Programme Communiste - On Anton Pannekoek: Marxism versus Idealism or the Party versus Sects

In the twentieth century, each wave of reformist degeneration of the class party gave rise to a renaissance of the anarchist movement in various forms. It was in the political struggle against these two symmetrical deviations of the proletarian movement that the Marxist party soaked and reconstituted itself.

Thus the first manifestations of opportunistic leprosy in the 2nd International provoked a revolutionary trade unionist reaction. While fighting the reformism and parliamentary cretinism that were at the origin of this deviation, the Marxist Left of the Italian Socialist Party had to lead an uninterrupted struggle against it.

The "German left" appeared in reaction to the bankruptcy of the 2nd International on positions quite different from those of Lenin and the nascent Communist International which, while leading a hard political and military fight against world imperialism and its social-patriotic, social-opportunist and centrist lackeys, had to cross swords with it.

If not only Lenin, but all the truly Marxist forces were concerned in 1920 to re-establish the just Marxist doctrine against the deformations that this "left" put them through, it is because they were aware that the world party of the proletariat cannot fulfil the tasks to which it is called if it is itself the result of a haggling over principles.

But the Marxist left having been defeated in the communist international itself, this in turn underwent an involution that could not fail to provoke a start of the so-called "left", whose main characteristic is the rejection of the party organ and the dictatorship of the proletariat, if not in words, at least in their Marxist sense, politically, and doctrinally, idealism.

Today, in the midst of counter-revolution, it is normal for anarchising tendencies to abound. All claiming more or less to be from that theoretician of the German left that was Anton Pannekoek, they want to marry (most often without realizing it) anarchism and Marxism, idealism and dialectical materialism. This is why this work aims to demonstrate the irreducible opposition that generally separates Marxist materialism from idealism, however "revolutionary" it may be in words, and in particular, the Italian Marxist left from which our party has emerged, and the so-called "German lefts".

Clarity on these issues is indeed a vital necessity to restore the international communist party whose reflexes must be formed and perfected through theoretical criticism and political battle long before social forces clash again.

Doctrinal Bases of Revolutionary Idealism

The German "left" current and its theorist Pannekoek have always declared their adherence to the materialist conception of history.

It is true that they have not contested the Marxist vision according to which the evolution of human society is reduced to the succession of various modes of production, capitalism itself being historically transient, the fundamental laws and tendencies of society condemning it one day to make way for a superior mode of production, through a revolution of the oppressed class.
It is not enough, however, to characterize historical materialism: it is not, in fact, Marxism that discovered classes and class struggle, first of all; then, even social democracy has admitted, at least in words, the transitory character of capitalism.

What Marxism has discovered through its analysis of the dynamics of modes of production is the materialistic vision of the class struggle and its agents (parties and states), and it is this vision that has enabled it to define exactly the characteristics of the revolutionary transition from capitalism to socialism.

**The Idealist Vision of Class Struggle**

For Pannekoek, "the transformation of capitalism into communism is linked to the action of two forces, one of which proceeds from the other, a material force and a spiritual force. The development of the economy makes it possible to understand the real course of things and this, in turn, generates a revolutionary will".\(^1\)

According to this school, capitalism makes possible the formation of a socialist will and consciousness of the masses that would be at the base of the revolutionary workers movement. Already in the controversy that opposed him to Kautsky in 1912, the K.A.P.D. theoretician said:

"The organization of the proletariat (...) must not be confused with the form of its organizations and associations of the present time (...) The nature of this organization (of the proletariat in class, N.D.L.R.) is something spiritual, it is the total transformation of the mentality of the proletarian (bolded by the author)."\(^2\)

From these premises, Pannekoek naturally draws the conclusion that social revolution is ripe when the working masses have reached a high development of socialist consciousness. One of the conditions of the revolution would be the "revolution of ideas":

"A revolution is always accompanied by a profound upheaval of ideas in the masses; it thus creates its precondition, which, in turn, conditions it (...)".\(^3\)

According to Pannekoek, for the revolution to take place "it is necessary that the proletariat, the immense masses, clearly discern the way and the goal"\(^4\) and it is in a perfect doctrinal continuity that the author, taking up this same question after the victory of Stalinism, will affirm:

"[The communist revolution] cannot, however, be reached by an ignorant mass. (...) This requires that the workers themselves, the whole class, understand the conditions, the ways and the means of their struggle (...)".\(^5\)

Turning the revolution into a problem of conscience, Pannekoek and the entire German "left" resolutely place themselves on the field of idealism. Whether this mass consciousness is the result of class struggle does not change the question. It is the Marxist Plekhanov who rightly says so:

"But how can we describe the idea of the history of men who, while affirming that the economic factor prevails in social life, at the same time remain convinced that the said factor, i.e. the economy of

\(^{1}\) All quotations from Pannekoek are taken - with express exceptions - from "Pannekoek et les conseils ouvriers", EDI, Paris, 1969. We will give the date of the article cited and the page concerned: 1920, page 163.


\(^{5}\) «Lénine philosophe», page 109, Editions Spartacus.
society, is in turn the fruit of human conceptions and knowledge? It cannot be described otherwise than as idealist. And as a result, materialism is not enough to exclude idealism from history. (...) We say: it is not enough to exclude idealism; it should be said: perhaps, and until today most often, has been a simple variety of idealism."6

Like the old bourgeois democracy, Pannekoek claims that the fate of the proletariat and, more generally, of society, is determined by the degree of education and awareness of the social problems of the masses. "Educate yourself and your fate will change!" they say. The nuance between the two lies in the type of education they would need: bourgeois for the former, socialist for the latter. Pannekoek and the German "left" school claim to be "extremist" because for them "the socialist enlightenment of the masses" would be the result of the class struggle they call for. We are thus brought back to struggle (in the year of grace 1972!) against the modern variants of the neo-Hegelian left and their heirs the anarchists.

To make the socialist education of the masses a prerequisite for revolution is to deny revolution itself, because this so-called education is impossible in a capitalist regime.

Against the neo-Hegelians, profoundly educationalists, Marx affirmed:

"The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas... The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships"7

The destruction of bourgeois ideology among the working masses presupposes that the capitalist relations of production have already been destroyed, that the means of both material and intellectual production have already been wrested from the capitalist class, that the communist revolution has already defeated. Socialist consciousness will be the dominant consciousness when the new material relations of socialist production are established, and it is then that men can consciously make their history. (Engels).

From the doctrinal point of view, the entire German "left" is dependent on bourgeois ideology and, in particular, on social-democratic doctrine. It shares with the latter the democratic and culturalist vision of the revolution and the workers movement.

Kautsky, the chief marxologist of social democracy, said:

"(...) The march of progress suddenly becomes rapid in times of revolutionary effervescence. It is with incredible speed that the great mass of the population becomes educated and acquires a clear conception of its class interests."8


The birth of the communist movement and its long and more than a century old struggle against social-democratic and libertarian degeneration, is indissolubly linked to the struggle against culturalism as it would be easy to demonstrate with the examples of Marx and Engels against left-wing neo-Hegelians and against anarchism or that of Lenin against economism.

And the Italian Marxist Left asserted itself historically by waging, from 1912 onwards, one of its great battles against both "proletarian" and bourgeois culturalism, which it would resume in 1922 in "The Democratic Principle" and, more than twenty years later - after counter-revolution had dragged the workers movement into the quagmire of parliamentary democracy - in "Force, violence, dictatorship in the class struggle". It will state that:
In all democratic theories of political struggle it is a question of making man (for the bourgeois) or the worker (for the "humanist socialists") capable of making his own history. Social forces and political forces, even collective ones, are only the sum of individual sovereign wills. And, as it should be today, the last disease of the workers movement, Stalinism, blames the "ignorance of the masses" for the continuous defeats of the working class.

For all these ideologues, idealists, be they German social democrats or "leftists", the political struggle, the revolution and the "revolt" are identified with the struggle for the IDEA which must win, for the socialist idea; for them, revolution takes place when the masses consciously struggle for the realization of communist society, when their immediate objective is socialism. For Marxist materialism, revolution has nothing to do with these dreams of bourgeois enlightenment tinged with socialism. For it, revolution is a material and physical fact, it is the result of the clashes between the classes pushed to the struggle by the antagonism between the productive forces and the relations of production:

"We can even state that a revolution is truly mature when the actual physical fact of the inadequacy of the systems of production places these systems into conflict even with the material interests of a large section of the privileged class itself. (...) Economic necessity unites and binds the pressure and energy of all those who are oppressed and suffocated by the forms of a given productive system. The oppressed react, they fight, they hurl themselves against these limits (...)."

