Programme Communiste - Gramsci, the "Ordine Nuovo" and "Il Soviet" – Part 1

Introduction

In the historical confrontation between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, no part of human activity and science can be "neutral", "above the fray", "objective". And less than any other, history, and in particular the history of the revolutionary movement. This is why, faced with the voluntary or innocent, Machiavellian or "leftist" historiography, we have been engaged for years in writing a History of the Communist Left. Our goal is obviously not the quest for "Truth" per se. If we seek to re-establish the reality of history, it is because, for the communist movement, the lessons learned from the experiences of the past are weapons in the struggle for the present and the future; because the reconstitution of the party, the revolutionary leadership, of the class, is only possible on the basis of a critical assessment of the past, and that this can only be drawn up validly on the basis of the fully reaffirmed Marxist doctrine.

So far, two volumes of this "History of the Left" have been published in Italian. The first deals with the history of the movement in Italy until the eve of the Bologna Congress of the Italian Socialist Party in 1919; the second is devoted to the period 1919-1920. Due to material difficulties, these volumes could not be published entirely in French. A very extensive summary of the first issue appeared in issues 28, 29, 31, 32 and 33 of this journal, but these issues are out of print. As for the second, two chapters were published in issues 58, 59 and 60. These are chapters VIII and IX, devoted respectively to "The Marxist Left of Italy and the International Communist Movement" and to "The 2nd Congress of the Communist International: A Summit and a Crossroads". The considerable political importance of these chapters imposed their rapid publication, despite the chronological order.

It is also for its political importance that we begin in this issue the publication of Chapter VI, which deals with "Gramsci, the 'Ordine Nuovo' and 'Il Soviet'". Indeed, the "left" and the "extreme left" are today rediscovering Gramsci and, for sometimes opposing but not contradictory reasons, claiming him as their master and precursor. We will see that they are all right to claim him, for the very reasons that have always made him known to us as a synthesis of all aspects of immediacy, and that the criticisms or reservations they formulate reflect only the divergences of the various aspects of immediacy.

Among these critical admirers, the funniest are those who want to explain what they call Gramsci's "mistakes" by the "bad influence" that the Left, and in particular Bordiga would have exerted on him. It takes a good dose of cynicism to support such a thesis, which does not resist the most elementary historical study. In reality, it is just the opposite: Gramsci and "Ordine Nuovo" represented a current fundamentally foreign to the Marxist line restored by the Communist International and defended by the Left; and the only moment when this current folded and aligned even slightly on this Marxist line is the moment when it was not "under the influence", but under the firm direction of the Left.

Other parts of the "History of the Left" explain why the Communist Party of Italy could only be constituted in January 1921 at the Livorno Congress. They also explain why the Left, which a legend as interesting as it is tenacious presents as the embodiment of sectarianism and the refusal to compromise, had to accept to constitute it on a relatively "impure" basis, incorporating in particular the current of the "Ordine Nuovo". It knew, of course, that this current was not communist, but it thought - just as Lenin thought of other currents - that it could be melted in the fire of revolutionary struggle, recovered the precious metal it contained, and rejected the unusable slag. It was a difficult and hazardous undertaking, but one that could be attempted subject to two indispensable conditions: the first, "objective", was a high level of proletarian struggles; the second, "subjective", was to subject these currents to the most severe political discipline.
In 1920-21, the first condition could still be considered fulfilled. As for the second, the Italian Left insisted that the International reinforce within its ranks the dictatorship of communist principles. This is what it did for its part in the Italian section which it directed until 1923, and in which it carried out a vigorous work of political supervision. It can be said that during this period Ordinovism did indeed "crumble" under the authority of the Left, accepting, externally at least and despite some "blunders", communist positions.

Locally, these blunders did not produce much consequence, thanks precisely to the clarity and firmness of the leadership of the Communist Party of Italy. However, they have had an adverse effect at the international level. Thus, Terracini’s "offensive" speech at the 3rd Congress of the International, which earned him a scathing reply from Lenin and a severe reprimand from Rome, contributed to the misunderstanding between the Bolsheviks and the Left.

It is vain to wonder about the possible outcome of this attempt at assimilation, this attempt to digest the proletarian flesh of the Ordinovist group and to spit out the immediatist refractory nucleus. The attempt turned short, because the two conditions that made it possible disappeared, not so much in Italy as on an international scale. As early as 1921, the revolutionary wave in Europe began to ebb. And, what is more serious, in reaction to this reflux, the tactical oscillations of the International began in the following years. While ordinovism had crashed under the firm leadership of the Left, it begins to lift its head when, internationally, this firmness and clarity of direction fades. Moreover, to break the resistance of the Left to its fluctuations, the leadership of the International will rely precisely on these elements, which could only strengthen them and reinforce their tendency to fall back into their own orientation. Already in the middle of 1923, the International withdrew the leadership of the Italian CP from the Left to entrust it among others to the poorly digested ex-ordinovists. From then on, it will no longer be a question of digesting them. It is they who, together with Stalinism on the one hand, the other immediatist tendencies on the other, will eat the International from within until, despite the resistance of the Lefts, opportunism prevails.

