An excellent communist who was at the forefront of the Italian proletariat's struggle against the Mussolini gangs at the time of the "romantic" and pseudo-revolutionary fascist movement in this country, but who never let himself be taken in by the fatal suggestions of anti-fascist opportunism, used to say that "the worst product of fascism was anti-fascism". This jest is completely incomprehensible to those supporters of a reformist, pacifist and progressive democracy who live continuously in their insipid dreams despite all the blows that capitalist reality gives them. Yet it is profound and true, and its meaning is not difficult to decipher for anyone who has any understanding of Marxism. It means in short: the importance of fascism has historically been very limited; but that of anti-fascism has been much more enduring, and more pernicious from the point of view of the interests of the revolutionary proletariat and communism. Anyone who, in 1969, is not capable of understanding this has never understood anything not only of revolutionary Marxism, but even, more modestly, of his time.

In the literal and narrow sense, in fact, the fascist movement fulfilled only a limited function: it saved the bourgeoisie of Italy first, then Germany and countries of lesser world weight, such as Spain, from an appalling political and economic bankruptcy at a time and in very specific circumstances, namely the general crisis which, especially in these countries, followed the First World War. We do not intend to affirm by this that these bourgeois victories, these crushing triumphs of the forces of capitalist conservation did not weigh much in the defeat of the International of 1919 and that they had little to do with the outbreak of a second imperialist war instead of the European and world revolution willed not only by Lenin, but by all the communists; that would be denying reality. There are only two questions to ask: how did the victory of the bourgeoisie come about when the fascist and Nazi parties came to power? But also and above all how is it that a quarter of a century after the fall of the fascist powers, which have been passed as the obstacle par excellence to the triumph of the proletariat, Capital continues to hold everywhere, in a totalitarian way, the political power of which, obviously, it uses in its exclusive interest? One only has to ask these questions to glimpse the meaning of the jest quoted above: the Italian bourgeoisie, then the German bourgeoisie and a certain number of lesser bourgeoisies were able to defeat the proletariat and drag behind them the middle classes that capitalism oppresses, because instead of having against them a tempered communist proletariat, they found only a largely "anti-fascist" proletariat which did not know how to retaliate to capitalist violence by its proletarian violence and seize itself in time of the power. Above all - since in any case it is neither the Italian proletariat nor the German proletariat which alone could make the history of the 20th century, and it is clearly the European and world proletariat which is in question - if capitalism still dominates, it is because the proletariat has not yet come to claim its own revolutionary dictatorship under the same political influence that already allowed its crushing in the years 2l-33, namely the persistent attachment to the apparent economic and social concessions it expects from the democratic form, but imagines itself abolished by a declared fascist power. In other words, twenty-five years after the fall of the Mussolinis and the Hitlers, the proletarians of the world are more "anti-fascist" (anti-Franco, anti-Gaulist, anti... a host of names of bourgeois politicians in this same vast bag) than revolutionary communists. It's all here. And as long as a profound transformation of this political mentality has not taken place, the anti-capitalist struggle will remain at a standstill, despite all the ridiculous boasts of socialist democracy.

It is obvious that this state of mind of the proletariat has deep causes that we do not have to examine here in detail, but it is certain that it is also made of prejudices that the simple knowledge of the historical facts would be enough to ruin if the opportunist parties did not seek with all their forces to make it inaccessible to the working mass, either by the means of demagogy, or by quite simply by keeping silent about the great past proletarian struggles. It is for this reason that the report below on the Communist Party of Italy in the face of the fascist offensive (report presented to a general meeting of the party) has a great political interest,
and not only "cultural", to use the unbearable modern bourgeois jargon. Indeed, this report demonstrates, on the indisputable basis of the facts and texts, some overlooked truths: the real gravedigger of the Italian proletariat was not so much the fascist movement, but the social democracy which, faced with the violence of the black bands, never knew how to do anything other than invoke respect for legality. Fascism itself triumphed not only through violence, but also through a reformist demagogy to which the socialists of the 2nd International had only too accustomed the proletariat. Finally, the only force in the world that can without brazenly lying bear witness to an effective struggle - both political and military - against fascism, a struggle that is purely proletarian and free from all bourgeois and opportunist influences, is the Communist Party of Italy, which at the time was precisely in the hands of our current. In other words, it was precisely the only section of the Communist International that energetically refused the excessive concessions made by the leadership of the Communist International to democratic anti-fascism (concessions to which unfortunately the name of the unlucky Zinoviev is forever attached) and denounced the opportunist dangers that this posed for the communist movement; which also led a coherent, stubborn and self-sacrificing struggle, also against the miserable black gangs of Italian fascism. If it was defeated, it depended on circumstances stronger than the will of the best revolutionary party. At least it was not politically liquidated, as was unfortunately the case of all the communist parties in the world that finally fell into a pure and simple defence of democracy. This is no accident. For only its Marxist and revolutionary way of leading and leading the vital struggle against the fascist movement prevented it, between 1939-45, from adhering to the imperialist war, that is to say the mortal betrayal of proletarian internationalism which put an end, for too many long years, to the attempt of the European and world proletariat to organize itself into an International Communist Party, an indispensable condition for the victory over Capital, to which anti-fascism ensured such a long survival.

**Nature of Fascism**

Our Party thesis on fascism is that it constitutes a method of government to which the bourgeoisie resorts to each time, radicalized by the crisis of capitalism, the masses no longer let themselves be deceived by the false formulas of freedom, equality, democracy and show themselves determined to seize power. Fascism is therefore not a pathological outgrowth, something outside the bourgeois regime, or, worse, a return to the regime that preceded the triumph of the "sacred principles" of the French revolution. It is one of the possible methods of government that the bourgeoisie uses whenever the democratic method is no longer able to ensure its class domination despite its egalitarian promises, and its corrupting influence on the upper layers of the proletariat. Whether this method of government is called fascism or Nazism or whether it takes the more provincial and backward forms of phalangism, or the more paternalistic forms of Salazar's corporativism or finally the primitive and crude form of the military coup d'état as in Greece in 1967, it remains essentially the same.

Those who, like the communists of Italy in the years 1919-1922, witnessed the unleashing of the bourgeois reaction and saw with their own eyes the proletarian fortresses (workers’ newspapers, Labour exchanges, People's Houses) first attacked and occupied by the regular police forces of the State, then invaded and burned by the fascist squads, could not doubt that fascism was the legitimate son of the bourgeoisie! They have always recognized in him a very easy political method of the ruling class, she, to spot in the financial citadels, the judiciary, the repressive forces, the press and Parliament itself. They never doubted that on a historical scale, the two methods, fascism and democracy, would exchange their respective experiences, converging in the use of all possible means to defend the class domination of the bourgeoisie, and distinguishing themselves from each other only by a different "mix" of these means to be attributed to the dynamics of class struggle and not to individual or even collective wills. The fact is that fascism has made its own the demagogy of reformism and socialist democracy in order to put them at the service of an attempt at a general and centralised organisation of the ruling class, while post-fascist democracy has inherited all the repressive arsenal of fascism and its methods of intervention in the field of the economy, while restoring the secular fiction of representative government, the freedom of citizens, the class fraternity and, of course,
the State, "common good of all". Moreover, imperialism, the supreme phase of capitalism, could not have
other political effects than that.

That said, the purpose of this report¹ is to show that the historical facts of the distant years 1919-24 proved
the perfect confluence of all political forces, both democratic and fascist, of the bourgeoisie in defense of its
class dictatorship and to reveal the opposition that exists between the attitude of the young Communist
Party of Italy of the time and the reformist sabotage of often heroic proletarian struggles, the bleating calls
of the maximalists for "pacification", "return to order and law" and other similar infamies. The Communist
Party was indeed the only one to boldly raise the question of fascism in its true terms by calling on the
revolutionary proletarians to take up the bourgeois challenge and to respond to violence with violence, to
armed struggle with armed struggle, and to defend themselves by preparing to go on the offensive as soon
as the balance of forces allowed. In the situation of 1920-22, which was unfortunately not favourable to it,
the working class of Italy took to the streets several times, determined to fight, and each time, the Communist
Party clearly proclaimed that the enemy to be crushed was the whole apparatus of repression and
exploitation of the ruling class whose three pillars were democracy, fascism and reformism.

The "Preventive Counter-Revolution" matures in the Shadow of Democracy

It was by no means the appearance of Mussolini's black shirts, but rather the legal apparatus of the
democratic state that enabled the Italian bourgeoisie, supported by the international bourgeoisie, to
overcome the ordeal that followed the First World War in the form of a great wave of unrest and strikes. If
this threatening situation for her was followed by a demobilization of the working class, it was in no way
thanks to the "illegal" forces of fascism, but thanks to the perfectly legal methods which the Italian
bourgeoisie had always used successfully since the constitution of the Kingdom, her State being moreover
admirably trained to add violent methods to them in case of need, and not even trying to hide from them.