"For decades we have been reproached for wanting a revolution carried out by those who are unconscious."

"We could answer that provided that the revolution sweeps away the mass of horrors created by the bourgeois regime, and provided that the terrible encirclement of the productive masses by bourgeois...

"The intellectual development of the worker is the direct consequence of his economic condition. That is why socialism is interested in the intellectual emancipation of the worker alongside his economic emancipation, but always considering that the former is a consequence of the latter (...). (Reformism and democracy) see in the workers' culture not the parallel consequence of economic emancipation, but the principal means and the "necessary condition" of this emancipation.

Whether such a conception is reactionary and anti-Marxist does not take long speeches to demonstrate it. If we believe that the ideology of a class is the consequence of the place assigned to it by the system of production at a given historical time, we cannot "wait" for the working class to be "educated" to believe that revolution is possible, for at the same time we would admit that revolution will never come. This so-called cultural education of the proletariat is not feasible in today's society. "("Il problema della cultura" (1913), in "Storia della Sinistra", vol. 1).

And it is always against these lies of educationalism - however "revolutionary" it may be in words - that the left will take up this cardinal position of Marxist materialism

"In short, and to go quickly, the law of economic determinism says that at a given time, the most accredited and followed political, philosophical and religious thought is that which corresponds to the interests of the dominant minority which holds privilege and power (...).

Because of the force of inertia, because of the formidable means available to any ruling class to fabricate opinions, the mass will not change ideology, philosophy, religion until long after the fall of the old system of domination. "("Force, violence, dictatorship in class struggle", 1946).

9 It is not inappropriate to repeat here Marx's blows against these "revolutionaries": "It should be mentioned also that all sorts of earlier illusions of our bonhomme contributed to Sancho's concept of "rebellion" (read: according to the theoretician of the KAPD). They include, among others, his belief that the individuals who make a revolution are linked by some ideal bond and that their "raising the standard of revolt" is limited to inscribing on it a new concept. fixed idea, spectre, or apparition — the holy.". "("German Ideology", page 418).
institutions which oppress and suffocate them is broken, then it would not bother us in the least if the decisive blows were delivered even by those who are not yet conscious of the aim of the struggle."10

That is why "workers do not have to take philosophy and other courses, but only to fight for their class" ("The Left"), because we are for the "revolution of the unconscious", because we are for revolution!

Pannekoek's thought represents the most complete expression of bourgeois materialism. The revolutionary bourgeoisie introduced materialism into the natural sciences, but it stopped at the threshold of the social and historical sciences, claiming that men freely made their history.

Pannekoek recognizes materialism in the analysis of modes of production and societies, but idealism shows the ear as soon as it deals with the transition from capitalism to socialist society. It affirms well that human nature has a historical character, by no means fixed, but it makes the revolutionary transformation of society depend on the change of "the human nature of the proletarian". For scientific materialism, on the contrary, the change of human nature is the result - and not the prerequisite - of the change of a mode of production, of an already constituted society.

To the extent that bourgeois materialism of the German "left" corresponds to an idealistic deviation in the workers movement, we prefer to define it as proletarian or "revolutionary" idealism, no less distant from Marxism than any other idealism.

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Against bourgeois democracy, against social democracy and against "revolutionary" idealism, which make the political consciousness of the masses the agent of social transformations, Marxism affirms that the conscious agent of revolution is the political class party, the communist party. For him, the subjects of history are neither the individuals nor the shapeless conglomerates of men, the multitudes, but the social classes whose struggle is identified with that of the social and historical organs in which they organize themselves, the parties and the States which represent their will and their conscience:

"The key to our conception lies precisely in the fact that we do not consider the seat of consciousness to be the narrow area of the individual person and that we well know that, generally speaking, the elements of the mass who are pushed into struggle cannot possess in their minds the general theoretical outlook. To require such a condition would be purely illusory and counter-revolutionary. Neither does this task of possessing the theoretical consciousness fall to a band or group of superior individuals whose mission is to help humanity. It falls instead to an organism, to a mechanism differentiated within the mass, utilizing the individual elements as cells that compose the tissue and elevating them to a function made possible only by this complex of relationships. This organism, this system, this complex of elements each with its own function, (analogous to the animal organism with its extremely complicated systems of tissues, networks, vessels, etc.) (...) We have always maintained that this clarity and consciousness is not realized in an amorphous mass of isolated individuals. It is realized instead in organizations which emerge from the undifferentiated mass, in resolute minorities who join together beyond national boundaries following the line of the general historical continuity of the movement. These minorities assume the function of leading the struggle of the masses; the greater part of the masses on the other hand are pushed into this struggle by economic factors well before they develop the same strength and clarity of ideas that is crystallized in the guiding party".11

"When the mass is thrust into action, only these first groups can foresee a final end, and it is they who support and lead the rest. (...) Although the party includes only a part of the class, only it can give the

class its unity of action and movement, for it amalgamates those elements, beyond the limits of categories and localities, which are sensitive to the class and represent it.”

"As the organ through which the continuity and persistence of the class movement is expressed, the Communist Party has the task of spreading revolutionary consciousness among the masses, organizing the material means of action and leading the proletariat in the development of the struggle." ("Theses of Rome").

Marxist materialism further affirms that "the Party is not formed on the basis of individual consciousness; it is not possible for each worker to become conscious and still less to master the class doctrine in a cultural way, neither is this possible for each militant nor even for the leaders of the Party as individuals. This consciousness lies in the organic unity of the Party."

Nothing therefore remains in the Marxism of the illuminist doctrine which makes the individual the subject of history.

Bourgeois ideology is impervious to the vision of a social organ with a collective consciousness, but in nature the slightest phenomenon gives us a thousand examples. Thus, in the biological kingdom, man is a subject with consciousness, but this consciousness is not that of the cells nor that of the brain, but that of organic unity. We could transpose the image and say that the party represents the central nervous system of the class. It is undeniable that the class struggle has an influence on men and consequently on their individual consciousness. In particular the individual consciousness of the worker is the result of his integration into the collective class struggle. It is this consciousness that pushes him to join the class party, but the communist consciousness is more a result than a condition of this membership, which integrates the militant in a historical continuity and an international organization: in both cases - the worker in the class; the militant in the party - the consciousness results from the action of the whole on the part, of the organ on one of its cells.

In the socialist worker, "conviction is the daughter of enthusiasm and feeling, and there is something that prevents this feeling from dying out, it is the instinctive solidarity of the exploited. The one who no longer has confidence in it and wants to replace it by the small theoretical school, study, awareness of practical problems is, we believe, sadly far from socialism.”

Marxism thus claims loudly for the party the critical consciousness of the social movement, but at the same time denies that it results from the cultural development of each of its members:

"We believe that the workers' culture can be included in the programmes of democracy, but that it has little value for the subversive action of socialism. This does not mean that we deny socialist culture. On the contrary, we believe that the only way to encourage it is to abandon it to individual action instead of confining it within the odious limits of a school system; for this action can only be encouraged if the young proletarians throw themselves into the fire of the social struggle that develops in them the desire to become more able to fight."

Thus, the problem of the constitution and development of the Communist Party is that of the framing and integration of the forces that are on the general field of the struggle against capitalism by constituting a living and unitary organ in its orientation. And it is by participating in the class struggle

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12 «Parti et classe» (1921).
13 Marx, in his speech for the 7th anniversary of the First International in 1871, stated clearly and in a manner as brief as sharp: "The role of the International is to organize and concentrate the proletarian forces for the struggle that awaits them."
14 «Thèses caractéristiques» (1951).
that this organ acquires the reflexes and the "capacity to lead the working masses against the ruling class and its institutions on the path that leads to socialist transformation. It is a historical and material process, not an intellectual or voluntarist one."

Just as much against the culturalist deviation as against the voluntarism, the Italian Marxist left affirmed in a lapidary way that neither the parties nor the revolutions are made; they are directed, they are not created, because they are material results of the shock of the social forces. And they are directed in the ways foreseen by the class doctrine according to the history of the international communist movement.

In the Marxist conception, there is therefore no contradiction between the most fierce anticulturalism and the most absolute intransigence in the field of doctrine and principles. On the contrary, the Marxist left has always affirmed the existence of a solid link between theory, program, tactics and organization. As Lenin said,"there is no revolutionary action without revolutionary theory."

Marxism means that the party is a result of its own action (i.e. its tactics) and that this is oriented towards its objectives (the program) according to a doctrinal vision of all the forces that act within history. It is in this sense that Marxism is at the base of the communist movement.

