects (dissolution of groups, individual membership, candidatures, etc.), but also regarding the unconditional and comprehensive adhesion to a theoretical-practical platform from which emanates the conscious discipline that unites forces, gradually resolves the contradictions and ensures continuity of the revolutionary struggle. And so far we have been consistent to this critical orientation, which has been able to mature among us thanks to the experience we passed through during the formation of the Party at Livorno.

Centralised Party, Yes – Centralism Over the Party, No!

We should first address the issue of centralism which the "Programmists" have never been able to define in an "organic" way. Linked as it is to the interpretation of a given historical experience, it simply cannot be reduced to formal and scholastic abstractions.

These muddle-headed "left communists" argue thus: in Lenin's International, there were no "pure communist parties" so the use of the democratic mechanism was inextricably linked to what existed at that particular historical time. It is therefore obvious that an International unlike the Third, which consists of "pure communist parties", should be identified by a different internal mechanism and not by democratic centralism, which ceased to be operative with the death of Lenin. What happened after that, in the Stalinist era, is not covered in their analysis because it had nothing to do with the working class and the objectives of the revolution.

But to suppose, as the "Programmists" do, an organisation in a state of chemical purity, an international of "pure Communist parties" as opposed to that of Lenin made of "impure parties", is playing with a metaphysical paradox. Instead of formulating the problems of a whole series of historical events through the lenses of dialectical materialism, they adopt a formal mechanistic calculation, which tends to get lost in the fog of the most obsolete idealism.

We can tell these comrades in all certainty that there will be no international of pure communist parties, but only an international that will reflect within it the good and the evil, the contradictions and absurdity, of a society divided into classes, themselves torn by

various layers of interest, social conditions, culture, etc. The assumption of communist parties in a pure state with an equally pure world organisation, even as a simple aspiration, is not the result of any serious investigation based on Marxism. It strangely resembles a certain mysticism which had its heyday in the twenty years of fascism.

Lenin's International certainly had its weaknesses, due to the immaturity of the historical period that followed the collapse of the Second International and the crisis then afflicting the capitalist world. Every proletarian organisation reproduces, though in a more advanced way, and on an inversely proportional scale, the characteristics of the historical period in which it was formed. And it is certain that the negative aspects present in the Third International will be present, although differently articulated in future international organisations, as amply proved by the objective conditions in which the various Left Communist groupings, who today claim the right to make a contribution to the reconstruction of the international proletarian party, are operating. Amongst these groups, the one that suffers most from intolerance and crises is the Bordigist "Communist Programme" where the dynamics of democratic centralism work more deeply, as seen in the explosive cycle of its internal contradictions. Today, for polemical convenience, the "Programmists" would like to pass off the Third International as made up of "impure" parties. But here's how Bordiga previously judged Lenin's International, in clear contradiction with the current positions.

> After restoring proletarian theory, the practical work of the Third International towered over the divisions raised by opportunists of all countries in banning from the ranks of the world's vanguard all reformists, social democrats, and centrists of all types. This renewal took place in all the old parties and is the foundation of the new revolutionary party of the proletariat. Lenin guided with an iron hand the difficult task of dispelling all confusions and weaknesses.

The real strength of these Bordigists lies in their inconsistency!

How can this group, with its structure of an aristocratic and intellectual elite, with a filtered and distilled Marxism, developed in backrooms rather than in the storm of class struggle, contest the accuracy of what we are saying? So then, how can we resolve, with Leninist integrity, the debate over the two faces of centralism? In the phase of imperialist domination and proletarian revolution no organisation of the revolutionary party can conceivably exist which is not based on a highly centralised structure. Perhaps this is the feature that most dramatically distinguishes it from parliamentary parties. If centralism is therefore an imperative requirement imposed by class conflict, the attributes of "democratic" and "organic" define the subjective terms of a polemical distinction that has never affected the substance of this centralisation. Who can say with absolute precision how far bodies involved in this centralisation make use of the tools of democracy (active

participation and active control of the rank and file) and how far the centres of power are based on an authoritarian regime in the physical person of a leader, and through him, to the Central Committee?

For the Bordigists of “Programma” the problem is posed in terms that come from the counter-revolutionary practice of Stalinism. This is how they tried, finally, to clarify their extraordinary theory that goes under the name of “organic centralism”. We have reproduced it above in the same words in which it was formulated.