On her! the corpse proliferates today the thousand variants of immediatism and opportunism which, from reformism to spontaneity, from "historical compromise" to "self-management", from "advanced democracy" to "anti-party councilism", can all, as we will see, legitimately claim to Gramsci.

* * *

Gramsci, the "Ordine Nuovo" and "Il Soviet"

Opportunistic "historiography" has wrapped the so-called "Ordine Nuovo" movement under so many mythological veils that in order to give an accurate idea and explain its developments, one must first retrace, at the risk of appearing tedious, the stages of the intellectual journey of its uncontested leader, Antonio Gramsci. In 1919-20 Ordinovism, as in later Gramscism, we see a process with a solid ideological continuity - an exemplary illustration of the invariance of opportunism - which, on the one hand, is similar in many aspects to multiple European or American a-Marxist and extra-Marxist currents and, on the other, anticipates - not by chance - the extreme aberration of Togliatti's "new party". It is for this reason, and not for the pleasure of denigrating, that we must study this current in its ins and outs.

1. Philosophical Foundations

As an ideologist, Gramsci is part of this vast movement of anti-Marxist reaction in epistemology and philosophy of history which, depending on the epochs and cultural areas, bears the name of Neo-Kantianism, empirio-criticism, vitalism, pragmatism, neo-idealism, etc. The main characteristics common to all these doctrines (which have direct repercussions on political economy or find their counterparts in the subjective conceptions of Pareto's "Austrian school", etc.) are the rejection of any monistic and deterministic position, that is, of any "objectivism" (even that of "objective idealism", hence the calculated abandonment or disfiguration of Hegelianism) and the more or less explicit resurrection of a tendentially individualistic and agnostic spiritualism, whose "consequent" outcome is solipsism.
In essence, one is trying to deny the very possibility of objective knowledge, that is, of science, of a dialectical prediction of events based on laws, that is, on the objective and binding sequence of material processes; as for the latter, we either simply deny their existence, or we declare them indecipherable. We begin, said Lenin in "What is to be done?" with

"Denied was the possibility of putting socialism on a scientific basis and of demonstrating its necessity and inevitability from the point of view of the materialist conception of history".

Science will thus be replaced by Sorel with the "myth", with James the "will to believe", with the Neokantians the "categorical imperative" corresponding to the metaphysics of the Rights and Duties of bourgeois ideology. Man's material intervention in the external world conditioned by the natural and productive environment dissolves into a monologue of individual Will, which, in its most consequent forms - those that dare to assert themselves as solipsists - is finally obliged to "pose" in front of it a "fictitious other" in order to have an object to which to apply and to which to tend.

The dialectic that Hegel's old objective-absolute idealism royally situated in the very movement of the Idea (of which all individual and contingent thought is only a later and particular avatar) and which thus objectively subsisted outside the individual "I" and even the collective "spiritual" activity of a given epoch, is, at best, reduced to a pure play of the individual "mind", The existence of these laws is ultimately considered as a mere "decal" of personal experience, a decal that cannot be taken into account or known except for "conventional" purposes and in terms of its gross and immediate economic "usefulness".

As Engels underlined in the preface to the English edition of "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific" (20 April 1892), in the face of the flagrant aggravation of its own contradictions, the bourgeoisie repudiated the instruments of knowledge by which it had discovered the contradictions inherent in the old regime and predicted its death. It does not only bury its head in the sand, but tries to deny, to devalue in the eyes of the class directly concerned the conclusions of the new science of proletarian revolution. Experience is substituted for matter, and no less alterations are made to the dialectic, that "algebra of the revolution" according to Herzen's expression, which Hegel had already amputated from its conclusions by a final metaphysical synthesis (the State resolving the contradictions of civil society) which consecrated the impossibility of going beyond the capitalist world. Dialectic is replaced by "painless evolution", as in what Marx called the "shitty positivism" of Count and Spencer, or it is lowered, as in Proudhon or in Bernstein's later revisionism to the rank of "double-entry accounting", of shop sharing of the "good" and "bad" sides of events, or weakened and punished as in Croce's neo-idealism. This one (who boasts, in writings well refuted by the ferocious orthodox polemict that Plekhanov was then, to have prefigured Bernsteinian revisionism) denies the dialectic of nature and its development through contradictions or "opposites", to postulate a dialectic of the "distinct" peaceful and sanitised.