It is for this very reason that the Left affirms the historical invariance of Marxism and that it draws from new events the confirmations of its doctrine. If only one of the members of her monolithic doctrinal body were invalidated by the material facts, it is because her critical consciousness would have been "mystified" and she would become at the same time unfit to accomplish her tasks: in this case, no empiricism, no doctrinal tinkering could bring any remedy!

The struggle of the Marxist currents has been an uninterrupted struggle against all the deviations that prevent the party-organ from fulfilling its historical tasks, that is, against all the dangers of degeneration.

**Marxist Party or Socialist Sect?**

Since the socialist consciousness of the masses is the supposed prerequisite for the proletariat to accomplish revolutionary tasks, according to the German "left", the revolutionary party - as a differentiated organization of the mass - would have the sole function of providing it with this consciousness:


The voluntarist error constitutes the complementary democratic deviation of culturalism. It attributes the revolutionary will to the individuals, either to those of the mass (workers deviation), or to those of the party (Blanquism or the deviation of the CI with the Bolshevisation). Voluntarism does not understand that the revolutionary will of the class is expressed in the will of a historical and social organ, the class party, and whose collective will cannot be reduced to the addition of the will of the militants just as the will of an individual is not that of its muscles and its members but that of organic unity. Marx provides us with a remarkable passage demolishing the attribution of any role in history to the addition of individual wills: "About the International, the great success that has crowned its efforts so far, is due to circumstances beyond the power of its members themselves. The foundation of the International itself was the result of such circumstances and is not due to the efforts of the men who attached themselves to this work. It is therefore not the fruit of a handful of skilful politicians: all the politicians of the world combined could not have created the conditions and circumstances that were necessary to ensure the success of the International. "("Speech for the VIIth anniversary of the A.I.T."in "La Commune de 1871", Editions 10/18).

17 This materialistic vision of the class struggle is brilliantly enunciated by Engels when he states to Heinzen: "Communism is not a doctrine but a movement, not principles but facts." The doctrine - Marxism - "is the theoretical expression of the conditions of liberation of the proletariat" it is the critical consciousness of the party, which makes it possible to affirm with Marx and Lenin that "Marxism is not a dogma (to reveal to the masses) but a guide for action".
"The task of a revolutionary party is to propagate clear knowledge in advance, so that among the masses appear elements capable, in those moments (the great events of world politics), of knowing what to do and of judging the situation for themselves."  

Thus, for the K.A.P.D. theorist, the party does not have to lead, but to "guide" the class spiritually; it does not have a revolution to lead, social forces to lead towards a well-defined goal in advance, a power to exercise, but advice to give.

Making theoretical activity and "going to bet to the workers"19: nowhere in this formula will Pannekoek have expressed more synthetically and more clearly the function of the party as he sees it!

According to this school, what would determine membership of this "party" would be a clear conscience of the individual; thus, this "party" would be nothing more than the organization of an elite which "understood" and which is ready "to help others understand" to make them capable of "making revolution" and which would melt more and more into the revolutionary mass, as the socialist conscience would seize it during the struggle.

This central conception of the adherence of the revolutionary masses to the doctrine and general vision advocated by an enlightened elite, which makes the revolution a process of "sectarianization of the masses", the whole class becoming a great sect, is the keystone of all the doctrines of the socialist sects.

Here we can only criticize one kind of these sects: the one for which the sectarianization of the working masses would take place in intermediary organizations (soviets, factory councils, unions, etc.). The other kind believes on the contrary that this sectarianization will have to take the form of an increasing adhesion and integration of the masses to a circle of initiates. In the first case, one can speak of "dissolution of the sect in the mass", in the second, of integration of the masses in the sect, but there is no real opposition between these two "options". Both are incapable, in their utopianism, to grasp the material process of the constitution of the proletariat in class and then in the dominant class.

The "party" of which Pannekoek speaks is not a party in the Marxist sense, and our school was born precisely by distinguishing itself from those kind of "parties" which are only socialist sects. The fact that these "parties" have brought together thousands of men - just like anarchism - does not change reality: they are only heralds of "truths", advocates of ideas, "revolutionary pedagogues".20

20 The terms of the polemic between Marxism and "revolutionary" idealism have remained unchanged for over a century. Let us first listen to Bakunin:"(Communists and anarchists) are also supporters of science which must destroy superstition and replace faith; but the former want to impose (sic!) science to the people, while (anarchists) try to spread science and knowledge among the people, so that the different groups of human society, after being convinced by propaganda, are able to organize and form spontaneously federations, according to their natural tendencies and their real interests, but never according to a plan drawn up in advance and imposed on the ignorant masses by some "superior" minds. (Bakunin, "Choix de textes", Ed. Seghers, page 171). And here is how Marx ridiculed this culturalist plan of the anarchists: "To make the working class the true representative of the new interests of humanity, their organization must be guided by the idea that must triumph. To identify this idea of the needs of our time, of the intimate tendencies of humanity by an
The “Revolutionary” Idealistic Vision of the Social Revolution

Any idealistic doctrine is necessarily accompanied by a gradualist conception of the destruction of the political power of the ruling class. Pannekoek’s doctrine is no exception. For him, revolution is a "movement-process" during which the working masses develop their struggle and their consciousness, seize the means of production and organize the new society, while the bourgeois power gradually disintegrates:

"Social revolution is the process of the progressive dissolution of all elements of force of the ruling class, including the state, the process of the continuous edification of the power of the proletariat until its fullest completion."\(^{21}\)

Thus Pannekoek endeavours to ridicule and caricature Marxist orthodoxy:

"Many are those who persist in conceiving proletarian revolution (...) as a series of phases generating each other: first the conquest of political power and the establishment of a new government; then the expropriation by decree of the capitalist class; finally, a reorganization of the production process (... but) so that the proletariat can really become the master of its destiny, it must simultaneously create its own organization and forms of the new economic order. These two elements are inseparable and constitute the process of social revolution."\(^{22}\)

For Marxism, on the contrary, revolution is only the birth of a society whose conditions already exist in the old one; it has nothing to build, it only has to destroy obstacles and for that it needs a centralized force which can be exerted on the scale of the society, and which is that of the proletarian State. The series is therefore: destruction of the capitalist state, proletarian dictatorship, despotic intervention in production relations. There is no gradualism either for the constitution of the proletariat into a ruling class or for the destruction of the bourgeoisie’s political power. The constitution of the proletariat as the dominant class conditions and precedes the destruction of capitalism in the economy. To say the opposite is to deny the transition period, the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The “Revolutionary” Idealistic Vision of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

Since Marx traced in his critique of the Gotha program the transitional phases that must lead to communist society through the dictatorship of the proletariat and lower socialism, revisionism, while claiming to refer to them, alters their content. Here is what Pannekoek tells us about the first phase, the dictatorship of the proletariat:

ongoing study of the phenomena of social life, then to make this idea penetrate within our workers' organizations, such must be the goal, etc. Finally, it is necessary to form, within our working class populations, a true revolutionary socialist school. Thus, the autonomous sections of workers suddenly become schools, of which these gentlemen of the Alliance will be the masters. They identify the idea through "ongoing studies" (...). They then "bring it into our workers' organisations". For them, the working class is a raw material, a chaos, which, to take shape, needs the breath of their Holy Spirit. "("The alleged divisions in the international", Circular of the A.I.T. March 5, 1872).

\(^{22}\) «Pannekoek et les conseils ouvriers», EDI, Paris, 1969. 1938, page 272. Laissons la parole à cet autre maître de l'idéalisme «révolutionnaire», Bakunin: "Since all political institutions and authorities were ultimately created only to protect and guarantee the economic privileges of the possessing and exploiting classes against the revolts of the proletariat, it is clear that the social revolution will have to destroy these institutions and authorities not before, nor after, but at the same time as it will put its bold hand on the economic foundations of the servitude of the people (...)". "("La Liberté", J.J Pauvert, 1965, page 223).
"Workers councils are the form of organization proper to the transition period during which the working class struggles for power, annihilates the capitalist system and organizes social production."²³

But this is not an organizational recipe; "councilism" is a principle and not a form of organization:

"(...) "Workers' councils" does not mean a fixed form of organization, elaborated once and for all, the details of which remain to be perfected; it is a principle, the principle of self-management of enterprises and production."²⁴

This is the finished vision of "revolutionary" idealism. The revolution would identify itself with the struggle of the masses, embracing the "sacred idea", socialism (the "socialist" sectorization of the masses, thus makes them capable of spontaneously organizing social production! Only history can reveal the paths that lead to it.