The proletarians who, in the years 1919-20, fought in the streets, in the factories and even in the countryside
first clashed with the regular armies of democracy who treated them with rifles. The state already had the
carabinieri, the police and the army (in some cases, the navy and the air force themselves intervened!), but
these bodies having proved insufficient after the war, although they were reinforced, Nitti created a royal
guard which allowed him not only to further strengthen the State, but to frame these anxious and threatening
bands of demobilized and adventurers who always swarm after the wars by arming them so that they pour
on the workers and the peasants in struggle their own grudges and frustrations of failures. It is thus under
the bullets of the very democratic forces of order that the workers fell at the beginning of 1919, proof that
the first decisive wave of anti-proletarian repression came from a government (or better a series of
governments) strictly liberal-democratic, or, as one would say today "progressive". This government knew
that it could count on the support of the trade union leaders and reformists of the Italian Socialist Party as
well as on the inconsistency of the maximalists, and it was in perfect bourgeois logic that democratic
repression was accompanied by a whole demagogy of "social welfare measures" (political price of bread,
agrarian reform plans and finally control over industry), but above all by the usual appeal to the ballot box,
which has always been so effective in putting the masses to sleep: General elections in the fall of 1919,
municipal and provincial elections one year later, general elections again in the fall of 1921. Nitti and Giolitti
alternated in power, waiting to cede power to the former Socialist Bonomi, as happened after the May 1921
election. An I.C.P. document of 1923 reminds us that the first had increased the contingent of carabinieri to
65,000 and that of customs officers to 35,000, that it had equipped 45,000 royal guards and reinforced the
internal espionage network. The second put the army in line during the events of Ancona. Their Democrat

¹ This report was presented at the general meeting of the Party held in Florence on April 20 - May 1, 1967. It was
published in "Il Programma comunista", No. 16.
cards were therefore perfectly in order, and it is right that they are now regarded as the fathers of the Italian Republic. Is the coat of arms of democracy not decorated with both the ballot paper and the rifle?

The proletariat fought with tireless energy. While the repressive forces of the state gradually re-established order and regained control of a situation which had seemed hopeless to the bourgeoisie, the electoral "successes" (one could even say triumphs) obtained by diverting precious energies from the armed struggle to disperse them in legal battles, awakened in the workers the illusion that after the terrible haemorrhage it had just suffered, the victory of their class was close at hand and power within reach. In reality, it was precisely by responding to the appeals of parliamentary electoralism that Italy's working class exposed itself materially and morally disarmed to the blows of its opponent.

In 1920, the proletariat was already reduced to a defensive attitude in the face of an enemy conscious of having wrested the weapons of victory from its hands. When the factories were occupied in September 1920, Giolitti did not need to resort to force, a method to which he did not find repugnant, however, since he had always applied it with perfect cynicism throughout his long career\(^2\). He knew that neither the C.G.T. nor the Socialist Party would want to run the danger of pushing the movement to its extreme consequences, that they would unload on each other the heavy responsibility of leading it.

A joint communiqué issued by these two organizations at the beginning of September threatened to give to the movement the objective of "the control of enterprises to achieve collective management and socialization of all forms of production"; but this threat was subject to a reservation, intended to reassure the bourgeoisie: "in the event that, because of the obstinacy of employers or the violation of neutrality by the government, a satisfactory solution to the conflict could not be found". The government seized the olive branch which was so opportunely stretched to it: it chose "neutrality"; instead of launching the forces of order against the occupied factories, it promised to exercise itself, on behalf of the State, "the control of production", foreseeing without difficulty that, deprived of direction and not directed towards the seizure of power, locked up within the narrow limits of the factory and prevented from leaving it by its political and trade union directions, the working class already exhausted by two years of bloody struggles, would have given in by asphyxia. As for its leaders, who said they wanted "an improvement in relations between bosses and workers and an increase in production", the prospect of administrative elections is enough to make them mouth water...

The final struggle did not take place (but no advantage... production control, promised simply to calm the spirits) because those who should have attacked were prevented by the bad shepherds and by the State, which from the heights of its "neutrality" waited quietly for the weapons to finally be handed over to it. So there was not even one of these defeats on the field of open class struggle that leave deep traces in the proletariat and are seeds of revolutionary recovery and victory. There was a defeat without a fight, the most demoralizing of all because it is the worst proof of impotence.

It was only then, during the terrible wave of reflux that followed the occupation movement of the factories, that the fascist bands entered the scene. They did not, of course, aim to remove an immediate proletarian threat, since it had ceased to exist, but they wanted to prevent the defeated proletariat from raising its head. They understood very well that they had lost nothing of its fighting spirit and its spirit of sacrifice (the continuation of the events will confirm it) and that the problems to which the ruling class was unable to give a solution could not fail to rest thereafter with more force and urgency than ever.

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\(^2\) The then socialist historian Gaetano Salvemini called Giolitti "Minister of the Mafia" because of his ability to exploit the resources of reformist and socialist democracy while using local Mafia - especially in the South - to secure docile communal administrations and falsify elections at his convenience, without excluding the open violence of the "mazzieri" (bailiffs) to intimidate agricultural workers.
After the very effective "normal" democratic repression, what was called a "preventive counter-revolution" was needed. When it happens, it will have been promoted, supported and legalized by the authors of the "stabilization" of the regime in 1921-22, that is, by the state, the bourgeois democratic parties and reformism.

The Beginning of the Fascist Offensive. Two False Theses on Fascism

The occupation of the factories ceased in the second half of September 1920; administrative elections followed in October. The two years of offensive of the fascist squads actually begin in November in Bologna: the 4 the assault is given by the fascists at the Labour Exchange; the 21, it is the events of the Accursio palace in Bologna. The movement was thus born in an agricultural zone and, from the beginning, it presented the physiognomy and social composition that would characterize it throughout its "climbing" against the proletarian fortresses: flying squads recruited in the small towns of the provinces and in the ranks of a famished and off-axis petty bourgeoisie or, better, layers placed below the petty bourgeoisie: soldiers of adventure, former members of Fiume's expedition and former representatives of the arditism of war, unsilvered elements of the middle layer, small intellectuals in search of glory and prebends, etc..... Moving from one locality to another with the "speed of manoeuvre" that allowed them not the tactical and strategic genius of its leaders, but the open connivance of the State, this movement always had as its goal the workers' citadels (Labour exchanges, seats of parties and trade unions, proletarian circles, cooperatives, etc.) and it faces only one enemy: the organized workers of the cities and the countryside; it can on the other hand count on the benevolent neutrality of the State and even, most often, on its total support.

The fact that the armed and "illegal" anti-proletarian offensive was part of an agricultural zone and that its perpetrators were essentially from the middle classes gave an appearance of foundation (but only an appearance) to two interpretations, sometimes distinct, sometimes mixed, but both false. According to the first, fascism represented a regression towards the classic pre-capitalist reaction methods that feudal-type landowners would have imposed on the "progressive" wing of the bourgeoisie embodied by the industrialists; according to the second, it was an extreme and successful attempt by the middle classes to organize themselves for a revolution obeying their particular ideology and aiming at independent goals.

These two interpretations made in the proletarian camp ravages of which we still suffer today the consequences. At the time they were found not only in the bourgeois "left" press or in the reformist press, but also in that of the "Ordine nuovo"6, and more especially in Gramsci, who, during his first steps in the young Communist Party of 1921, still had difficulty understanding that State power is still, whatever form it takes, an organ of the bourgeoisie's class dictatorship7.

Two quotations from Gramsci will suffice to illustrate the two above-mentioned aspects of the non-Marxist interpretation of fascism. The first one says:

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3 This will be explained at the IV Congress of the Communist International the representative of the Italian CP who then defended the positions of the left.

4 On November 21, 1920, the fascists stormed the Palace of the Municipality in which had just settled the triumphantly elected socialist administration. In the shooting that followed, there were 9 dead and 100 wounded. These incidents mark the beginning of the punitive expeditions against the... strongholds of the proletariat, that is, according to the stupid conception of the reformists... the local municipalities (!).

5 The "arditi" were regular army assault groups with daggers and hand grenades.

6 The Ordine nuovo, fraction of the idealistic and workerist Socialist Party which will follow the abstentionist fraction in the new party during the split of Livorno. Based in Turin, it was led by Gramsci and Togliatti who later became the hatchet man of Moscow against the left who had founded the party.

7 This misunderstanding of a fundamental Marxist conception by Gramsci appears clearly in this passage from one of his writings: "From the constitutional point of view, what does it mean when we affirm that a given State is not a democracy, but the dictatorship of a class? And he replied: "This means that the executive, legislative, and judicial authorities are not separate and independent from each other, but united in a single power, the executive". As if the notion of "dictatorship of a class" were constitutional, and not social and historical!
"Thanks to the decline of the Socialist Party after the occupation of the factories, the petty bourgeoisie militarily reconstituted its cadres and organized itself on a national scale with the speed of lightning, under the impetus of the staff who had used it during the war. A simple toy in the hands of this general staff and the most backward forces of the government, the urban petty bourgeoisie allied itself with the landowners and, on their behalf, destroyed the organization of the peasants." ("Ordine nuovo", 2 October 1921).

The second one said this:

"The industrial bourgeoisie was incapable of curbing the workers movement, and just as incapable of controlling this movement as the revolutionary movement of the countryside. This is why the first watchword of fascism after the occupation of the factories was the following: the rural people must control the urban bourgeoisie which did not show enough grip with the workers... Originally anti-capitalists, then linked to capital, but not completely absorbed by it, the rural classes are those who organized the state in the various countries putting in their reactionary activity all the ferocity and ruthlessness of decision which always characterized them". Gramsci concluded: "With fascism, we are witnessing a phenomenon of historical regression" (Speech of 16-5-1925 in the Chamber of Deputies).