But we need to clarify once and for all the relationship that has to exist between the centre and the base so that the party is structured and operates according to Leninist principles. An ongoing dialectical relationship exists between the members and the party centre. It is obviously on the basis of that relationship, in the context of theoretical and political platform already agreed that the party leadership develops its tactical action. Lenin never advocated, either in theory or in his political actions, any other way in which the organisation could act. And how can we understand the organisational formula of a Central Committee or of a leader who relies only on himself, on his capacity as related to a “set” of already planned possible moves (our emphasis) in relation to no less foreseen outcomes whilst the “so-called membership can usefully be ordered to perform actions indicated by the leadership?”

It simply means the same as the policy of the Central Committee under Stalin, once all working class elements had been eliminated from the dictatorship of the proletariat. It means a deep and irreparable rupture between the members of the party and its directing centre and the resulting slide into the open reconstruction of capitalism. It also means that the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party and Stalin himself was tied to a “set” of possible moves that were perfectly planned in advance, that would be carried out with equal accuracy, in terms, and in a reality, we all know. What we are denouncing are the disastrous consequences which occur in a supposedly revolutionary party when its central organ, as a body, operates outside of the bounds and control of the organisation’s membership.

But closer to our experience, we have to denounce precisely those who postulate, or allow to be postulated, this laughable distinction between a political membership required only to carry out acts indicated by the centre and a centre that is entrusted with such powers of foresight and divination that it does not offer us a very encouraging sight. And here we are dealing with comrades who in terms of preparation and long militancy are highly skilled and command the respect and confidence of the whole party.

Was the leadership of the Communist Party of Italy (PCd'I), through Bordiga’s declarations to the Comintern, perhaps not bound to a set of possible options that denied the possibility of Fascism’s rise to power at the very time when it was carrying out the March on Rome? And was this glaring error of perspective not “in correspondence with the no less foreseeable outcome” of jeopardising the party with the tactic of the offensive

for the offensive's sake?

And who prepared a "scientific" analysis of the Russian economy defining the October Revolution as anti-feudal revolution after having celebrated it as a socialist? Had Bordiga not affirmed (in *Lenin nel cammino della rivoluzione* [*Lenin on the Path of Revolution*]): "The revolution will be made in Russia, by and for the working class itself "? And further: "Soviet power was victorious, the dictatorship of the proletariat predicted by Marx, made its tremendous entrance onto the stage of history"?

How should we judge someone who was the most prominent exponent of the party and of "left-wing communism" who refused to become a "militant" in the Internationalist Communist Party at the time of its formation, as he considered it a mistake to fight directly against "the national communist party" (the PCI)[07] with the excuse that the workers were in the party of Togliatti? Then, when our split occurred, agreed to enter the PCd'I provided that the rump remained true to him, politically neutered and reduced to a sect of parrots of not always digested formulae?

What was his contribution to the development of a critical examination of the nature of the Second World War and the role played by Russia as a major imperialist player, when he rejected our definition of state capitalism to speculate about Russia as a spurious form of "industrial state"?

There are many more questions but we have said enough to show how ill-founded, precarious and objectively dangerous is his claim to assign to the Central Committee and this or that person, whatever their esteem, or skills of divination, the tasks of arbitrarily developing our theory, and functions of leadership, outside of and above, the party as a whole.

Lenin, at his most personal and most decisive, by which we mean the Lenin of the "April Theses" had a desperate determination to "go to the sailors", beyond the formal organisation of the Bolshevik Party's Central Committee whose positions which were based on misunderstanding and compromise. Lenin was not operating on organic or even democratic centralism here, but acting as the chief pillar of the coming revolution, the only one who had understood and endorsed the demands of the working class and this is because his feet were firmly on a class terrain, because he thought and worked in class terms, and for the class, and had a very lively sense of history which teaches us that revolution loves action and hates cowards who turn up a day late.

In this constant dialectical relationship between the membership and leadership of the party, in this necessary integration of freedom and authority, lies the solution of a problem to which professional objectors have perhaps paid too much attention.

Any revolutionary party which is not a mere abstraction has to address the problems of the class struggle in a historical climate in which violence and unchallenged authority dominates. In order to increasingly become a living instrument of combat it can only be organised around the most iron unity. Its ranks therefore have to be closed against the

general thrust of the counter-revolution. The revolutionary party does not ape bourgeois parties, but obeys the need to adapt its organisational structure to the objective condition of the revolutionary struggle.

The elementary tactical principle of the revolutionary party in action, is that it must take into account the characteristics of the terrain on which it works and that its members are adequately prepared for their tasks. We do not believe there needs to be disagreements on the question of centralism. These only begin when we talk in "democratic" or "organic" terms. The use, or worse, the abuse, of the term "organic" can lead to forms of authoritarian degeneration which break the dialectical relationship that must exist between the leadership and the members. The experience of Lenin is still valid, and it is vital to be able to fuse together, in a single vision, the seeming contradiction between "democratic" and "organic" centralism.