"In order to wage this struggle, workers therefore need new forms of organisation whose elements of strength they keep behind them. It would be vain to want to build or imagine these new forms; they can only arise from the effective struggle of the workers themselves."²⁵

The Marxist critique of "revolutionary" idealism has no difficulty in highlighting the link between the different expressions of this current which, starting from Proudhon and Bakunin, first reappeared in revolutionary syndicalism to reappear once again in the German "left" and in Italian gramscism.

For this petty-bourgeois, culturalist and idealistic school, revolution is nothing other than the "liberation" of the worker, and the powerful antagonism between social production and mercantilism is reduced to an antagonism between "those below" and "those above", between producers and profiteers, between workers and "parasites", between masses and leaders, between "freedom" and oppression. The revolution is no more than the process of freeing workers from all constraints (the good old "freedom" dear to Bakunin), against the discipline of the factory, the State, the unions or the parties; it is only an attempt to "take one's life in hand" according to the powerless and sterile vision of petty bourgeoisie.

The German "left" has only updated its positions according to the immutable principles of anarchism. It is Pannekoek himself who finally acknowledges this:

"At a time when workers are increasingly subjected to the crushing tyranny of the bourgeois state, it is natural that anarchism arouses increased sympathy, because of the propaganda it leads for freedom. (...) (!!!) seems to have greater possibilities for development today, at a time when state capitalism is in full expansion. (...) (But it bears) the imprint of primitive conditions (sic!), those of the XIXth century. The principle of freedom, born in the bourgeois conditions that prevailed at the beginning of capitalism, the freedom of trade and the freedom of enterprise, cannot suffice for the working class. The problem and the goal, as far as it is concerned, is to combine freedom and organization. Anarchism, by setting freedom as its goal, forgets that the free society of workers can only exist thanks to a powerful sense of belonging to the community, the very basis of the mentality proper to the associated producers. This new mentality, which is already taking the form of vigorous solidarity in the workers' struggles, is the foundation of organization without top-down constraints. The result of cooperation between free workers, this self-managed organization also serves as a basis for their personal freedom, in other words, for their feeling of being masters of their work."²⁶
In short, anarchism - not only premature, but also primitive of the 19th century - would "finally" find in "modern" capitalism, that of the 20th, not only its historical possibility of realization, but its finished expression. Pannekoek only updates Bakunin according to the evolution of capitalism which makes capitalist cooperation penetrate in its modern form as well in the most diverse social activities as in the factory, at the same time as it drives more and more the capitalists of the productive sphere to make of them simple "clippers of coupons". The old anarchist opposition between "freedom" and "oppression", between producers and "parasites" - which among revolutionary trade unionists takes the form of opposition between unions and bosses - here takes the form of antagonism between the masses and "bureaucracies" or "apparatuses": a populist vision that parallels that, dear to the social-democratic or Stalinist opportunists, which pits the "people" against trusts, Gramsci's or Garaudy's "historical bloc" against monopolies! Anarchism's poverty!

By making "councilism" not a question of forms of organization, but a principle, at the limit, Pannekoek could formally claim the Marxist thesis: "revolution is not a problem of forms of organization". But the incompatibility between the anti-formalism of Marxism and that of idealism is total.

Although both schools do not prejudge the forms that revolutionary violence of the working class will take, that is, the mass organizations that will emerge, Marxism asserts that only the party can give them revolutionary unity of will and conscience [through centralization, leadership and the exercise of power by the class party] and enable them to accomplish the historical tasks of social transformation and the annihilation of the enemy classes.

The German "left", on the other hand, opposes mass organizations and their functions to the party and its role. Moreover, it argues that it is only if mass organizations can get rid of the leadership of any party that they will be able to become organs of social transformation. Thus for Pannekoek, the "party"-sect that he conceives "is therefore also a hundred miles from having the aim of any political party (...) to take direct control of the State machine". What good is dictatorship led by a sect if the revolutionary masses are indeed sectarian?!

According to Pannekoek, if within the revolutionary mass, a minority (meaning the communist party) centralizes and exercises power, it is because "the great mass" would not be prepared to "do it by itself" and that revolution would therefore be impossible! And this should "inevitably" lead to the domination of a bureaucracy over the masses!

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27 Without claiming any copyright, we could even anticipate the inevitable evolution of this school and assert that nothing can compel it to argue that mass organizations should be factory organizations. On the contrary, if it were to update its postulates, it would have to affirm that with the evolution of capitalism - which increasingly socializes all human activities - the organizations that will have to materialize the principle of councilism will have to be located outside the factories.


29 "How will he (the revolutionary party) defeat the capitalist class? The answer goes without saying: because there will have been mass uprising; only mass attacks, struggles and mass strikes can reverse the old domination. Thus, the "revolutionary party" will never achieve anything without the intervention of the masses. So there are two things. Or the masses persist in action. (...) From that moment on, a conflict arose inescapably between the masses and the new party wishing to be the only one in power. (...) It may then be that the class movement has acquired a power that allows it to override the party. But it may also be that the party, allied with bourgeois elements, crushes the workers. In either case, however, the party proved to be an obstacle to the revolution. Because it is intended to be something other than an organ of propaganda and clarification. Because it has a specific mission to lead and govern. (...) Or the working masses conform to the doctrine of the party and abandon the direction of things to it. (...) And in this way the party, deprived of mass power, proper to a revolutionary class, becomes an agent of conservation of bourgeois power." 1936, page 264. Thus, this current presents as "last model Marxism" the old foolishness of a Bakunin: "To pretend that a group of individuals will be able to become the thought, the soul, the leading and unifying will of the
For this school, the revolutionary party as conceived by Marxist orthodoxy represents a bastard heritage of the bourgeois period: "Compared to proletarian revolution, a "revolutionary party" represents a contradiction in terms. One could say it in another way, namely in the expression "revolutionary party", the term revolutionary necessarily designates a bourgeois revolution. Every time the masses intervened to overthrow a government and then entrusted power to a new party, we found ourselves facing a bourgeois revolution, the replacement of one dominant category by another."\(^{30}\)

The K.A.P.D. Theorist's Argument against the role of the communist party is the same as that of Bakunin against the proletarian state: we should be against any state, because until today all states have represented the domination of one class over another and the maintenance of a society of domination.

Marxism has forever ended with the shapeless dreams of petty-bourgeois ideologues: the freedom they are crying out for in their congenital horror of all authority and discipline cannot be materially anything other than the freedom of capital and mercantilism. Parties and states have always been and always will be the instruments of a ruling class; the party and the state of the proletariat will be the instruments of the destruction of the last class society. Any doctrine that refuses the organization and leadership of the dictatorship of the proletariat by the party at the same time supports a democratic vision of revolution and the exercise of power, breaks the material dynamics of history by denying the centralized avant-gardes the function that it compels them to fulfill, and those who adhere to it deny not only Marxism, but revolution.

It is true that the communist movement made use in the past of the formula of "workers democracy", but it was in a polemical sense, against the bourgeoisie which claimed that parliamentary democracy was a means of reducing class inequalities. It affirmed for its part that this is only one form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and that the deep meaning of the egalitarian claim is the disappearance of the classes whose political condition is the constitution of the proletariat into a dominant class.

But there is no scientific sense to identify dictatorship of the proletariat and workers democracy because it is not the political equality - as formal as utopian - of all workers, even if it is only revolutionary workers, that makes this dictatorship possible, but the exercise of revolutionary coercion for the accomplishment of the historical tasks of the proletariat. The revolution does not have abstract rights to recognize: all those whose action will go against revolutionary needs will have to be neutralized.

The "Revolutionary" Idealistic Critique of Social-Democratic Opportunism

When the German "left" was born, it claimed that it would return to the sources of Marxist orthodoxy against the minimalist and reformist praxis of social democracy and against its growing opportunism. Even revolutionary trade unionism claimed the same thing in its early days. Nothing could be further from the truth.

revolutionary movement and the economic organization of the proletariat of all countries, it is such a heresy against common sense and against historical experience, that one wonders how a man as intelligent as M. Marx was able to conceive it (...) and what about a friend of the proletariat, a revolutionary who dares to dream the subjugation of the proletariat of all countries to a single thought and I wonder how (Marx) does not see only the establishment of a dictatorship (...) that would somehow do the job of a chief engineer of the world revolution (...) would be enough alone to kill the revolution, to paralyze and distort all popular movements? "("Freedom", pages 212-214).