The Marxist Left theoretically refuted this double thesis by showing that "the big agrarians" was a purely metaphysical notion and that this so-called "category" was decomposed on the one hand into owners of large capitalist agricultural enterprises and on the other hand into absentee landowners that only a bastard sociology could consider as "feudal barons". It also showed that the former belong by right to the ruling bourgeois class and that the latter have long been integrated into the capitalist mechanism, living in perfect symbiosis with it, and trailing it. It also denied any autonomous existence and any capacity for political and social initiative to the small and medium-sized bourgeoisie: is it necessary to recall Marx's "The Class Struggles in France" and "The Eighteenth Brumaire" on this subject?

All theoretical considerations aside, the two theses in question were contradicted both by the facts of 1919-24 and by their historical precedents. As far as precedents are concerned, the "progressive" bourgeoisie (both agrarian and industrial) has shown itself willing since the beginning of the century "to open up to workers' organisations led by the reformists". Flattering "the people", reformist, in short Giolittian, it held firmly in its hand the rudder of the bourgeois-democratic state and faced victoriously in person, and without obscurantist returns from the reaction, the proletarian assault, using both flattery and violence. In the crucial years following the war, it only brought this subtle art of government to perfection. As for the facts, those of 1919-24, that is, the fascist offensive, are as easy to decipher as a diagram, and we must summarize them before entering into the heart of our subject which is the struggle of the young Communist Party in these hard years.

**Real Price of the "Fascist Climb"**

If, as we have just seen, the fascist offensive began at the end of 1920 in the rural areas of the North, as an organized movement, fascism dates from 1919 and it was born in the cities, or better in the Lombardy metropolis, the heart of high finance, big industry and big commerce, and not in the depths of the still barbaric countryside, in new Vendees. It is there, in Turin, that the centre is located which, in 1915, mobilised the young petty-bourgeois interventionists in favour and at the service of the great Capital; and it is also Turin which is the cradle of workers reformism.

Fascism has therefore not only been nurtured, but amply fuelled by big capital, and benefiting from the political experience of those who sponsored it, it is born with a programme that does not only provide for the use of violence (this violence will take a long time to manifest itself and it will only do so sporadically and in "unauthorised" forms), but also and above all reforms. If it is enough to demand anti-clerical reforms, to demand the abolition of the Senate or to declare oneself against royalty to be "progressive", then fascism was from its birth at the forefront of all progressivism, including that of the Italian "communists" of today, because it knew well that it was the only way to attract to itself, in addition to a fraction of the labour...
aristocracy, the dissatisfied petty bourgeois and the "intellectuals" who express the aspirations of the latter and who, far from mobilizing and organizing themselves, are always mobilized and organized by others.

Fascism was thus born in the cities, but it immediately spread to the countryside and conquered the "rural". In which areas? Well, precisely in the clearly capitalist agricultural zones such as the lower Po Valley, Emilia and Romagna, which for more than fifty years were the scene of the struggles of agricultural workers, i.e. pure wage earners, and of the fierce repression exerted against them by a fully bourgeois patronage, totally rid of any trace of "feudalism". At its origin, fascism does not exist in the so-called lands of election of the "feudal barons", like southern Italy, and if it is born and develops rapidly there, it is only in those areas where, as in Apulia, the relations of production are modern relations between capital and salaried labour and where the social relations are based on the antagonism between the latter. The large industrial bourgeoisie and the large land bourgeoisie help each other to organize, just as apt to use violence or, on the contrary, to play the "progressive" one as the other, and also quick to skilfully divide labour to better defend their common heritage. Nowhere do we see "agrarians" controlling urban industrialists!

Of the capitalist zones of the North, the fascist offensive (which must be distinguished from the movement itself) is determined by purely tactical reasons: its real strategic objective is the large proletarian agglomerations, particularly those of the industrial triangle Lombardy - Liguria - Piedmont, and of course the political capital of the Kingdom. The "climbing" towards these objectives starts nonetheless from the less defended workers' zones, campaigns where the proletariat is scattered, small provincial towns where it is easier to mobilize the petty-bourgeois scum for adventurous expeditions and zones where it is relatively easy to pit one against the other the different categories of which the peasantry is made up. Thus, in the Ferrara region, fascists began to occupy and share land as early as 1920, a good tactic for breaking the dangerous alliance between small-scale farmers or sharecroppers and agricultural workers; areas where workers' concentrations were not defended and where workers, very strong when they took to the streets, were vulnerable as scattered and isolated citizens; areas where the brake of reformism at the Prampolini, the "Milanese" of election, acted as a counterweight to the vigorous push of agricultural workers. In all these regions, the bourgeoisie intends to catch two pigeons with the same bean; it has a long memory: it knows how much the agricultural proletariat can be a dangerous enemy and how much its rebellious spirit worries the big landowners. That is why the offensive starts there, that is why it ruthlessly attacks its class adversary in the open countryside to return, covered with laurels, to the cities and clear the ground of its enemy implanted in the factories and the working class districts.

Cowardly as always, the Italian bourgeoisie did not dare prematurely attack the proletarian fortresses that are the working class districts of the big industrial metropolises, nor even the poor (but with strong workers infiltrations) districts of the very bourgeois city of Rome. It will take them two years to achieve this, not without first having secured their rear, that is, broken the workers' resistance in the provinces and the countryside. When, by exception, it tries to do so, as was the case at the beginning, in Turin, Milan, Genoa and Rome, it will have to retreat hastily, heal its famous wounds and count its first deaths. From Emilia and Romagna as well as from Lower Lombardy, it will have the greatest difficulties to reach the South, the North and the North-West. If it can be unleashed in Tuscany, a combative province even in the countryside, it is because this region is also an almost inexhaustible reserve of downgraded petty-bourgeois or careerists; it will penetrate the Marches, Umbria, Lazio, always aiming at the same objective: the workers' circles, the Labour exchanges, the headquarters of the Communist Party, and even, albeit to a lesser extent, the socialist party, the drafting of proletarian newspapers, isolated militants. And it is when the strongholds of the proletariat have fallen that Mussolini will receive as a bonus his "march on Rome"... in a sleeping car, and then all the fractions of the bourgeoisie will provide him with under-secretaries of state and ministers.

During all these encircling manoeuvres, it is the grand-capitalist counter-revolution that advances, and which, making itself a bulwark of the petty-bourgeois body, rushes against the only enemy: the workers' organizations.
Cities and towns are invaded or taken over one after the other: Ferrara fell on 20 December 1920, Modena on 24 January 1921, Trieste on 8 February (the "Lavoratore" was destroyed); at the end of February it was the turn of Minervino, Murge and Bari; 27-29, that of Florence, where Spartaco Lavagnini, communist activist and trade union leader, was assassinated; 1 March is Empoli; 4 Siena; 22-26 Perugia and Terni; 31 Lucca; 2 April Reggio; 12 Prato, Foiàno del Chiana and Arezzo; 19 Parma; 20 Mantua; 22-23 Piacenza; 2 May Pisa; 5 Naples. While labour exchanges, trade union headquarters, newspaper editorial offices and workers' party headquarters burn, and workers and peasants fight like lions, inflicting greater losses on the enemy than their own, in short, while the whole peninsula is set on fire and blood and the classes clash in a duel to the death, the inevitable word of order is once again heard: the ballot boxes! From the arsenal of democracy, Giolitti now draws the trump card of political elections.

After that, will it still be argued that the "agrarian reaction" forced the hand of the "democratic progressivism" of the industrialists by relying on the "most retrograde elements" placed at the head of the State? In reality, Giolitti's reformist democracy is at the head of the state: it is it which, in the administrative elections of 1920, stood united with the fascists; it is it which, in the conflicts between black shirts and workers, invariably intervenes to help the former to win. After the massacres in Ferrara, it was Giolitti who ordered the province of Emilia to be "disarmed"; policemen and carabinieri made a large harvest of weapons hidden in the houses of the workers and peasants, but on those of the fascists they closed their eyes. In Florence, during three days of very violent battles, it was not the black shirts, but the armoured divisions of the army and the carabinieri that broke the heroic resistance of the proletarians of the Scandicci district. In Empoli, Signa and Prato, cities decided not to give in, the fascists found a convenient asylum in the barracks. In Pisa, it was the general in command of the division who ordered the gate of the labour exchange, which the workers refused to open, to be gunned down. And for its part, the judiciary only pronounces sentence against the left.

As we can see, this is quite something other than a "return to the regime before the bourgeois revolution and its sacred principles". And the meaning of the events that we have been retracing since the beginning is not at all in the opposition of "progressive industrial democracy" and "feudal agrarian reaction", and even less in the "petty-bourgeois revolution", but in the opposition between the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and that of the proletariat, a dilemma posed internationally by the end of the war and inscribed in letters of fire in historical reality.

**Foundation of the Communist Party in Livorno. Historical Necessity of the Split**

The events mentioned above form the backdrop to the split of the old socialist party that occurred in Livorno in January 1921. From this surgical operation long called for by the Left, the young Communist Party emerges armed with a programme that converges with that of the Bolsheviks in all fundamental questions, as became clear from the October Revolution and throughout the war, and it can already make a positive assessment of its relentless struggle against reformism.

This young Communist Party has no doubt about the nature of democracy:

"Production relations today are protected by the power of the bourgeois State: whatever the form of representative system and employment of elective democratic, the bourgeois State remains the organ for the defence of the interests of the capitalist class." (Livorno Programme, point 2).

