On the Thread of Time - Intellectuals and Marxism

Yesterday

The following four points, so many times developed in useful time and place, are completely inseparable in the Marxist line:

1) The proletarian socialist movement is in no way a movement of culture and education. The possibilities for the development of thought are the consequence of a better development of physical life; they will therefore come only after the elimination of economic exploitation. Those in the lower-income classes do not need "knowledge" to fight: it is enough for them to revolt against their starving condition. They'll understand later.

2) The revolutionary class party does not refuse to welcome into its ranks as qualified comrades and militant individuals from economically superior classes and to use their best intellectual development for its own struggle, when it is a question of real deserters from the opposing social camp. In all victorious class struggles this rupture was one of the first of the counterrevolutionary front, despite the drawbacks, crises and setbacks in individual cases.

3) The proletarian class, which needs the formation of the political party to win, also needs theoretical clarity, continuity and coherence; it therefore gives a very first order place to the defence of the class doctrine (not to be confused with consciousness, an insidiously subjective and not collective term that with many other terminological junk one must leave to conformist and traditionalist positions).

4) The revolutionary communist movement counts among its worst enemies, with the bourgeoisie, capitalists, bosses and with the officials and henchmen of the various hierarchies, "thinkers" and "intellectuals" in general, representatives of "science" and "culture", "literature" or "art", presented as independent general movements and processes and above social determinations and the historical class struggle.

Any deviation from these points is, for obvious reasons, in irreducible opposition to the bases of Marxism; it leads to opportunistic degeneration and the defeat of the revolution.

The deviation from the first point leads to a fall back into the liberal-democratic tendencies of education of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie which, by its wealth, monopolizes the state, the school, the press and everything else, for its class objectives.

The deviation from the second point leads to open workerism, labourism or pure trade unionism, which locks the proletarians into a dead-end economism, denies the political party struggle and the conquest of revolutionary power, the only way to overcome capitalism.

The deviation from the third point leads to revisionism and reformism, to social-democratic opportunism, to day-to-day politics, to the trade of principles, to the cynicism of the Bernstein motto: "the goal is nothing, the movement is everything" where one implies: "for the fat cats".

The deviation from the fourth point leads to all three previous deviations, to orgies of block politics: it would make even a steel stomach vomit.
These points were those of Marx and Engels, who, at the origins of the workers movement and in the initial efforts to found proletarian parties, at the time of the League of the Just and the universal Alliances, could not avoid contacts with some of these men of thought. They took ample revenge by spitting out radical criticism to the point of being fierce, and ruthless sarcasm. Among the hundred quotations that could be given, here is one: in a letter to Engels, Marx, who envied having escaped a meeting where many philosophers, philanthropists and humanitarians of this kind were present, reported to him that, designated to write the final address, he had not been able to avoid placing the usual words of Freedom, Humanity, Justice, Civilization, Thought, etc... He adds, to apologize: I was careful to put them in passages where, meaning absolutely nothing, they could not do anything wrong.

We are not mystics and we admit that a Marxist is obliged, by party duty, to say or write nonsense. However, there are two conditions: the first is that he does not believe it; the second is that he does not try to make others believe it. If a few of today's "Leninists" still manage to fulfil the first condition, they and their confreres trample on the second twenty times a day.

In the years of the great revolution in Russia, the "intellectuals" who navigated the cataclysm of war between more insipid and decadent philosophical and aesthetic schools than the others, heard the noise; and, inclined as they are to make weathervanes, they turned towards the east. Among other things, a movement, "Clarté", was born in France which brought together writers and artists who sympathized with the victorious Bolshevism (especially because it was victorious). It was a clarity that was not born of complete adherence to a doctrine and radical conversion to new principles: it was an empty cerebral "illuminism", reproducing at a century and a half of distance the bourgeois illuminism, which had had the courage to precede and prepare a revolution, and not to follow it with the vague intention of taking advantage of it or avoiding its damage.

The Russian Bolshevik comrades, Marxists with heads as armoured as their stomachs, used or intended to use even these jolts in the bowels of an entire enemy world; but from all these characters, partly good people but nothing more, they expected no more than from their local "intelligentsia", whom they knew inside and out for having seen it, at the test of all the vicissitudes of history and struggle, often talkative, always cowardly, to successively arrange themselves, in scales more numerous than the colours of the rainbow, in the ranks of all the counterrevolutionaries: liberals, populists, peasants, anarchoids and finally defeatist emigrants on the other side of the different borders.