In the following passage - a real piece of "German left" anthology - the theorist of the K.A.P.D. tries to draw the boundaries between social democracy and German "left-wing" communism:

"It is not the aim (!) that distinguishes social democracy from communism: indeed, the aim of both (?) is the seizure of social power by the working class. Nor is it the fact that the communists intend to achieve this by means of a revolution, while the social democrats are counting on an evolution (!!!!) because they also foresee the possibility of a power versus power struggle, class versus class. (...) Nor does it come from what the communists think that instead of waiting for this overgrowth, we should take power all at once: such is not the thought of the communists (!!!).

The fundamental difference between these two tendencies lies in the idea (!) that they respectively form means, organs by which the proletariat will take power.

Social democracy has always seen in the party (linked to the trade unions) the organ used to bring the revolution to a successful conclusion. This does not necessarily mean the exclusive use of electoral methods; for its radical fraction, the party had to use the joint pressure of parliamentary means and extra-parliamentary means such as strikes and demonstrations, in order to assert the power of the proletariat. But in the end it was still the party that led the struggle. (...) And if the oppressive yoke of state power were to jump, it was still the party, in its capacity as representative of the proletariat, that would take power. (...) The evolution of social democracy before, during and after the war demonstrated that it was impossible to carry out this project; with the corresponding permanent apparatus, (the party) takes on a conservative character, its bureaucracy can only fear a revolution. Within a democratic party of this type, the mass of militants (...) does not have the means to impose its will on a bureaucracy that has all the elements of force"31.

The passage quoted is luminous. Luminously anarchist. According to the author, social democracy went bankrupt because it was a party, because it "had a specific mission to lead and govern". The leaders could only impose themselves on the militants, the "apparatus" could only impose itself on the masses! The "lesson" that the German "left" draws from the degeneration of social democracy is the following: in the end, it was Bakunin who was right against the Marxist current.

The quoted passage clearly shows that - in doctrine - the German "left" has been incapable of doing anything other than a democratic critique of social democracy. It recognizes that social democracy - after it slipped into class collaboration during the war and directly assumed the defence of the bourgeois order against workers insurrections in Central Europe - set socialism as its goal; it concedes to social democracy the aspiration to the conquest of political power by the working class, after it has shown in doctrine and in fact that it has set as its objective only the defence of bourgeois democracy against proletarian revolution; it affirms that revolution against evolution is not a historical alternative! Anarchism's poverty!

This is not a temporary stray. And it is the author himself who gives us the key to his position when he affirms that the fundamental difference between these two currents lies in the idea they respectively make of the means and organs of the struggle for the conquest of power. Following his idealistic vision of social struggles, he accuses social democracy of giving "bad ideas" to the workers, ideas that push the organizations that "seize" them to play a counter-revolutionary role.

The knot of their criticism is there. The rest is just folklore.

What a "lesson" from history! The "ideas" advocated by the social democracy were "good" except those concerning the leadership role of the party. It would be enough "therefore" to make propaganda against this idea while keeping the others!

The "revolutionary" idealism has not made the slightest analysis of social-democratic opportunism; for any explanation, it merely denounces the corruption of "apparatuses" and the theory of substitutionism (i.e. the action of apparatuses, parliamentarians or trade unions in the place and name of the working class, because they have seized the idea of leading!).

This political current claims to be "extremist" because it claims against social democracy the destruction of the State, whereas the latter only spoke of "displacement of forces within the State". But this is the anarchist anti-State claim which - as history has always shown - is nothing but a false radicalism pushing the own assumptions of petty-bourgeois democracy to the absurd.

According to it, in the face of the monstrous counter-revolutionary force of social democracy, the workers movement would only have to be hara-kiri in the very style of the petty bourgeoisie crushed by the "apparatus", power and authority. The "lesson" that the German "Left" draws from history is not that it is necessary to constitute a powerful army whose centralized and authoritarian force (resulting not from who knows what "dictatorship over the class" but from the material dynamics of the class struggle itself) is capable of overcoming all the obstacles to the revolution: it is a moralizing attitude that smells with full nose the false philistinism of liberalism, of democratism, of "revolutionary" Calvinism, presented as the most complete expression of proletarian radicalism.

Communism has nothing to do with all these lies of "freedom": the workers movement is the overcoming of the claim of the individual's freedom (whether citizen or worker) and the negation of any democratic principle. There will never be a "freedom of the working class", but only the political domination of the proletariat that will allow it to disappear later as a class through the destruction of capitalism. The reign of freedom will be that of the species that came to communism.

Far from these stinking waters of democratism, the Communist International showed the roots of the degeneration of the social-democratic parties which, from organs of the revolutionary struggle for proletarian emancipation at their origin, had become organs of social conservation because of their reformist praxis, which had invaded their muscles, deformed their critical consciousness and distorted their function.

The Marxist critique of social democracy is not that of the party form, but of the party that no longer claims only "reforms". It is true that Marxism does not reject the struggle for reform on principle. This is a problem that depends on geographical and historical areas. This struggle was recognized and accepted for Europe until 1914, when it was forever set aside. But for Marxism, this struggle was a means which was to allow the blooming of the class struggle, the constitution of the proletariat in class and thus in party. In the Marxist vision, one was fighting for reforms in order to hasten the destruction of bourgeois society; this struggle was to help liquidate all the social and political heritage of the earlier stages of capitalist society and thus demonstrate that capitalism was to be destroyed as democratic as the state was. The goal was not democracy, but its negation: revolution and class dictatorship of the proletariat.

The Marxist left has shown that opportunistic degeneration in the workers movement occurred when the socialist parties began to present the socialist revolution as an extension of the struggle for reforms and democracy and no longer as its dialectical negation.32

32 "To affirm the affinity between socialists and democratic ideas, to make them look like two branches coming from the same trunk and which tend to join, to grow in parallel, is (...) a deplorable sabotage of the socialist
Lenin has shown that the deep roots - economic and social - of this disease of the workers movement are imperialism and the workers aristocracy. It is imperialism that manages to constitute the more or less broad layers of workers corrupted by the crumbs drawn from imperialist and colonialist plunder and who find in opportunism and social-pacifism the political expression of their objective tendency to collaboration and class alliances. And opportunism succeeded in imposing itself within the class organization because the struggle for reforms had lost its subversive content, which resulted in the loss of revolutionary capacity of the organ that led it. For this reason opportunism could claim historical continuity with the praxis of the 2nd International, while the 3rd International got rid of the minimalist legacy of the struggle for reforms.

It is the democratic and reformist deviation that is at the basis of the doctrinal denial of Marxism by social democracy. What the Marxist left criticizes in the doctrine of the latter is not that it claims political power, but that it intends to peacefully conquer the State through the parliamentary majority, instead of destroying it to replace it with the new State of the proletariat in arms, an institution that does not admit gradualism; it does not criticize the idea of the exercise of proletarian power by a party, but affirms that it is a dictatorship and not a democracy.

The "Revolutionary" Idealistic Critique of the Communist International

There was a deep misunderstanding in the adherence of the German "left" and in particular Pannekoek to the October Revolution and the Communist International. But that misunderstanding was quickly cleared up. The K.A.P.D. participates in the 3rd Congress of the CI by attacking all the resolutions of the 2nd Congress - its true constituent Congress - and accusing the CI of opportunism.

The divergence immediately broke out on a fundamental problem of doctrine: nature and role of the class party, and was immediately reflected in the various tactical questions debated in the CI. But before we get into these tactical issues, Pannekoek attacks the CI on another problem: the splits within the socialist parties which allowed into the International large layers of centrist opportunists and "repentant" social-patriots, the Serrati on the one hand and the Cachins on the other.

The history of the struggle against social-democratic opportunism has shown that it is not enough to claim the struggle against this pathology of the workers movement to situate oneself in the revolutionary communist tradition. The revolutionary syndicalism of Sorel - before openly revealing its revisionist character - claimed to represent a return to the sources against parliamentary cretinism. So let us see on what basis Pannekoek makes this criticism:

"And, during the revolution, the party must establish the program, the watchwords and the directives that the masses, acting spontaneously, recognize as just, because they find there in a finished form, their own revolutionary goals and manage, thanks to them, to see more clearly: it is in this sense that the party leads the struggle. As long as the masses are inactive, its efforts may seem futile; but the principles thus propagated reach many elements, however, which temporarily remain outside the party, and, during the revolution, these principles prove to be an active force helping to guide these elements in the right direction. On the other hand, to water down the principles in order to be able to form a larger party beforehand, with the help of coalitions and concessions, is to leave confused (...)

\[33\] The Italian Marxist left has adopted this analysis: "Opportunism is a social fact, a deepening compromise between the classes, and it would be madness to ignore it". "("The Foundations of Revolutionary Communism").

\[33\] If there is a total negation of democratic theory and action, it is socialism." "("Democrazia e Socialisme", 1914, in "Storia della Sinistra", vol. 1).
elements the possibility of acquiring, in times of revolution, a hold whose masses do not succeed in getting rid of because of their deficiencies."\(^{34}\)

In other words, the German "left" claims to be more on the left because it wants "parties"-cults capable of fulfilling the role that "revolutionary" idealism attributes to them: to elaborate the theory, the program and the watchwords that can "enlighten" the masses when the time comes, which would be impossible if "impure" people entered this "party".