Nor does it have any doubts that the armed offensive of fascism simply constitutes the most obvious manifestation of the "insurmountable dilemma" posed by war and bourgeois peace to the "proletarians of Italy and the whole world: either dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, or dictatorship of the proletariat". Immediately after its constitution, it proclaims:

"Workers, whoever wants to lead you down other paths and convince you that the destruction of the bourgeois state apparatus is not the only way to save the countless victims of capitalism, whoever disarms
you morally and materially from peaceful actions while the bourgeoisie is clearly preparing for armed struggle and taking the offensive against you; who thus speaks to you consciously or unconsciously betrays the proletarian cause and is only a servant of counterrevolution” (Manifesto for the demonstration of February 20, 1921).

The Italian Marxist Left had not suffered, but really wanted the split for both theoretical and practical reasons. In those months of unbridled bourgeois reaction, it was indeed clearer than ever that the unity of the Socialist Party rabidly defended by Serrati’s maximalist centre actually meant a surrender to Turati’s right. Such unity could only deprive the proletarians who were fighting with all their strength in the street, of any conscious, energetic and centralized direction. This false, this false unity with open or masked reformists could only be a ball and chain shackled to the feet of the heroic working class of Italy engaged in an unequal struggle not only with the "irregular" forces of fascism, but with the regular forces of the democratic state: it was therefore necessary above all to break this unity so that this desperate resistance would succeed and above all so that, when the time came, the proletarian counter-offensive would triumph.

The Left was not concerned about losing any municipality (even the traditionally "red" municipality of Bologna) in the operation, because it was clearly not the place where the great class battle could be decided. But immediately after the events at the Accursio Palace in Bologna, the organ of the communist fraction of the P.S.I., "Il Comunista", drew the lesson from the facts in its issue of 5 December 1920:

"The events in Bologna where the bourgeoisie adopted a boldly aggressive attitude both in its regular and irregular organizations... can be and are exploited in favor of the unitary thesis: we are attacked, we close ranks to defend ourselves. Such an interpretation of the eloquent lesson that has just been given to us is completely wrong, and even absurd. Party unity still exists; it was even complete during the election campaign, yet the working class failed to defend itself. Why is that? For one simple reason: formal unity can be a united front for electoral conquests; it is not one for defensive action, let alone offensive action. The party formed and trained for traditional peaceful actions is completely unfit now that this stage is over and the situation puts us in front of all other needs. The lesson to be drawn from this fact is that coexistence between right and left in the same party is lethal. When we have a homogeneous and compact Party, capable of both offensive and defensive violent actions; capable of preparing morally and materially these actions in full agreement and conscience to avoid surprises or retreats after the fact, it may be that we lose municipalities (for example that of Bologna) because we will be few, or if we do not lose them, we will know how to keep them by force, or if we do not obtain them by elections, the day will come when we will take them by the same means as the fascists when they have wrested them from us, thus giving us a profitable lesson".

The brutal evidence of the facts as well as the reasons of principle therefore made urgent the split that the Left had been demanding since 1919 and that only the slowness with which the other groups that joined the Communist Party had become aware of its necessity had delayed. Under the cloak of unity defended by maximalism (which was only in favour of barricades in words), reformism was free to bind the feet and fists to the working class and then stab it by striking agreement with the police and the fascists. After having developed the reasons of principle which were at the basis of the constitution of the Communist Party of Italy, the report of the Communist fraction to the Congress of Livorno moved on to the practical arguments on the basis of the bloody experience of the previous two years:

"The function of communists is to show the masses that revolution is inevitable. On this basis, they can and must, therefore, to the motive force of a moral and material preparation, accumulate the conditions that will increase the chances of victory of the proletariat, for with a class party ready to lead it and technically prepared for all the demands of the revolutionary struggle, the latter will acquire all the necessary temper. Reformers and social democrats on the contrary tell the masses that revolution is avoidable or even impossible. When the crisis breaks out, not only will the proletariat be at their fault in conditions that will allow the bourgeoisie to beat it easily, but they will themselves support the bourgeois forces.
What is the function of a party in which revolutionaries are mixed up with reformists? It is to delay any serious revolutionary preparation and to paralyse the action of the Left while that of the Right develops under the best conditions, this action not consisting in elaborating reforms which the historical circumstances make impossible, but rather in opposing to the revolutionary tendencies a passive resistance which, when it becomes necessary, turns into active resistance”.

While fascism raged against the workers with the complicity of democracy and reformism, the social democrats and maximalists lamented the "violation of legality" and the "disruption of order", imploring the tutelary state to defend the former and restore the latter. Fulfilling with energy its hard task of self-organization, the Communist Party took up the challenge of the bourgeois coalition under the constant blows of the adversary: in February, its siege of the "Lavoratore" of Trieste was attacked and destroyed, and the communists of the city were imprisoned one after the other. Edmondo Peluso was deported "without reason" to the island of Santo Stefano. Ersilio Ambrogi was brought before the court as a common law homicide for the events in Cecina. Spartaco Lavagnini had just fallen in Florence under fascist bullets. Hundreds of obscure proletarians were beaten to death in the streets or caught in the clutches of the "fair" royal justice. On March 2, the Communist Party appealed to the working class for struggle. It could do so, nothing opposing the party's action to its doctrine since the break with the reformists. It was its duty to give it support and galvanize the will of the proletariat to struggle, and this duty it fulfills alone against all:

Appeal against the fascist reaction

"Comrades!

In today's tragic situation, the Communist Party has a duty to address you.

In many regions and cities of Italy, bloody clashes between the proletariat and the regular and irregular forces of the bourgeoisie follow one another and multiply. Among so many known or obscure victims, the Communist Party notes the loss of one of its best activists, Spartaco Lavagnini, who fell in Florence in his position of responsibility towards the working class and his party. To his memory, and to that of all the proletarians who fell in the struggle, the communists address the salvation of men whose faith and action temper them against the trial.

The events that are precipitating show that the revolutionary proletariat of Italy does not give in to the blows of the reaction to which the bourgeoisie and its government have resorted for some months with its armed gangs that attack the workers aspiring to their class emancipation. From the red Apulia, from the proletarian Florence, from so many other centers, we receive news that shows that despite the inferiority of its means and its organization, the proletariat knew how to respond to attacks, defend itself and strike those who hit it.

The inferiority of the proletariat - which it would be useless to hide - depends on the inadequacy of its organization; only the communist method can give it to it, and it passes through the struggle against the former leaders and against their outdated methods of peaceful action. The blows that the bourgeoisie inflicts on the masses must convince them that it is necessary to abandon the dangerous reformist illusions and to get rid of those who preach a social peace that is historically no longer possible.

Faithful to the doctrine and tactics of the International of Moscow, the Communist Party called on the conscious forces of the Italian proletariat to unite in order to give themselves the preparation and organization that until then they had missed and that existed only in reformist demagogy. It does not preach peace of mind or renunciation of violence and clearly tells workers that they cannot be satisfied with the weapons of propaganda, persuasion or democratic legality, that they need real weapons and not metaphorical ones. It enthusiastically proclaims its solidarity with the workers who responded to the white offensive blow for blow and warns them against the leaders who back away from their responsibilities and who propagate the stupid utopia of a civilized and chivalrous social struggle, sowing defeatism in the masses
and encouraging reaction: they are the worst enemies of the proletariat and the adversary rightly laughs at their nonsense.

The motto of the Communist Party is to accept the struggle on the ground that the bourgeoisie has chosen and on which the deadly crisis that works for it has irresistibly carried it. It is to respond to preparation by preparation, organization by organization, discipline by discipline, force by force and weapons by weapons.

There could be no better preparation for the offensive than the proletarian forces will inevitably have to launch one day against the bourgeois power and which will be the epilogue of the current struggles.

It is on this basis that the military organization of the Party will be constituted and in the meantime, these directives strengthen and stimulate the will to struggle of the obscure militants of the working class. The Party is aware of the difficulties that remain to be overcome in order to give the vigorous spontaneous action of the masses political leadership and a unitary organization, which derive essentially from the persistent influence of legal and pacifist socialism among the masses. It does not hide them from the workers either. There is not an atom of demagogy in its appeal, but only a severe exhortation to respond to a bourgeois reaction, both legal and illegal, of an implacable hardness by means opposed to those of the Party's reformist era and which the Communists were prepared to implement. The manifesto goes on like this:

"Action and preparation must become increasingly effective and systematic, and demagogy must stop. In the current situation, much still remains to be done, let us recognize it, so that the proletarian response to the adverse attacks takes the character of a general and coordinated action alone capable of ensuring us victory.

For this general action, the proletariat could not today resort to other forms of action than those which were very often adopted, but whose direction, in the current state of things, would remain, in whole or in part, in the hands of political and economic organizations whose method and structure can only lead to new disappointments and which leave no other prospect than to be stopped or abandoned in their action (this forecast was only too often verified thereafter NdR). As long as the reformists are still able to usurp leadership positions in the organizations that supervise the masses, this will be the case.

In such a perspective, the Communist Party will not undertake any general movement requiring it to relate to such elements, unless the situation leaves it no other possibility. As it stands, the Communist Party says that we must not accept national action in common with those whose methods can only lead to disaster. If this action were to occur, the Communist Party would do its duty so that the proletariat would not be betrayed at the height of the struggle, by closely monitoring the opponents of the revolution.

Today, therefore, the Communist Party gives its militants the watchword to resist locally on all fronts to fascist attacks, to demand revolutionary methods, to denounce the defeatism of the social democrats who, by weakness and error, the least conscious proletarians can consider as possible allies, in the face of danger.

Whether the course of action to be observed remains that or becomes more radical, the centre of the party knows that, from the first to the last, the Communists will do all their duty, faithful to their martyrs and aware of their responsibility as representatives of the Revolutionary International from Moscow to Italy.