"Circles" and the Revolutionary Party

After clarifying the party's traditional thinking concerning the problem of centralism, a problem that sophists, pedants and obscurantists place at the centre of a debate that has neither head nor tail which reduces the question to a futile bar-room debate about whether centralism should be "democratic" or "organic", we think that centralism, understood and practiced by Lenin, is the best way to run a revolutionary party called upon to solve the onerous task of organisation and handling the most irrational and violent events, full of inexorable, unknown, unforeseen factors, namely, the revolutionary conquest of capitalist power, which is the most skilled and ruthless organiser of violence, whether police or military, that history has ever known.

But a revolutionary party, which for the most part should only be made up of worker cadres selected in the class struggle, can only be a powerful instrument of revolutionary action to the extent that its iron unity resolves the problem of permanent interdependence between the top and the bottom of the organisation, namely to the extent that the constant relationship between freedom and discipline lives and acts in the collective consciousness of the party.

And we come to another aspect of the debate that Programma started in such a clumsy and thoughtless manner: that of the "circles", in which today the chaotic and scattered anti-Stalinist left seems to be enclosed and almost lost. We use the adjective "anti-Stalinist" and not "revolutionary" because obviously not all anti-Stalinists are revolutionary, but only in certain cases. To what and whom do these circles refer? What are they really? What are the analogies with the historical phase in which circles were developed, with the period of the old *Iskra*?[08] Are there now objective conditions in place that allow these circles, assuming that they exist, to be a factor in the reconstruction of the revolutionary party, even if not a determinant factor? It is always a pleasure, for its

freshness and because there is always something new there, to look back to the events that preceded the Second Congress, in the years of preparation (1890-1900). The work of ideological, political and organisational delimitation of the different organisations which later went to make up the party had to be carried out then, following the plan drawn up by the old *Iskra*. Lenin also thought it was the party's historical tendency that made (keep in mind that this happened two or three years before 1905, the year of the first revolution) the convergence of numerous groups so important, which although they did not have a common platform, did at least have a minimal agreement that could be used as an indispensable bond. This is how Lenin concretised the essential task of that Congress[09]:

> To create a true party founded on the ideological and organisational principles formulated and developed by *Iskra*. The three years of *Iskra*'s activity and the fact of having been recognised by most of the committees, obliges the Congress to work in that direction.
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> *Iskra*'s programme and tendency should become the programme and the tendency of the party; *Iskra*'s plans on organisational issues should be sanctioned in the party's organisational statutes. But it is clear that this will have to be fought for: the representation for Congress ensured the presence of organisations that had fought resolutely against *Iskra* (the Bund and *Rabocheye Dyelo*)[10] and others who, while recognising *Iskra* as the governing body, actually pursued their own plans and were distinguished by their instability in the realm of principles (the group "Youzhny Rabotchi"[11] and delegates of some committees who joined them). Under these conditions, Congress could only become the arena for the victory of the *Iskra* trend.

And when addressing the challenge of unifying forces that were not homogeneous, following the plans of *Iskra*, Lenin knew he had to have the support of external groups as well as those representing *Iskra* itself, as the Second Congress was to make clear.

The debate, or rather, the altercation between all these tendencies arose over certain articles of the statutes, and not by chance. And this certainly did not happen because they posed a different way of solving apparently formal, purely organisational problems, but actually arose due to the political-ideological character of the statutes, intended to exclude, or rather, make it impossible to coexist in the same organisation, those forces perhaps seeking unity in good faith, but which did not conceive of, or want, the party as a concrete and irreplaceable instrument for the class and its revolutionary leadership.

Given that all this happened in the historical climate of the Second International where parliamentary democratic guidelines dominated, the commitment to legal struggle is not surprising, the strange thing is that we are still not clear that, as the experience of Lenin in the old *Iskra* shows, the solution to the party's organisational thesis involves having a political intuition deep enough to realise that the development of the revolution occurred

in the context of an objectively conservative reality.

The clash between the militant activity of Lenin, and Plekhanov, Martov and Axelrod who were seeking a purely formal party unity (circles, according to them had "historical greatness", and had to continue to enjoy a permanent and active presence within the party), was because they expected that this delimitation of the party would act like a centrifugal force on the circles. Indeed, in the October Revolution, these forces would be on the other side of the class barricade.

The experience we went through in Italy is no less full of lessons, in the phase prior to the formation of the party. At both the Imola meeting, and the Congress of Livorno, overcoming the groups that could be defined generally as of the left provoked quite harsh and controversial internal disagreements, but the fact is that the agreement around unity developed with an ease inversely proportional to its sincerity.