The true Marxist critique of the divisions too far to the right that gave rise to the national sections of the CI was made by the Italian left on other bases and for a completely different purpose. This concern of the left stems from its clear awareness that the World Party cannot be constituted and develop organically on the basis of grafts of heterogeneous currents with different programmes, traditions and critical conceptions. It was better to have a small body capable of fulfilling its tasks and thus developing, than mergers which could not fail to make its revolutionary struggle difficult or impossible - as was very often the case.

It is superfluous to add that according to the conception of the left, the Kapedist current would not have found a place either in the CI as it says in the "Theses of Lyon".

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**On Tactics**

The controversy between the German "left" and the CI did not concern tactical problems, although - at first sight - it touched on them. In fact, the abyss that separated them was a principle. And that is what we will strive to demonstrate.

For Pannekoek, "the problem of tactics (...) can be stated as follows: how can the traditional bourgeois way of thinking, which paralyses them, be removed from the proletarian masses?\(^{35}\) And this "problem" was, according to him, all the more acute because the counter-revolution had no other basis:

"(In Germany, in 1918) it is because the masses still remain totally subject to a bourgeois way of thinking, that after the collapse of bourgeois domination, they restored it with their own hands."\(^{36}\)

And for the author, the bourgeois way of thinking among the working masses is represented by the social-democratic ideology which is thus elevated to the rank of cause of the slavery of the proletariat and the power of the bourgeoisie. In fact, social-democratic ideology - or today Stalinist ideology - represents for the "revolutionary" idealists of the 20th century what religion represented for

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anarchists in the 19th century. So these are ideas or spiritual powers elevated to the rank of active agents of history or causes of periods of counter-revolution. What "materialism"! And it is on these idealistic bases that the Kapedist current will be anti-parliamentary, for union splits as a matter of principle, against the united front, even the trade union front.

In the Marxist vision, the problem of tactics comes down to that of preparing the subjective conditions of the revolution, relying on objective conditions.

The Italian left defined the Marxist point of view on the problem of tactics when it affirmed:

"The conditions for achieving the revolutionary goals of the CI are of an objective nature insofar as they reside in the situation of the capitalist regime and in the phases of the crisis it is going through. They are subjective in nature insofar as they relate to the capacity of the working class to struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie's power and for the organization of its own dictatorship by developing a unity of action, that is, by succeeding in subordinating all the partial interests of limited groups to the general interest of the whole proletariat and to the final goal of revolution.

The subjective conditions are of two kinds, namely

a) The existence of communist parties with a clear programmatic vision and a well-defined organization that ensures unity of action,

b) A (sufficient) degree of influence of the Communist Party on the masses of the workers and their economic organizations, so that the Communist Party prevails over the other political tendencies of the proletariat.

The problem of tactics consists in seeking the means which best enable the communist parties to achieve simultaneously these revolutionary conditions of a subjective nature, based on objective conditions and on the course of their development.

The opposition between these two currents could not be more striking. Although the culturalist currents (social democrats, anarchists, German "left") claim to the Marxist vision of "catastrophism" - which is that of proletarian revolution, resulting on the one hand from the contradictions of the bourgeois system and on the other from the maturity and strength of the proletariat - for these currents this second condition is measured by the extension of the "socialist consciousness" in the masses, whereas for Marxist materialism it is measured by the degree of influence of the communist party on the social movement, i.e. the degree of constitution of the proletariat in class.

It is on the basis of this materialistic vision of the tactical problem, which is indissolubly linked to the conception of the nature and role of the party organ, that the Italian left will give a negative

37 Thus, the question is completely reversed in an idealistic way. In reality, the undisputed power of the bourgeoisie, its states and parties over society, and the political domination of Stalinism or bourgeois movements over the working masses are only the consequence of counterrevolution, that is, the material defeat of the revolutionary movement (which resulted - among other things - in the degeneration of the revolutionary organ, the CI, which took the form of Stalinism). If we have not yet emerged from this dark period, it is not due to "ideological domination", but to material determinations.

38 We will leave aside the position of this current in relation to the national and colonial question. His disciples are all on the front of indifference, that is, of the position that this kind of struggle does not concern the revolutionary proletariat, which is in perfect coherence with their doctrinal idealism and with the sectarian conception of the "party" that results from it. This has always been the case for any "revolutionary" idealistic current - (cf. Prodhonism and Anarchism in the First International). The communist movement - through the materialist vision of the historical conditions in which class struggle takes place and of the nature and role of the party - has always had to reforge itself by fighting frontist and indifferent deviations.

39 «Projet de Thèses présenté au IVme Congrès de l'I.C.»
appreciation of "revolutionary parliamentarism", that it will reject the tactics of trade union splits on principle, and - from before 1919 - the united front of political organisations while advocating it in the intermediate organisations of the class; and finally that it will adhere unconditionally to the tactics adopted at the II Congress in the national and colonial question (cf. The article of the left "Communism and the national question", in "Prometeo", 1924).

We will deal here only with the parliamentary and trade union question, noting the profound divergence of positions between the two currents mentioned.

**On "Revolutionary Parliamentarism"**

For Pannekoek, it is necessary to fight the "revolutionary parliamentarism" advocated by the CI and adopt the abstentionist tactic because:

"Parliamentarianism is the typical form of struggle through leaders, in which the masses themselves have only a subordinate role. In practice, it consists in putting the effective direction of the struggle to separate personalities, deputies; these must therefore maintain the masses in the illusion that others can lead the fight in their place"\(^{40}\).

According to Pannekoek, what is opposed is not the communist and revolutionary struggle, on the one hand, and, on the other, the absence of struggle, the replacement of the effective struggle by parliamentary practices. No! it is "the struggle of the masses" and..." the struggle through the leaders"!

On the other hand, at the 2nd Congress of the CI, the Marxist left criticized the parliamentary tactics of the international in the West from the point of view of the tasks of the communist party:

"While the military and political executive apparatus of the bourgeois state organizes direct action against proletarian revolution, democracy constitutes an indirect means of defence by spreading among the masses the illusion that they can achieve emancipation through a peaceful process and that the proletarian state can also take parliamentary form, with the right of representation for the bourgeois minority. The result of this democratic influence on the proletarian masses was the corruption of the socialist movement of the 2nd International in both theory and action.

Currently, the task of the communists in their work of ideological and material preparation for revolution is above all to liberate the proletariat from these illusions and prejudices spread in its ranks. (...) In countries where the democratic system has already existed for a long time and is deeply rooted in the habits and mentality of the masses as well as in that of the traditional social-democratic parties, this task is of particular importance and is at the forefront of the problems of revolutionary preparation." ('Theses of the Communist abstentionist faction of the PSI', paragraphs 4 and 5).

In these conditions, the preparation of the subjective conditions of the revolution requires boycott because:

"a) The clarity of the propaganda, no less than the effective preparation of the final struggle for dictatorship require that the communists lead an unrest for the boycott of the workers' elections (point 7);

b) The central problem having become the revolutionary conquest of power by the proletariat, all the political activity of the class party must be devoted to this direct goal (point 8);

c) The disgust of the proletariat for this practice of treason (the parliamentary cretinism of the traditional socialists) prepared the ground for the mistakes of the trade unionists and anarchists who deny any value to the political action and functions of the party. This is why the communist parties will never obtain a broad success in propaganda for the Marxist revolutionary method if they do not support their direct work for the dictatorship of the proletariat and for the Workers' Councils on the abandonment of all contact with the spiral of bourgeois democracy (point 9);

d) The very great importance attributed in practice to the electoral campaign and its results, the fact that for a very long period the party devotes all its forces and all its resources (men, press, economic means) to it, on the one hand, in spite of all the public speeches and all the theoretical declarations, to reinforce the sensation that this is indeed the central action for the communist goals and, on the other hand, provokes the almost complete abandonment of the work of revolutionary organization and preparation giving to the organization of the party a technical character completely contrary to the requirements of the legal or illegal revolutionary work (point 10);

e) For the parties which, by majority decision, have passed to the III International, the fact of continuing the electoral action prohibits the necessary selection; however, without the elimination of the social-democratic elements, the III International will fail in its historical task and will not be the disciplined and homogeneous army of the world revolution (point 11);

(f) The very nature of debates in parliament and other democratic bodies precludes any possibility of criticism of the policies of opposing parties (item 12).