Long live communism! Long live the world revolution.

Communist Party of Italy

The Federation of Communist Youth of Italy".

**Conditions of the Defensive and Offensive Action of the Proletariat**

It was the first time in this tormented post-war period that Italian proletarians heard such direct, open, stimulating and courageous language. In the Manifesto quoted above we find two themes that will return constantly during the following months. The first is this: the Party tells the proletarians and itself:
unfortunately, we are on the defensive, not because we wanted to be, but because circumstances beyond our control imposed it on us. We must defend ourselves, because no one else will help us. We can defend ourselves, on condition that we go down on the ground chosen by the bourgeoisie, the only one on which the fate of the revolution can be decided and therefore also on condition that we are ready from now on (and as soon as possible) to go on the offensive ourselves, in short on condition that we fight in this spirit. The second theme is this: we have against us the regular repressive forces of the state and the irregular bands of fascism. Neither of them could do anything against the formidable impetus of the proletariat, even badly armed as it is today, if this impetus were not hindered precisely by the cowardly attachment of the reformists to legality and the stupid attachment of the maximalist traitors to so-called "unity". We will never win, even on purely defensive ground, if we do not get rid of this double negative influence which paralyses all our practical efforts. It is these central themes that the Party tirelessly tried to get into the heads of the magnificent industrial and agricultural workers of Italy of 1921; who, as combative in defence as in attack, were unfortunately only too used for years and years to hearing the Reformers sing to them the song of legality and social peace, and to presenting democracy to them as placed above class conflicts. These themes also had to be recalled tirelessly within the young Communist Party itself in order to organise the necessary military frameworks, failing this would have been a disaster.

The Communist Party of Italy already had its persecuted and its martyrs, just as, forgotten by all, the anarchists to whose combativeness the Party always paid homage while inexorably condemning their ideology. To a lesser extent, the other parties with workers' composition also had some, but Livorno's party knew that the struggle carried risks (that of losing militants, but also that of losing... the compass) and not only did it abstain from joining the chorus of weeping reformists, but it warned the proletarians and militants against them. Just as there was no help to be expected from the state against fascism, there was no mercy to be begged for its "justice", bourgeois justice which the communists intend to destroy and not to restore. Thus, in an article entitled "Against the reaction" and published in the "Ordine nuovo" of 26/3/21 as in all the organs of the Party, the central wrote:

"Let us act, yes; let us work, yes, to give to those of our comrades who have sacrificed themselves most the help we owe them to give their leaders back to the movement of the masses. But let us avoid the mistake of considering action aimed at this goal as detached from the rest of our action as the current situation demands and as root causes want it to be. It is an illusion to believe that we can push the ruling class and its government back to a normal regime and respect for individual and collective freedoms. For us, the problem is by no means to bring the adversary back to respect for the law, for his law. This would mean enhancing the counter-revolutionary illusion that bourgeois legality promotes the struggle for the emancipation of the masses. If we were even remotely to unite ourselves in action with those movements whose theory and tactics are based on this central error, we would ruin the whole effect of our propaganda among the masses and we would fall into a fatal equivocation: to let believe that if the bourgeoisie remained within the limits of its own legality, we would do the same on our side. This would mean that we consider the perpetuation of the present constitutional regime as desirable, which would be forgetting that, according to Marxist criticism, the freedom that this regime affects to concede is only a deception and a resource of social conservation.

In the mouth of the communists, none of the ridiculous stereotypical phrases that are dear to bourgeois democracy and so-called socialist opportunism about freedom of opinion, individual rights and the like should be heard. We must also avoid encouraging elements who are influenced by our trade unionist and anarchist cousins to abuse this petty-bourgeois language while believing themselves to be true extremists. The communists are moving into a whole new territory. They know perfectly well that a return to traditional bourgeois legality is impossible. They affirm that history has universally posed a dilemma: either the open dictatorship of counter-revolution, or the victory of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. They do not set themselves the goal of opening a new era of "normal" political and legal relations (absurdity which would only mean the peaceful restoration of capitalist domination and privileges), but of promoting the transition to the era of revolutionary power of the proletariat. The communists do not say to the bourgeoisie:
beware, if you do not enter into legality, we will make the revolution to re-establish it! On the contrary, they propose to destroy bourgeois power through their revolutionary action. Anyone who intends to remain in the field of peaceful struggle, like the Social Democrats, will never be our ally.

To fight against the reaction, there is thus no other means than to organize oneself to overcome it, by fighting against it without excluding any means. We must make our action independent from the easy sanctions of bourgeois power so that it strikes more surely and more deeply the enemy in the heart. The whole question of the revolutionary method is there. We do not agree with the social democrats who think they can do without violating bourgeois legality, nor with the libertarians who think that, after the destruction of the old system, it is not necessary to organise a new power, a new disciplined organisation, a new army and even a new police force against the bourgeois class.

The problem of political victims and the fight against reaction is therefore not an accidental and negative one: it relates to the general and positive problem of action against the current state of affairs. Those who think that we can resolve to walk hand in hand with the Social Democrats are doing so in a counter-revolutionary way and saying the exact opposite of them in politics will not change anything.

The Communist Party fights against reaction because it fights against bourgeois power even when it does not leave its legal functions. It leads this struggle by directing in this direction the consciousness and the forces of the proletariat. If it accepts to put itself on the ground of illegality and violence, it is not because it is the bourgeoisie that wanted it, but because it is the only ground that the proletariat has an interest in choosing to accelerate the dissolution of all bourgeois legality and not to bind its hands in advance. These are precisely all the reasons which pushed the Communist Party to form itself and which also lead it to define its own methods which resurface when it comes to facing the reaction: the reaction resides in the very domination of the bourgeoisie: our adversary will never present itself to us in different and more vulnerable forms.

That is why the communists fight against enemy violence without modifying in any way the physiognomy of their organization and tactics".

This is how the Party developed the first of the two themes discussed above. The second, it will develop by founding its illegal organization against all those, reformists or maximalists, who were to sign a few months later the ignoble pact of pacification with the State and the fascist bands and of whom some regretted the "alliance" because they did not understand that it would not have given more force to the proletariat, but on the contrary would have inoculated it to the poison of defeatism.

The historians of today (they are very good!) have finally recognized the work accomplished since the birth of the Party under the leadership of the Left in the field of organization and discipline, but they continue to regret that it has rejected as the plague the alliance with reformism, maximalism and democracy. It is natural on their part, because for them, what had to be saved was not the possibility of a revolutionary resumption of the proletariat, but on the contrary democracy. They are the descendants of those who signed the pacts of pacification and therefore of demobilization of the proletariat: they therefore cannot understand that the party's task was precisely to bury democracy at the same time as its legitimate son, fascism, instead of giving them oxygen, and if they did, they would back down in horror before such a plan.

**Socialist Defeatism**

While the Communist Party gave the above-mentioned directives, the Socialist Party unmasked itself and showed itself such as we had always affirmed that it was: a factor of defeatism within the working class.

Faithful to its tradition, Turati’s right, whose maximalist majority had not wanted to separate and from whom it now thought less than ever to detach itself, preached "social peace", the return to "civilized" methods of struggle, that is to peaceful coexistence between political parties, and the renunciation by the proletariat of violence, even purely defensive: reformism had never said anything else in the past, and it could not act
otherwise. Not that it condemned violence theoretically in the manner of Tolstoy, moreover; as the Party will write:

"The social-democrat, the social-pacifist is not against violence in general. On the contrary, he recognizes its social and historical function; only, for him, if it is the state power that uses it, it is legitimate; but when it is the proletariat that uses it to defend itself against fascism, it ceases to be it, because then it ceases to be a legal initiative, a state initiative". For social democracy, therefore: "the formation of the democratic and parliamentary state has closed the era of violent struggles between individuals, groups and classes, and the state is precisely there to repress these violent initiatives as anti-social actions. It is not up to the proletarians to defend themselves: it is up to... Giolitti. The right is therefore logical with itself when it invites the proletarians to renounce the struggle and the State to use force against the fascists... whom it finances, supports or leaves be. It is logical with itself when it insists with the adversaries in the presence that they sign pacts of pacification, ready to act as in Germany the Noske and the Scheidemann if it had gone to power (as it was almost), that is to say to unleash the legal violence of the State against the only ones who claimed the use of the class violence to bring down bourgeois domination, namely the communists".

But did not the maximalists who held the leadership of the Socialist Party proclaim in Bologna that "the proletariat will have to resort to violence" not only to "conquer power", its supreme goal, and to "consolidate the conquests of the revolution", but also "to relax against the violence of the bourgeoisie", its immediate goal? Did they not declare their adherence to the Third International on the basis of the theses of its First Congress, which nevertheless opposed the revolutionary solution to the social-democratic, reformist and parliamentary solution? After Livorno, did they not always insist that Moscow rectify the split and open the doors of the Comintern to them? No doubt, but it is precisely in this that lies the specific function of centrism:

"To get closer to the programme of the left, to make it one's own in the noisiest and most demagogic forms in order to imprison the movement of the masses and one day (that day has arrived) to hand it over to the right, to the declared reformism which, among other virtues, at least has that of coherence and that of knowing how to wait its time by letting its centrist allies act, even when they take it as the head of the Turks for the gallery".