It is true that what most contributed to make this possible was the attractiveness of the October Revolution, but one must take into account that, in Imola, no group played nor could play the role *Iskra* played in the Second Congress. Neither Ordinovists nor abstainers, nor pro-Communist maximalists ever claimed that "their programme and their tendency had to become the programme and tendency of the Party of Livorno". That is how far the domination of the politics of the Centre of the International extended.

What was missing in 1921 was a platform to serve as an effective central pole as did *Iskra* in the years 1890-1900.

The comic, yet at the same time sad, moment at the Congress came when the representative of the abstentionists solemnly declared the fraction dissolved and retracted its main demand, abstentionism, to allay the suspicions and ill-concealed anger of the maximalist representatives, expressed with eloquence by Luigi Salvatori during the proceedings. Another of the comic and pitiful moments at Imola was the sacrifice of Ordinovism on the altar of the party that was about to be born.

All this happened in a situation in which the real possibilities for revolution were increasing, but what would happen later when the reflux of the revolutionary wave led it to break on the wall of the counter-revolution? What would happen was what actually happened in 1924, when Gramsci and Togliatti grew their old horns back, namely, the original vices of immediatism and idealism upon which the experience of L'Ordine Nuovo in Turin was based. These were blunt weapons but, according to them, they were the most suitable for expressing the ideas and methods of the workers' struggle. They were the best suited to their changing conditions, when a policy of compromises and contingent commitments substituted the perspective of uninterrupted revolution and the catastrophic outcome of the class conflict; when, in short, it was time to be legalistic, in and in favour of the republican constitution, and all because with the apparent and transitory consolidation of capitalism it seemed that democracy was "untouchable", i.e. not deteriorating over time nor was it subject to the changing and conflicting vicissitudes

of capital.

In light of this double experience, we can now proceed to examine the current situation, in which the dispersion of the groups of the communist left is usually due to causes profoundly different to those we have discussed above, although the problem in the background is always the same, namely the rebuilding of a party capable of facing the demands of the revolutionary struggle.

But let's look at the true nature of these groups, paying more attention to their ideological-political features rather than their numbers. It is disconcerting to note that all claim that we need a party and all claim to be the party in embryo. In this sense, we can say that in the present situation in terms of the stature of men, their political foresight and sense of responsibility, the revolutionary minority is well below the experience of the old *Iskra* and even the Imola meeting.

If we cannot establish a criterion that differentiates the Communist left groups, then it would be impossible to justify and politically myopic not to consider objective factors which confer historical legitimacy on the theoretical elaboration of a sustained and consistent opposition to any policy of compromise and capitulation, as well as the building of an organisational base of selected cadres. We are part of the history of the workers' movement under the name of "communist left". The entire Internationalist Communist Party was born within this movement, having been the left opposition in the Socialist Party up until the Livorno Congress, the majority in the Communist Party of Italy until the Bolshevisation[12] of the party, after which it become the opposition until the outbreak of the Second World War. It organised itself as a Fraction in France and Belgium in 1928, in constant touch with the Internal Centre, which in 1945 resolved to organise itself as a party, following a class line which had never deviated nor broken through all these years, despite the twin attacks of the traditional class enemy and the new reactionary forces of Stalinism. And it is here, in a position where it has not always been easy to work but which nevertheless is always fertile, where one has to look for the ideas, motives, energies and experiences of new people, to get down to work resolutely on the enormous task of rebuilding the revolutionary party, with the prestige and moral and political authority this involves.

Besides the communist internationalists, who are responsible for this task not through natural or divine right or birthright, nor because they are deemed *primus inter pares*, there are other groups that have recently emerged from the crisis within the PCI, whose good faith or ability is not in question. But this is not enough to be a militant revolutionary, if one does not also prove capable of facing and successfully carrying out critical re-examination of one's political views in regard to the great problems such as the class nature of the Soviet state and the nature of its economic and political organisation, the nature of war in general and in particular colonial wars in the historic imperialist phase of financial capital. Finally you have to decide whether to accept the revolutionary

strategy which means that in Russia, in China and in democratic countries directly or indirectly allied to these centres of power, the full extent of the problem of the conquest of power is raised. We have to destroy the structures of the capitalist commodity economy upon which the rising power of state capitalism is being erected.

The rise of these fractions can be attributed almost exclusively to the process of decomposition of the first workers' state, which has spawned a new opportunism which considers state capitalism in Russia as a phase required in the construction of socialism, or rather, as a necessary stage of the lower stage of socialism.