All the arguments put forward here aim to make the party capable of fulfilling the revolutionary tasks, to tear it away from the weakening reformist praxis, to make possible its clear political delimitation and to allow the mass in struggle against capitalism to find in the party the organ capable of leading it, because the party is also a material result of its own action. For the left, it is a question of clearly defining the bases which will make it possible to forge a solid communist party and not to "create" conditions which would allow the masses to do without their class party!

**On the Trade Union Question**

The German "left" was split, where boycottists as a matter of principle in mass organizations led by the reformists. This position stems from considerations which, despite their diversity, have revisionism as their common denominator.

The first argument relates to the "trade union form":

"It is indeed the form of (trade union) organisation itself which reduces the masses to impotence or just as and forbids them to make it the instrument of their will"41.

On the other hand, "its mode of operation (...) does not allow it to be used as an instrument of proletarian revolution"42.

These passages do not resist the slightest Marxist criticism. On the one hand, the trade union form has only changed over the course of history, and on the other hand, to affirm by principle that, by its very nature, any organisation whose specific aim is the defence of the labour force is incapable of becoming the instrument of the workers' will and a lever of revolution, amounts to affirming "quite simply" that

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the proletariat is incapable of fighting consistently for its survival and that this struggle - and the antagonism that provokes it - is an obstacle to revolution! That is what Pannekoek says when he says:

"In a prosperous bottom-up system, the organisation of councils is impossible, so workers only care about improving their living conditions, which allows union and political action. In a decadent capitalism, in the grip of crises, this last type of action is vain and clinging to it can only slow down the development of the autonomous struggle of the masses, of their self-activity."

This is a shining example of what this political school calls "Marxism"! If what Pannekoek affirms were true, the revolution would be a result foreign to the "low" economic interests of the proletariat. Socialism would then be transformed into this "moral idea" dear to all idealists (including Bernstein!) in the style of all petty-bourgeois dreams ("live better", "self-manage", freedom - equality - fraternity!).

In fact, the K.A.P.D. Theorist's argument is perfectly consistent with his gradualist vision of the revolution: what is the point of economic defence organisations if the revolution is the process in which wage labour disappears? The defence of wage labour would then amount to defending capitalism!... The poverty of "revolutionary" idealism!

Materialistic analysis can only be historical analysis. Here are Pannekoek's "historical" arguments in favor of split tactics:

"The form of organization in trade unions (…), which originated in the period of ascending capitalism, is no longer of any use."

This statement necessarily leads to another: trade unions - organizations defending the labour force - no longer have a raison d'être "in the era of imperialism". In other words, the laws proper to the capitalist system are no longer valid for imperialism; imperialism would then no longer be a phase of capitalism but a specific mode of production!!! Let's move on...

"As far as the workers are concerned - and this is the second "historical" argument put forward by Pannekoek - the conditions of struggle have deteriorated. The power of the capitalist class has increased enormously (…), the coalition of the bosses themselves places the unions in front of a much stronger and often almost impregnable power. Moreover, the fierce competition among capitalists in all countries (…) demands that increasing shares of the increase in value go to arms manufacture and war; the fall in the rate of profit therefore forces capitalists to increase the exploitation rate, i.e. to reduce real wages. Thus, the trade unions face increased resistance, the old methods become less and less usable (on the other hand, the "Lassalle's iron law of wages" is "more and more" valid… N.D.R.)".

This paragraph highlights the profound pacifism of all the "revolutionary" idealists, pacifism that Marx pointed out about the "left-wing" neo-Hegelians who believed they were overthrowing the world with their "revolutionary" phraseology. Pannekoek only notes the potential increase of antagonisms within the capitalist society and, in the name of a purely verbal radicalism, he draws the conclusion that it is necessary to disregard the trade-union struggle because the working class meets an increased opposition! Why not turn away from the political struggle if the capitalist state has only increased its means of resistance?

The last of Pannekoek's arguments is deeply "practical". It is based on the culturalist role of the "party"-sect, which is

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"To radicalize minds, to enlighten by word and by action, and for this reason to strive to oppose with the greatest vigour new principles to old ideas."\(^{46}\)

The argument is extremely "simple". To better "enlighten" the workers, those who have already "begun to understand" (their numbers increase in revolutionary times and decrease in periods of counterrevolution) should be brought together outside the unions. Thus their struggle, freer without "bureaucracy", would allow the "party"-sect to provide them with this socialist consciousness and to set an example to the workers hired by opportunism by showing them "how to do it". With material conditions helping, the revolutionary process would be triggered. That's why the K.A.P.D. style "communists" can only be interested in the immediate struggles of the class when these struggles are directly connected to a revolutionary process; otherwise, "the masses could not be receptive to socialism". That is why the organizations of the revolution must be "pure" (the Unions asked their adherents to recognize the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat...) and only "be interested" in the struggle of the masses insofar as the masses "are interested" in the revolution!\(^{47}\)

Far be it from us to deny the coherence of the tactics of the German "left" with its principles and programme. From idealistic principles, one cannot draw a communist tactic. This idealistic coherence confirms once again the Marxist position that there is no tactical problem per se; tactics is never a set of "recipes". The Marxist left has always maintained that communist tactics must conform to communist doctrine and program in the sense that tactics, being the party's mode of intervention in class struggle, must accord with the materialist vision of the forces participating in it and with the objectives pursued.

It is in the area of intermediary class organizations that this coherence is particularly salient. According to the Marxist conception, awareness of the obstacles to the satisfaction of material needs follows action to satisfy them. It follows that the struggle for contingent objectives is one of the conditions, one of the preconditions for the Communist Party to be able to validly and on a large scale oppose its own propaganda, proselytism and action to those of the other political currents within the workers movement, which gives rise to around it

"a wider network of (party) organisations connected both to the deeper layers of the masses and to the centre of the party itself. This is how a unitary discipline of the working class is prepared"\(^{48}\).

On the other hand, revolution presupposes the setting in motion of gigantic masses whose material needs cannot be satisfied without the overthrow of the whole bourgeois order. The role of the party is to channel the forces that fight for partial objectives, quotas, in order to constitute an avalanche that can carry away all the obstacles that stand in the way of the birth of the new society. It is by fulfilling


\(^{47}\) The following passage is another true "chosen" piece from the German "left" anthology: "The aim of the A.A.U (General Workers' Union) is that in the revolutionary phases all the union members of the various power stations should move in its direction. (...) And the clear propaganda for this idea could only fail if the A.A.U. was competing with the other confederations, instead of acting as a vehicle for a tactic that transcended their goals at all. (...) It has sometimes been said that the A.A.U. was the vector of an organizing principle, factory organization, superior to trade unions." But this does not mean that it is an instrument to revive trade union-type combativeness: "To give oneself this objective would be to transform oneself into an organisation necessarily destined to return (...) to the reformist path. (...) If, against the will of the unions, the workers enter into a struggle against the bosses, the A.A.U. must support them with its opinions and explanations and provide them with the means of agitation, but without ever adopting the point of view of those who seek to beat their competitors, to win over union members. And thus also without adopting the point of view of a new organization which places itself at the head of the workers, but by seeking everything on the contrary to promote the new principles". 1927, pages 235-236.

\(^{48}\) («Projet de Thèse présenté par la Gauche au IVme Congrès de l'I. C.», dans «In difesa della continuità del programma comunista»).
this task that the party develops and develops its influence on the masses. This obliges it to pay the greatest attention to the forms of struggle and to the forms of organization that this struggle must necessarily generate. The Communist Party invents neither, "it limits itself to generalizing, organizing, making conscious the forms of revolutionary class struggle that arise spontaneously in the very course of the struggle", to centralize these fights and its organized expressions.

It is on this basis that the CI and the Italian left found themselves in perfect agreement in 1920 in the question of the attitude to be taken towards the mass organizations controlled by the reformists. Insofar as these organizations remain open to the working masses - and are therefore likely to become the organized expression of their struggle - the party does not give up working within them. When the split is justified, it is also for reasons that stem from materialist doctrine: when the large masses are excluded from the unions while the class marks a general tendency towards organization.