**Hypocrisy of Maximalism**

The fascist offensive tested the sincerity of the "barricadier" language of the maximalists and confirmed the correctness of the appreciation of the communists who accused them of serving as an advanced point and cover for the socialist right. Indeed, barely had the "illegal" violence begun when the Socialist Party (not only the right, but the whole party, starting with the maximalist leadership) began to preach in the columns of its organ "Avanti! the return to order, the "normalization" of political and social life, the renunciation of the proletarians to violent struggle. In August, it will sign the pact of pacification with the fascists, in perfect coherence with all this Malthusian propaganda.... In other circumstances already, while the social conflict was evolving towards an open confrontation, maximalism had defended arguments which, apparently valid, concealed in a Jesuitic way its cowardly will to give in to the first signs of storm: it needed an adequate preparation! You shouldn't let yourself be drawn into the trap by taking general actions before you were ready! Individual action had to give way to general and collective action, etc... etc... From then on, even this kind of argument was left aside: maximalism now stated clearly that violence should not be used, even to defend oneself, and that it would not be used, and it proclaimed it at the very moment when young proletarians were giving their lives to defend their labour exchanges, the editorial offices of their newspapers and the headquarters of their parties. It is not by chance that in the May 1921 elections, the P.S.I added in its emblem a book with a sickle and a hammer: in the streets, we were shooting, and the "Workers' Party" invited its militants to lean over the tables of the popular libraries! In the streets, they defended themselves, and even attacked whenever they could, but the party that claimed to embody the interests of the proletariat spread discredit on this spontaneous and inflexible combativeness, it dissociated itself from it and even condemned it!
Highlighting the "contradiction" (completely obvious, by the way) between the official proclamations of maximalism and these unworthy invitations that it addressed to the proletarians to offer the left cheek to their enemies after having been struck on the right, the Communist Party castigated what, in fact, appeared clearly as a true defeatism:

"We are therefore no longer in a period of world revolution which must see the bursting of the supreme struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie for power? It is therefore no longer true that the bourgeoisie cannot be dispossessed of this power without armed struggle, because, without armed struggle, it will never renounce organized violence itself? And all this would cease to be true at the precise moment when fascism comes to vividly demonstrate the opposite? We would no longer be placed before the dilemma: dictatorship of the bourgeoisie or dictatorship of the proletariat, at the precise moment when the bourgeoisie boldly proclaims its cynical will to dominate and when it cancels all the concessions, all the political and economic agreements made between the constituted powers and the working class?

The maximalists, it should be noted, do not raise a contingent question of tactical opportunity. They do not say that at this moment, the proletariat must confine itself to a prudent preparation, and refuse to use its forces in immediate actions. In the current situation, such arguments would already be signs of defeatism, since the facts of recent months prove that the more the proletariat avoids clashes, the more the bourgeois reaction gets emboldened. But the maximalist renegades say and do much worse. They condemn with astounding impudence the very principle of the methods which they still affected yesterday to accept, since they give as final directive to the masses to renounce violence as well in the future as today, and they make every effort to bring back to the field of peaceful struggle...

One might object that the moment of revolutionary violence will come, but by theorizing this argument of the "decisive moment", the defender of unity between socialism and communism would only confirm one thing: our pseudo-revolutionaries are even worse than the genuine reformists, who are at least sincere enough to condemn violent methods and to clearly propose other means of action to the masses. The final explosion of revolutionary violence is necessarily preceded by a series of episodic clashes. The task of the Revolutionary Party during this period is to prepare and organize the proletarian forces, but this is impossible if one preaches the renunciation of violence, a fundamental means of action for which one must technically prepare oneself, and of which it is not enough to proclaim the final necessity, as the leaders of the Socialist Party are doing at the moment, who seem to retreat as their program of yesteryear is carried out in fact. Would it no longer be true that the imperialist war should be transformed into a revolutionary class war? When they once said it, they didn't mean it, since they now discover that class war must be fought not with the weapons that proletarians used to kill each other for four years, but with "civilized" weapons!

While the bourgeoisie uses in the internal struggle the weapons that served in the war against foreigners, the maximalists invoke disarmament, instead of seeing in this fact the confirmation of the doctrine that they still defended yesterday! Faced with this situation, our first duty is to attack the saboteurs of the revolution thoroughly: the revolutionary preparation incumbent on our party goes hand in hand with the liquidation of the last traces of their influence. The rapid disintegration of the Social Democratic Party will be the best indicator of the revolutionary energy growth of the Italian proletariat" (A decomposing party, "Il comunista" 10/3/21).

The right is counter-revolutionary and does not hesitate to say so. The centre is counter-revolutionary and all it has more than the right is hypocrisy: the phenomenon is not only true in Italy, but in all countries; it is not subjective, but objective, that is, it does not depend on the intentions of individuals. In response to the above article, Serrati replied in "L'Avanti!" by opposing the "methodically prepared action" advocated by communism and of which he, Serrati, would have been the defender, to the disorderly reactions "to each shot of a revolver" which he accused the communists of advocating. And to hide his party's hasty retreat from the enemy attack, he denounced these actions as "voluntarist". The argument was insidious and the Communist Party's response was swift in an article entitled Mystifying Serenity of 16/3/21:
"Serrati accuses others of voluntarism and he is the most voluntarist of all without realizing it. If there is one statement that is neither deterministic nor Marxist, it is to attribute, as Serrati does, the lack of revolutionary preparation to the particular defects of the Italian people: a humorous way of understanding revolutionary preparation!

The Party should postpone the use of proletarian violence until it feels able to trigger a general and coordinated action; in the meantime, it should oppose any conflict between proletarian forces and bourgeois forces, disavow them and condemn them, under the pretext that it is only "individual" violence. It should even prevent such conflicts from occurring!

Our conception is completely opposed to this one. The Communist Party bases all its action on the fact that the conditions for the final clash between the classes already exist in the current historical period and that it has already begun. The goal of the party is to exert its own influence in this struggle determined by historical conditions to organize it, that is, to give more effectiveness to the proletarian rebellion. It does not use its initiative capacity to launch isolated attacks until it seems possible to coordinate them into a general movement with some chance of success. In local and occasional conflicts that occur, it takes care not to let itself be drawn into engaging all its forces in unfavourable conditions, but it is also concerned not to lose ground in the work of preparation already accomplished and which must take into account the coefficient of collective psychology. It strives to give the masses the impression that its renunciation of revolutionary initiatives is an element of strength and not of weakness, and to strengthen in them the conviction that revolutionary means will be used in due course; it must not therefore bring them into disrepute! This is the difference between our conception and that of the Socialists, even in Serrati’s Jesuitic theorization.

In the situation of recent days, the Socialists have not told the masses, like Serrati: Let us prepare, but let us avoid clashes at this time’. Denying all their previous statements, they said clearly: "Look how terrible the use of violence, how terrible civil guerrilla warfare is! The proletariat's march forward must follow other paths. It was not the Socialists who launched the fascist offensive, of course; but their crime is to disarm the masses by imagining themselves stopping the attack, precisely because they foolishly believe they have provoked it. Nevertheless, Serrati’s insidious formula is defeatist. It amounts to an unlimited retreat that can only make revolutionaries lose all moral and material strength, compromise and even make impossible that revolutionary preparation that Serrati claimed to want to guarantee; "preparation" means training and the habit of correctly interpreting the facts, and not passive negation of reality or fatalistic expectation, something impossible or exclusively favourable to the enemy. This would be negative voluntarism, and not the negation of voluntarism. It would be to use the positive influence one has in the interest of the adversary.

In fact, our attitude is clearly different from that which Serrati defends and which his people have adopted. Even if our only superiority over the socialists were limited to abstaining from the vile language they held, it would be enough to prove the superiority of our method over theirs. But there was a difference in the actions as well. We made it clear that it was indispensable to respond to conservative violence by the same means, even if the material and moral unpreparedness of the proletariat prevented us from taking the initiative of a general revolutionary action in order not to fall into adventure or rather not to succumb to the certain betrayal of the reformists. Even if we had limited ourselves to proclaiming our solidarity with the spontaneous proletarian reactions to the adverse violence, this would be enough to prove the effective difference that exists between us and the socialists who cowardly disavowed these reactions. But we have also given the Communists the watchword to be ready in advance to retaliate in the likely event that the fascists attack in certain areas. We remain faithful to this line of action. These are the facts that will demonstrate its effectiveness in maintaining the morale of the masses and for their leadership by the party. However, this framework implies that they have confidence in him, and this confidence is therefore the first aspect of "revolutionary preparation".

It is therefore more than ever proven that the socialists of the old party, as good social democrats, have played the game of the bourgeoisie by telling the masses that violent means must be repudiated. It has been
proved that it is grotesque to claim to justify such an attitude on the pretext that it is only a question of postponing revolutionary action at the appropriate time. All counter-revolutionaries make similar statements; they are the characteristic mark of centrism which, in all countries, is complicit in reformism, itself an accomplice of the bourgeoisie, since such a policy is best able to disarm the masses and finally abandon them disoriented and powerless to the blows of counter-revolution.

From this old polemic it is clear that in the development of struggle, maximalism has deliberately placed itself on the other side of the barricade as centrism has always done and will always do. The Bolsheviks were right to consider that in all countries the latter was enemy Nr. 1 because it is the most insidious and fiercest. Never, therefore, should it have been admitted - as unfortunately they themselves did later - that even a partial agreement with it was desirable and, worse still, that it was possible to admit the maximalists into the Italian section of the Communist International. Even without any theoretical consideration, the facts shouted exactly the opposite.

**From Elections to Changes of Government**

In parallel with the fascist offensive which continued throughout April, the employer offensive against the living conditions of the working class developed, and this was not by chance.