Those who do not take this into account will not understand what is common to the experience of Lenin's old *Iskra*, which unfolded in the historic setting of the Second International, and the current situation in which the historical problem of the revolutionary party is similarly up against huge barriers, sometimes insurmountable, on a proletarian terrain largely shaped by Stalinism which nurtures those bad mushrooms who call themselves Trotskyists, Bordigists or Maoists. They all claim to embody the ideology of the revolution, but actually diminish the political heritage of the entire proletariat to their own intellectual level, their own vanity, if not their own personal gain.

Therefore, these differences that separate the groups of the historical minority that claim to be internationalist are not insignificant from those who tend to merge into a single organisation and who generally originate from the chronic crisis of the PCI, although they declare themselves communist internationalists. The former recognise the need for a class break with PCI ideology and politics which have raged and still rage, in our country, while the latter, the Trotskyists, Maoists, pro-Chinese activists, must demonstrate with their theoretical contribution and political activity that they have broken all ties with opportunism.

And really in our analysis we are most interested in the former, the groups of the historical minority.

Notes

[01]. Damen means Bordiga here. Bordiga retired from political activity and refused all contact from 1926-45.

[02]. This refers to the Hungarian workers rising against Stalinism in 1956, in which "workers' councils" made their appearance before the movement was crushed by Russian tanks.

[03]. Although he had no university degree, Damen was a notable classicist so his writings are dotted with such references. Thespis was named by several sources, including Aristotle, as the first actor (i.e. one who took the identity of another). He sang the main part in dithyrambs whilst the chorus supported him ("helots" being slaves). He toured with all his costumes and props in a wagon hence the reference here. He gives us the

name "thespian" for an actor.

[04]. National Conference of the Communist Fraction of the PSI, November 1920.

[05]. Daniel De Leon (1852-1914). He played a prominent role in the foundation of the Socialist Workers' Party of America (SLP) and Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

[06]. Antonio Graziadei (1873-1953). He became a PCd'I executive member when Bordiga was arrested in February 1923 and before Bolshevisation consolidated the future group of Stalinists around Gramsci.

Anselm Marabini (1865-1948). He was an old maximalist who in 1921 formed part of the Central Committee of the PCd'I.

[07]. The Italian Communist Party (PCI) was formed under the leadership of Togliatti as a completely Stalinist party after the war. It dropped the old name of the Communist Party of Italy (PCd'I) as a symbol that it had abandoned any internationalist pretensions.

[08]. *Iskra* (*The Spark*) was founded by Lenin in 1900 as a Marxist underground newspaper throughout Russia. Later, at the Second Congress of the RSDLP (Russian Social Democratic Labour Party), it became the organ of the party, under the leadership of Lenin, Julius Martov and Georgi Plekhanov. Lenin left the editorship in 1903, when Iskra became the organ of the Menshevik trend.

[09]. The Second Congress of the RSDLP, held between London and Brussels in 1903, confirmed the support of the party majority for the left wing led by Lenin, who conceived the party as the political vanguard, strictly disciplined and composed of professional revolutionaries, a scheme that suited existing conditions in Tsarist Russia.

[10]. *Rabocheye Dyelo* (The Cause of Labour) was published between 1889 and 1902. It adopted intermediate positions between economism and revolutionary social democracy. Lenin wrote in 1902: "*Rabocheye Dyelo* has become particularly important, historically if you will, as it expresses in the most clear and complete manner, not coherent economism, but the confusion and hesitation that characterise an entire period of the history of Russian Social Democracy."

[11]. The newspaper *Youzhny Rabotchi* (The Worker of the South), published clandestinely between 1900 and 1903, was led by a group that, while condemning terrorism and economism and claiming that a mass revolutionary movement was required, proposed building the party based on the regional Social Democrats unions. At the Second Congress of 1903 it adopted a centrist position.

[12]. The campaign for "Bolshevisation", launched by the Communist International leaders in the years 1924-1925 with the purpose of subjecting all national sections to the discipline and directives of Moscow, replaced the territorial organisation which until then the PCd'I maintained with factory cells. The Left, with Bordiga, condemned this "policy of manoeuvring and expedients" which actually went so far as to deny the centralisation of the communist parties. Indeed, the cells drowned internal party life by trapping the

workers within the narrow confines of the factory, reinforcing the bureaucratic power of party officials divided into watertight compartments. Particularism and individualism were strengthened and corporatism and workerism ended up breaking the organic unity of the party while the Comintern gave intellectuals a monopoly of political authority. See also Footnote 62 [footnote 1 of Crisis of Bordigism? Maybe, But Not a Crisis of the Italian Left -- MIA].

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