This is a principled position that affects all intermediary organizations in the class, not just the unions. Moreover, Marxism never theorizes a form of organization as being "the revolutionary form" that will serve, by nature, the insurrection and the conquest of power. In 1871 it was the Commune; in 1917, it was the Soviets; in Italy, the Labour exchanges could have become it; according to Trotsky, in Germany in 1923, the factory committees could have been the transmission belt of the revolution.

The Lessons of the Counter-Revolution

The criticism of the Italian Marxist left towards the tactics followed from 1922 onwards (political united front, workers' government, workers' and peasants' government) responds - insofar as the problem was placed on the tactical field - to the same concerns which had led it to define the conditions for the subjective preparation of the revolution.

"Revolutionary" idealists will wonder where the tactical question ends and the question of doctrine begins. For its part, Marxism asserts that the party has no "free will" in the tactical choice, and that this choice is determined by the goals inscribed in its program and by the ratio of class forces within the society where the party must act.

The followers of the German "left" - for whom the basis of the party's existence is a fact of conscience - will cry victory. According to them, if the CI was wrong in its choice of tactical means, it would be the result of a false doctrine. Poverty of culturalism!

49 "First, Marxism differs from all primitive forms of socialism in that it does not link the movement to any single, determined form of struggle. He admits the most varied forms of struggle, and he does not "invent" them: he limits himself to generalizing, organizing, making conscious the forms of revolutionary class struggle, which arise spontaneously in the very course of the movement. (...) Marxism demands that we carefully consider the ongoing mass struggle, which (...) constantly generates new and increasingly varied processes of defence and attack. (...) Under no circumstances does it intend to limit itself to the possible and existing forms of struggle at a given moment: it recognizes that a change in the social situation will inevitably lead to the appearance of new forms of struggle. (...) Marxism, in this respect, is being educated, if one can say so, in the practical school of the masses; it is far from claiming to teach the masses forms of struggle that the "system builders" imagine at the bottom of their office.... Secondly, Marxism absolutely demands that the question of forms of struggle be considered in its historical aspect. At different moments of economic evolution, according to different political, national, cultural, living conditions, etc., forms of struggle are at the forefront to become the main ones; as a result, secondary and accessory forms of struggle change in their turn. To try to resolve by yes or no about a given means of struggle, without examining in detail the concrete circumstances of the development it has reached, would be to leave the Marxist terrain completely. (Lenin, "The War of the Partisans").
For scientific materialism, the maintenance of coherence between theory and action, between doctrine and tactics, depends on the historical and material conditions in which the party-organ is forged. In the CI, a unitary direction has not emerged insofar as it has been constituted on the basis of currents which have roughly escaped the bankruptcy of the 2nd International and which have merged with the heat of the victory of the October Revolution, but without having a unitary historical tradition. This is a material, historical fact to say the least. The CI should have become the world party; history has not allowed it. We have to learn the lessons as materialists to know where mistakes were made that made possible or encouraged the degeneration of the party so that - in the light of great victories and great defeats - the next crystallization of revolutionary forces allows the reconstitution of a world party capable of avoiding the thousand and one traps that bourgeois society sets for the communist proletariat. It is a question of forging the organ which in its reflexes conditioned by all the past history of the class struggle, in its praxis and in its direction, is capable of fulfilling its historical task.

The criticism developed by the Italian left was cruelly confirmed by the events in Germany in 1923 when the Communist Party discredited itself as a revolutionary party and by those in Italy in 1924, after the assassination of Matteoti, where, falling into the hands of centrism, it was unable to resolutely put itself on the field of class struggle.

In 1926, with the "Theses of Lyon", the left will only confirm by the harsh reality of seven years of international experience the positions which were at the base of the constitution of the Communist Party, Italian section of the CI; and it will do so in the name of the constitutive bases of the International itself, thus transmitting to the future communist movement the lessons learned from almost a hundred years of history.

The German "Left", for its part, has only drawn from the counter-revolution the confirmation of its positions, both principled and tactical, which it defends as a distinct current - from the first decade of the century:

"So those who think of a "revolutionary party" only half learn the lessons of the past. Not unaware that the workers parties, the SP and the CP have become organs of domination, serving to perpetuate exploitation, they only conclude: "We only have to do better!" It is to close our eyes to the fact that the failure of the various parties is due to an even more general cause, namely: the fundamental contradiction existing between the emancipation of the class, as a whole and by its own forces, and the reduction to nothing of the activity of the masses by a new pro-worker power (...). Any so-called vanguard seeking, according to its programme, to lead and govern the masses by means of a "revolutionary party" is proving to be a reactionary factor, even because of this conception"50.

In short, "Long live Bakunin, down with Marxism!"Long live the revolution, down with the constitution of the class into a party", "long live the soviets... without the Bolsheviks!".

With the victory of the current counterrevolution, the cannibalism that accompanies any counterrevolution has risen to unknown heights both with regard to the oppression of the proletariat and the general offensive against communist doctrine. And among its most disgusting flanks are all those who - in the name of the proletariat and the socialist revolution - modulate their complaint on the same democratic wavelength as the bourgeoisie, the social-democracy and the Stalinists who partisan of "peaceful coexistence", to denounce the very principles of Bolshevism (Marxism and all!) and the CI as the matrix of Stalinist counterrevolution.

We have nothing to add today to what our current had already sustained not only during the glorious years of the first post-war period, but immediately after its birth in 1847. Our appreciation of the

"revolutionary" idealistic currents does not depend on the historical period, but on their very nature. "The Manifesto" had already declared them outdated by history. Today, their existence is indeed an indication of the depth of the counter-revolution from which they draw their raison d'être, and the scathing words of the "Manifesto" retain all their value:

"The importance of "socialism of sects" is a function of historical development. As the class struggle intensifies and takes shape, this way of rising above it by imagination, this imaginary opposition that one makes to it, loses all practical value, all theoretical justification. (...) They therefore seek, and in this they are logical, to blunt class struggle and to reconcile antagonisms. They continue to dream of the experimental realization of their social utopias. (...) Little by little, they fall into the category of reactionary or conservative socialists (...) and are distinguished only by a more systematic pedantry and a superstitious and fanatical faith in the miraculous effectiveness of their social science.

They are therefore fiercely opposed to any political action by the working class, an action which, in their opinion, can only come from a lack of blind faith in the new gospel.

History has already secreted the currents, the divergent historical forces which, in periods of counterrevolution, prepare the doctrinal weapons which will have to guide the social movement of tomorrow.

On the one hand, the social democrats (from Louis Blanc to Stalinism, via Kautsky and the centrists) who want to marry parliamentary democracy and the constitution of the proletariat into a ruling class, the people and the working class, reforms and socialism and who all come together under the ever-renewed and counter-revolutionary banner of the "peaceful transition to socialism".

On the other hand, anarchism, which claims to guide the emancipation of the proletariat and destroy capitalism, while denying the essential weapons of revolutionary struggle - Party and State, centralized terror and dictatorship - embracing at the same time the democratic and gradualist vision of revolution, from Proudhon to Bakunin, from revolutionary trade unionists to the German "left" (and its many epigones) who throw out the same misleading slogans of "freedom", "autonomy" and "sovereignty".

After each counter-revolutionary wave, the Marxist party had to reforge itself by fighting these two pathological deviations of the workers movement, which always claim to emerge victorious from each defeat of the revolution. From Marx to Lenin, from the First to the Third International, the struggle has always been the same to defend the class party against the attempts of "innovators" and "critics", ridding them of all democratic or libertarian deformations.

During the last counterrevolutionary wave, it belonged to the Italian left to claim the historical invariance of Marxism. Confirming all her theoretical and doctrinal weapons, she demonstrated that there is nothing to review in the Marxist baggage and that the errors that were at the root of the degeneration of the Third International do not relate to Marxism, but to the doctrines of the enemy classes.

One does not create doctrines at will; they arise during the great confrontations of the class forces whose bourgeois society is big and which shook it four times: 1848, 1871, 1905 and 1917. The new forces that are entering the field of political struggle can only be integrated into one of these

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51 In this already lengthy article, we cannot deal with another issue on which it has been claimed that there is an "analogy" between the positions of the Italian left and that of the German "left". The Marxist left asserts the dual character of the Russian revolution (proletarian-led anti-feudal revolution) and the capitalist nature of Russian society and state today. The German "left" asserts it "too". It will be the object of a future party work to highlight the deep doctrinal abyss that separates their respective analysis from the Russian question.
irreconcilable traditions, which today clash in theory with the weapons of criticism, and which tomorrow will clash on the social field with the criticism of weapons, according to the law written in letters of fire by materialistic determinism, by the history of social classes and revolutions.

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