While in February Giolitti abolished the political price of bread, employers attacked both through layoffs and wage cuts. In March, workers' "conquests" that seemed permanent to some were abolished, especially in Turin: at Michelin, after a month of negotiations, not only were the first redundancies ratified, but among those they hit were members of internal commissions, deemed inviolable, and representatives of workshops. At Fiat, after a month of struggle, work was resumed under the sign of "discipline and authority within the factory", which management demanded be "exercised exclusively by Fiat without arbitrary foreign intervention". For a year, the C.G.T. would cradle the vain hope of seeing Giolitti first, then Bonomi, establish the famous "Control of Industry" in accordance with their September 1920 promises.

In Turin itself, on April 25, the fascists attempted to storm the Maison du Peuple, the center of the F.I.O.M. labor exchange, and seat of various parties and workers' circles. The fascists "overcome" the fierce resistance of the workers only by abandoning the ground to the regular police who disarmed them, arrested the "leaders", and returned to the fascists the courtesy they had given them by leaving them all licence to occupy and burn down the building. After this bitter experience, however, the black shirts will wait more than a year before renewing the attempt, deeming it safer to first secure their backs!

To the defeatism of the socialists towards the proletarian struggle against the black shirts was of course during their defeatism in the economic struggles. On the contrary, the effort of the Communist Party to wrest the masses from this demoralizing influence, to unite them in their defensive and offensive actions, under the same flag, with a clear watchword and under centralized leadership, is inseparable from their effort to give all trade union struggles a single strategy that the trade union groups of the Communists were trying to make triumph throughout the C.G.T. Indeed, these were two inseparable aspects of the class struggle: the Left, which had soaked itself for more than ten years in the fire of war against the thousand incarnations of reformism, fought the two battles with an energy of which it alone was capable and which it communicated to the urban and rural proletariat.

In May 1921 elections were held. What better way to overcome the revolutionary energies, to rock the socialist militants with the hope of a return to normality and to open to the fascists the way of parliamentary and democratic honorability, they who were until then only a collection of truncheons? Indeed, it is Giolitti

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8 F.I.O.M.: Federation of Italian Metalworkers.
9 We cannot develop this capital point within the framework of this article, but Programme Communiste will publish in a future issue a series of texts relating to the trade union struggle of the Italian CP when it was led by the Left. They are rich in highly topical lessons.
himself who, by means of the "national bloc", gives the fascists the pole that will allow them to play in the purest Giolittian style on both sides of "constitutional legality" on the one hand, and "de facto illegality" on the other. The reformists of today, that is, the CP. Italian official, comment in the following way this fact:

"The integration of fascist candidates in the lists of the national bloc has undoubtedly removed the most serious and inconsiderate political operation of the old Piedmontese statesman. It constituted indeed a legalization of the violence of these black shirts which had bloodied the country, and it was the first official abdication of the State before the right-wing subversion" ("I comunisti nella storia d'Italia", fasc. Nr. 4 publisher "Calendario del Popolo" published under the auspices of the CP. Italian).

We see that the reformists of today are worth those of yesterday, and that they are also incapable of understanding that "right-wing subversion" was only the other side of the conservative violence of the state, that it would not have been possible without it and that they are inseparable from each other!

We will not go into the details of these elections in May, which were the second after the war. Despite the resistance of many of its members and even entire sections which did not come from the abstentionist faction, the Communist Party of Italy participated in it by discipline with regard to the International10, engaging in the electoral battle all its resources, which would have been much more usefully employed to continue its work of political, trade-union and military leadership. It is interesting to note, however, that fascism used the election period to heal its wounds, preparing to resume the armed offensive in July with some training exercises: an assault on the editorial staff of Il Soviet on 5 May; demonstrations in Emilia against the arrest of Italo Balbo, who was promptly released from prison; an attack on Francesco Misiano on 13 June, and a fire at the Grosseto labour exchange on 28 June. For their part, the Socialists had found in the new "democratic climate" additional reasons to practise defeatism against workers struggles. When Giolitti resigns on 27 June, the leadership of the parliamentary group votes on the next agenda, approved by the maximalist centre:

"The leadership of the Socialist Parliamentary Group, while maintaining the tactical and programmatic guidelines set by the latter when it was set up, decided to propose that it should not lose interest in the development of the crisis and its solution. The parliamentary group unanimously considers that for reasons, theoretical according to some, practical according to others, it is not appropriate to speak of the participation of the socialists in the government, and retains that the socialist deputies must not, however, reject a priori any attempts by other parties to really and lastingly put an end to the policy of violence against the proletarian movement. The representatives of the party leadership approve this decision".

This is the great maximist recipe: we, the "intransigent parliamentarians", are prepared to do whatever transactions we want as soon as the possibility of a government "truly and lastingly" willing to do what we ourselves do not do: defend the proletarian movement against "illegal" violence. If such a government does not form, we will return to our parliamentary intransigence, but far from calling on the proletarians to defend themselves and lead them in their struggle, we will take the initiative ourselves of sincere and lasting pacts with the bourgeois parties to put an end to violence!

When the mountain of ministerial crisis gives birth to the Bonomi mouse, the maximalist leadership will regain a momentarily lost virginity by declaring not being satisfied with the "promises" and "guarantees" given by the new government regarding the "restoration of legality" (the legality, alpha and omega of the socialist breviary!) and therefore having no reason to renounce the formal parliamentary opposition decided by Congress. Not much more than a month later, virginity will again be happily sacrificed on a new altar, that of the pact of pacification, thanks to the good offices of the President of the House and future President of

10 "As a communist" declared the representative of the Left, "I am first centralist and only then abstentionist". And he added that if revolutionary parliamentarism had any meaning, it was precisely in a reactionary situation like that of 1921.
the Republic, Enrico de Nicola, but always within the framework of the "intransigent parliamentary opposition".

**Communist Party Struggle for Military Control of the Masses**

Before moving on to the pact for pacification, which is central to the period that began with the May elections and the formation of the new government, we must look back on the action carried out by the Communist Party of Italy in the previous period. By the call of March 4, the Communist Party had shown the proletariat that to respond to bourgeois violence, the only way was proletarian violence, and it had been the only one to do so. Denouncing the fatal defeatism of the reformists and maximalists, it was naturally led to show that the fate of the workers counter-offensive was linked to its own capacity as a party to support, sustain and animate it, but above all to lead it. It had taken advantage of the electoral campaign and the May Day feast to recall these directives, denouncing with tenacity and consistency the political parties with a workers base, but with pacifist and democratic ideology and with parliamentary and legal tactics, which hijacked a working class that remained combative despite two years of defeats in its unquenchable struggle against all institutions, legal or illegal, preserving bourgeois domination.

Yet it was not enough to rid the field of pacifist, whiny and capitulatory ideologies of reformism and maximalism. It was not enough to instil in the communist masses and militants the feeling of the need to defend themselves on the same ground as the adversary and even to move to the counter-offensive as soon as the situation was more favourable or whenever the opportunity presented itself during the "defensive" struggle itself. It was not enough to bring into the minds of the young militants of the working class the conviction that only the Communist Party could provide the necessary framework for defence and attack, apart from all the equivocal electoral combinations and the false "unity" with reformism. All this still constituted only an essential premise for the preparation of a general and disciplined confrontation of the workers forces and bourgeois counter-revolution. To this end, the creation of an illegal Party organization network, demanded in the 21 conditions for international admission, was not sufficient, nor was the defeatist propaganda of communist youths in the army, nor the strengthening of communist groups in the proletarian leagues of former soldiers. Nor was it sufficient, as has always been the case, to link economic and demand action to the primordial demands of the defence of the workers' organizations that had become the preferred target of the fascists and the natural centre of proletarian resistance: it was necessary to methodically build a military "apparatus" (such was the term used) that obeyed strict party discipline and was inspired in all its actions by a single political directive.

The military problem of defence and attack is inseparable from the political problem on which it depends: it is politics that determines the ways and goals of military struggle. One does not defend oneself (and has more reason, one does not attack) in the same way when one wants to defend the violated democracy and when one wants to annihilate it to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is impossible to confront enemy forces with an effective and disciplined force if one does not know in advance which of the two objectives is to be pursued and if, in the course of the struggle, hesitations, doubts and prejudices manifest themselves and limit one's possibilities of development. The clarity of policy or, to use a more appropriate term in this case, strategy is a condition for the power, continuity and homogeneity of practical action, or, if one prefers, tactics, and this power, continuity and homogeneity are in turn the condition for the effectiveness and solidity of the organisation.

In this field too, the Communist Party had to go against the current and build ex novo by getting rid of the most negative traditions of the old socialist party which could only harm the centralisation, discipline and organicity of the movement. Especially at the beginning, individual initiatives, even peripheral ones, could not and should not be discouraged because they were healthy manifestations of the combativeness of militants and simple workers; but it was necessary to prepare their leadership in a unitary, disciplined and thus centralized organization.
Given the urgency of the defensive action, the Communist Youth Federation had been charged with organizing locally the first nuclei of the military organization of the Party and to call the proletarians who wanted to put their forces, their technical capacities and their spirit of struggle in the service of the holy war of the working class against the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois unleashed to regroup around it. The old socialist party had shown itself organically incapable of giving itself this minimum of organization: by nature, it could not do so, and there was no hope that it would ever do so. The young section of the Communist International therefore had to show the proletarians that, even in this field, it was the only true class struggle organization.