A very good French comrade with an authentic culture, Raymond Lefebvre, who perished in 1920 while crossing the Arctic on his return from Russia, recalled in many meetings to prove the spread of communism in his country, that the party had in its ranks "France's four largest print runs", the four writers whose works reached the greatest circulation. They were Henri Barbusse, Georges Duhamel, Anatole France (we make an exception for this powerful brain which gave many really vibrant pages on the reversal of the foundations of a world and its dominant hypocrisies), Romain Rolland. The thing had an effect and was said in a beautiful French; but between us, Marxist militants, we had never thought of overthrowing the bourgeoisie with the circulation of a hundred thousand copies of bouquins, much more we need to pull them by the horns. We smiled: Raymond, strong and sincere, got angry.

There was also Lenin's indescribable smile and sparkling eyes when the conversation came about Maxim Gorki who, in the general collapse of intellectuals, had stayed with the Bolsheviks and could not be refused, because of his too great world notoriety and because of his indisputable good faith, hospitality, the membership card and sometimes the word, and to whom one had to give up making understand how stupid he was when he was dealing with social and political problems.
Today

We do not want to write the history of the political movements that were born in the camp and with the support of "intellectuals" with diverse activities and origins. There would be too much to say and it would be considerable work to discuss, in addition to the artistic and literary "world", the no less interesting world of science, and to see how the contributions of Gorki and Barbusse are largely overtaken in their degree of distressing inconsistency by those of Joliot-Curie and Einstein.

In 1914 the Germanic paladins made intellectual manifestos to shout, with the authority of writers, musicians, poets and painters, their famous "es ist nicht wahr! against the anti-German campaign. The Italian antifascists did the same at home to arrest Mussolini, and it was found to be a brilliant way for a counter-offensive appeal after the labour exchanges and armed workers groups failed to stop the fascists. We all know the disastrous results; some had to backtrack in order to save their posts and livelihoods, others withered away, became embittered in helpless opposition and ended up being politically absurd. Once fascism fell under the non-intellectual pressure of explosives and shells, they reappeared; and it was told that Italy finally found the healthiest forces of science, thought, technique, liberated from the fascist gang. As far as science, thought, literature and the arts are concerned, there has never been so much waste in circulation and, in this post-fascist era, we are going down entire ramps of steps.

The recipe for freedom of thought, writing and speech and the lie of the "impartiality" of the public apparatus towards various opinions are additional factors of degradation; we are at the antipodes of the force, including doctrinal and scientific, that emanated from the victory of the Russian totalitarian revolution. Just think of these pitiful radio broadcasts discussing social and political problems of the Convegno dei Cinque, where grotesque puppets exhibit themselves with timid assertions and chastised objections, although bitter jealousy of poorly digested profession.

But where the global mobilization of the forces of thought is being prepared and begins in a grandiose way, it is in the movement against the Atlantic Pact and in the Peace Congresses. Since the artists are called to the rescue, symbolism comes to the fore; and the strange animal drawn by Picasso seriously offends the disembodied eyes of old Noah, who, rubbing them vigorously in the other world, must wonder if he has not made a big mistake by embarking on the Ark and then releasing the original, vulgar and zoological pigeon to the calmed skies.

The art of the future. At the time, we were attacked because we denied the futurist movement any revolutionary value. It is a force of thought, let us join them said those who, as usual, do not think very clever and who were certainly not invented in Russia with the patent of the Cominform. Like us, they destroy the forms of the past; Papini's Lacerba magazine even dared to call the monument to the great King "a large pissoir surmounted by a golden fireman"! Marinetti exalts physical strength and punches his opponents in the theatres and on the street! Let us unite with them. There is no need to recall how Papini, among the monks, and Marinetti, among the black shirts, gave measure of the advanced character of their positions. They did not even overthrow the monument in question, still sacred to the present Republic and to the general directions of modern art.

This tendency to be inspired and subordinated to the vanity of the intellectuals of the bourgeois world marks the extreme culmination of the prostitution of class struggle on the theoretical, organizational and action levels.
The manifesto - or declaration - of petitions for peace, besides the use of the foolishly legalistic form, is praised as the work of a Catholic writer; and it contains the invocation to divinity. Even the bourgeoisie had affirmed that it was contradictory to think that salvation could come from God and from the liberal expression of the will of peoples... The flakes of theory and coherence are thrown one after the other as ballast is thrown to avoid the fall. Obviously, with these last drops there is no more ballast, and the nacelle of opportunism will inevitably end in a shameful shipwreck.

The closest end one could hope for would be the unlikely proclamation of the pact of international and social friendship with the forces of the western plutocracy: the worthy embrace of the imperialist hawk and the floozie dove.