When we leaf through the provincial press of the party at that time, we continually come across public manifestations of this will to crystallize around the party the best energies of young workers, a will that responded to an obvious objective need. We will give as an example the appeal of the Milan Chapter Youth Federation which, like all the others, was launched according to the party centre's directives, and which was distributed in thousands of copies under the responsibility of the Central Youth Committee. This call is reproduced in "The Commune" of 17-6-1921, organ of the Communist Federation of Como:

"Young workers, join the action groups of the Communist Youth!

Young workers,

While the bourgeois reaction that has been unleashed against you seems to be slackening and you imagine that you have repelled the attacks of the mercenaries of capitalism by the electoral victory of 15 May, the Communist Youth feels the need to address you frankly once again.

It feels the need to remind you that all the victories obtained peacefully and on the legal ground by the proletariat were ephemeral and that the electoral triumph of November 1919 was not at all the prelude to the seizure of power by the proletariat, but that of the bourgeois counter-offensive on a much more realistic and effective ground: that of class violence.

You cannot have already forgotten them: a month of capitalist violence was enough to wrest from the proletariat the positions it thought it had definitively conquered by long years of legal struggle. To continue to harbour such illusions today could be fatal to the working class.

The working class must understand that if the fascist reaction seems to be weakening today, it is because it thinks it has weakened the workers' organizations too much for them to be able to wage their only real struggle: the revolutionary struggle. It is not at all because the armed bands of the reaction would fear not being able to beat the 123 members of the present legislature with sticks as they did the 156 members of the previous legislation!

Young workers!

You have to convince yourself that the avalanche of ballots that the "Socialist" Party is so excited about is just an avalanche of paper! It is not it that will crush the organized armed force of the ruling class. This can only be crushed by armed and organized force, but infinitely more numerous, and therefore stronger, of the proletariat.

Young workers!

The Federation of Communist Youth calls you to gather around its flag, which is that of the young workers of the whole world, that of the Communist International!

It calls you to gather to organize the vanguard of the revolutionary offensive of the proletariat that will begin with a counter-offensive against fascism.

With us, young guards of Communism and the World Revolution!".
But the party was far from limiting its ambition to these necessarily intermittent actions of immediate and local defense. The months that followed the split of Livorno had been used for a feverish work of political leadership and the intervention in the electoral battle had not interrupted this fundamental work and this immense effort and had not diverted the communists from it.

It is precisely because of the solidity of its political framework and its centralization that the Party had succeeded in developing outside the whole range of its own activities without any of them ever appearing unrelated to the programme of the Moscow International and the Livorno Congress in the eyes of the proletarians: the party's very intense trade union activity is a typical example. The unitary or, as we say, organic character of the party was expressed clearly and directly in the fact that each of its particular manifestations reflected the overall program, and connected in the most rigorous way to all the others, as a simple gearing of a political machine obeying a single directive and tending towards a single goal. Moreover, these activities all started with perfect simultaneity from the party's centre, and the trade union (or other) directives did not fail to put at the forefront the party's political tasks and objectives and the needs of direct violent action.

The Party had achieved this result of capital importance thanks to its struggle against all the habits of "autonomy" inherited from the old socialist party and which it was not easy to uproot from the militants who had passed to the Communist Party in Livorno, but also against the generous but negative impatience caused by the harsh enemy offensive and by the seduction of the interested calls for "unity" launched by organizations of proletarian origin and tradition. It is enough in this respect to recall as were settled the cases, moreover rare, of indiscipline in the electoral campaign and the rigour with which, from March 20, the EC of the party prohibits its federations and its sections to conclude:

"This was not because such agreements were inadmissible, but because the party had to ensure that "they would not be concluded outside certain limits, and only for the purposes and according to the modalities defined by the centre of the party and that it would communicate in each case, to avoid incoherent and dispersed actions"."

No autonomy was granted to the party's parliamentary group, in accordance with the 21 conditions for admission; the trade union groups emanated directly from the party and functioned like its instruments in the trade unions and factories: It had to act as a pole of attraction for all the workers determined to fight and lead them precisely because its aims could not be confused with those of any other party, because its practical action was unitary, and because its organisation was disciplined and therefore effective. These party framework criteria are perfectly established in 'Il Comunista' of 14 July, which obviously takes account of initiatives by other parties or groups, to which we shall return in the second part:

"For the party leadership

On the basis of the work already done in many localities to provide military guidance to the members and supporters of the Communist Party and the Youth Federation, and taking into account the lessons that can be learned, the Party Centre and the Youth Federation are preparing a communiqué which will establish the rules to be applied in this indispensable work of revolutionary organization and preparation.
Since elements outside the Communist Party take similar initiatives in various centres in Italy outside the official participation and responsibility of the Communist Party, comrades must wait for this communiqué before acting, so that the general directives adopted by the Party do not clash with faits accomplis.

This means that the training work of the communist action groups must continue wherever they exist and be organized where they do not exist by strictly conforming to the following criterion: the military leadership of the proletariat must be done in a party organization closely linked to its political organizations. Communists therefore cannot and should not participate in any military initiative from other parties or taken outside their party.

Military preparation and action require discipline at least equal to the political discipline of the Communist Party. Two distinct disciplines cannot be observed. Therefore the communist and the sympathizer who really feels bound to the Party (if he has reservations on the question of discipline, he no longer deserves this title) cannot and must not belong to any other military organization than those of the party.

Pending the more precise directives that practical experience will allow to give, the motto of the party to its members and to the workers who follow it is the following: formation of action groups led by the Communist Party to prepare and train the proletariat for defensive and offensive revolutionary military action”.

In the July issue of the same organ, it is the same effort, fully crowned with success as we shall see, which manifests itself and which aims to give discipline and unity to the healthy proletarian energies and to prevent them from dispersing into disorderly and untimely initiatives as had happened too often in the history of the Italian workers movement:

"Encadrement"

(In response to an abundant correspondence), we remind the comrades who are at the head of the Federations and sections that... communists cannot participate in initiatives outside the party. Recalling on this occasion the criteria of discipline to which all members of a communist party must obey, we remind comrades that the party cannot give itself a military framework and that this can only meet its goals if the members of the party renounce their particular tactical points of view, these can only be defended in assemblies and congresses.

The order for the party to establish a military organization was given by the Executive Committee in agreement with that of the Youth Federation and not only by the latter as some mistakenly believed.

Military leadership was not “invented” by us to imitate other similar organizations existing today. It meets the revolutionary organization criteria of all communist parties adhering to the Third International. If we did not take the initiative earlier, it is because the military organization must be preceded by the political organization and it is to the latter that we have devoted all our care since the Livorno Congress. The two forms of supervision cannot replace each other and do not hinder each other: they complement each other”.

This communiqué announced decisions which appeared publicly in ”Il comunista” under the title ”Framework of Communist Forces” and which were part of a general clarification and delimitation of the executive tasks of the Party and in a work of strengthening the organization intended to facilitate their accomplishment. The article recalled:

"The organizational criteria of discipline and hierarchy which must be all the more emphasized, because of the development of proletarian struggle, as we move from the era of theoretical criticism to that of propaganda and proselytism and finally to that of action and combat”.

The article also stressed that:

"the bourgeois conception according to which the militant of a party limits himself to giving his ideological adhesion, to voting for his party and to regularly paying his contribution" is incompatible with the communist
conception, according to which "the one who adheres to the Party is required to provide a continuous practical activity according to the requirements of the Party".

In the specifically military field, it announced the decision to form action groups in all sections:

"composed of all comrades, adults and youth, physically fit to perform this function, both candidates and registered activists, as well as sympathizers not registered with other political parties and having proved their loyalty to the Communist Party and having made a formal commitment to observe the strictest discipline.

These action groups were later to be brought together in companies directly linked to the party centre by a network of provincial officials. The technical particularities of this organization do not interest us here, but we must note the insistence with which the Party once again recalled that:

"No member of the Party and the Youth Federation may belong to military organizations other than the one which the Party has formed and which it leads."

Already then, some saw in these rigid provisions, parallel to equally rigid directives on trade union activity (which proves the organic character of all the young party's activity), a proof of "schematism", "sectarianism" and "dogmatism", especially as regards political relations with other parties and currents and the attitude to adopt towards their "anti-fascist" military subsidiaries. In this, they only anticipated the howls and stamping of the future theorists of the "new type of party", of the Stalinist opportunism, against the Left. However, it is certain that the Party (which at that time walked entirely with its left leadership) defended an absolutely vital position of principle, that of Party autonomy. But a purely ideological autonomy is not one: autonomy is both theoretical and practical, or it is not. In the situation then more than ever, theoretical considerations coincided with practical considerations, both excluding any alliance with forces in which Marxist realism rightly saw accomplices in capitalist conservation.

Referring to "other military organisations", the text was primarily aimed at the Arditi del Popolo, to which we shall return. But precisely at the same time (from June 22 to July 12) was held in Moscow the III Congress of the Communist International, this one received the visit of a delegation of the P.S.I. (they were the three "pilgrims" Lazzari, Maffi and Riboldi) who defended in vain before it the cause of the admission of this party in the Communist International, in spite of the split of Livorno. These delegates were harshly received, but in the following year the International changed its mind, admitting, despite resistance from the Communist Party of Italy, the possibility of a merger between the Communists and the Socialists (or at least some of them) once the old party had got rid of the right. To what extent such a position was false and dangerous, this is what the pact of pacification that the socialists will conclude with fascism under the new government, at the precise moment when the proletariat and its organizations underwent an offensive more furious than ever black shirts.