Now it is to Croce - and through him to Italian neo-idealism in general, imbued with subjectivism from birth and inclined to a trivialising interpretation of the dialectic close to that of the "Hegelian right" - that Gramsci refers; he even argues that Marxism, or rather (as he defines not without accuracy his own "interpretation" and "re-creation") the "philosophy of praxis" would fundamentally be a variant of this particularly narrow idealism.

Against the positivist and neo-Kantian falsifications of the various revisionist currents of the 2nd International, Lenin had reaffirmed (cf. "Materialism and Empirio-Criticism" and "Philosophical Papers") in the epistemological field the foundations of the dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels, without fearing to re-emphasise the enucleation of the "rational core" of the Hegelian system. The very fact that, for Gramsci, the rational core (but in reality it is something else for him) must be sought in neo-idealism reveals, more than a "provincial narrowness of intellectual experience", that he never accepted the Marxist idea that philosophy ends with the Hegelian system, in other words, philosophy as such (superscience) or as a particular science loses its raison d'ètre in the face of the urgent need for a single revolutionary science of
nature and history, the result of all experimental scientific knowledge and of formal and dialectical logic, that is to say of the new "conception of the world" unitarily materialistic and entirely scientific.

Gramsci's criticisms of the very concept of "science" or "objectivity", as well as that of "materialism" - to which he would like to substitute an absolute historicism combined with Crocianism and pragmatist relativism - are none other than the traditional objections of subjective idealism to a realistic and objectivist, and even more materialistic, conception; the same arguments, would rightly say Lenin, of Bishop Berkeley. These criticisms, explicitly developed in the "Prison Notebooks", are already underlying in the "Ordine Nuovo" and its previous writings. And it is necessary to see that this ideological position presides over the elaboration of the key concepts of Gramscism, which all come down, in a sense, to the notion of historical block. It is indeed to this notion that the very concept of hegemony that Gramsci substitutes, not by chance or by clumsiness of expression, to the dictatorship of the class and the party is reduced.

In this typically gradualist and idealistic concept of historical block, voluntarism unites with educationism (and culturalism) in a representative synthesis of the numerous suggestions coming from the international revisionist milieus.

Among the material factors of the capitalist crisis, of the advent of a revolutionary situation, one is the "permeability" of the proletariat to the propaganda and organisation of a party which fulfils its task by submitting itself, in the strategic, tactical and organisational fields, to an invariant programme because it is based on the material unveiling of the antagonisms inherent in the mode of production in force, which they undermine and explode. Now all this is replaced by a spiritual enlightenment that spreads into immediate achievements and anticipates the new society within the old in the form of a network of local conquests. "The "school" (if we are given this word) of the "Ordine Nuovo" is still characterised by one trait, which both its friends and its enemies recognised: the localism of Turin. According to him, the formula of the workers' organisation, of the factory council, was a novelty which had been imposed in Turin and had only gained Italy and the world by the virtue of this Turin "experience" assumed with a pioneering ardour. It was basically a variant of the insidious "model theory" that suddenly appeared and was destined to have lasting and disastrous extensions, vainly fought: we will do in Europe what was started in Russia, we will do in Italy what was started in Turin. That's where you went to wreak such havoc, poisoned recipe for competitive emulation!

2. False gradualist leftism

In full agreement with the classics of critical communism (polemics against Proudhon, Bakunin, Lassalle, criticism of the Gotha and Erfurt Programmes, etc.) and with the great restorers of Marxism ("What is to be done?", "Against the current", "The State and Revolution", "The Renegade Kautsky", "Terrorism and Communism"...) we have always, by re-exposing revolutionary programmatic theses, shown that immediacy is the essential and distinctive aspect of opportunism, which best reveals its impatience by postulating a gradual transformation of society and a reversal of power relations, or even a direct conquest of power, thanks to the progressive development, within bourgeois society itself, of a new economic form labelled "proletarian". This is a counterfeit of the Marxist thesis according to which bourgeois society carries within itself its own negation and the agents of its own overcoming, that is, the material conditions of socialism (the social character of production as opposed to the private character of appropriation), premises whose flourishing requires the destruction of the commodity system, in other words the surgical intervention of the revolution.

This is a counterfeit of the Marxist thesis according to which bourgeois society carries within itself its own negation and the agents of its own overcoming, that is, the material conditions of socialism (the social character of production as opposed to the private character of appropriation), premises whose flourishing requires the destruction of the mercantile system, in other words the surgical intervention of the revolution.

The revisionist thesis establishes a fallacious analogy between the situation of the bourgeoisie in feudal society, where this class has unquestionably obtained growing economic power with the related ideological-cultural assets, and the "condition" of the proletariat in bourgeois society (where it is by definition without reserves, devoid of everything, disinheritad). Such a vision denies as a whole the entire scientific analysis of
"Capital", the whole Marxist program of the constitution of the proletariat as a class (through its constitution as a party) and of its emancipation. This cannot be conceived as the rupture, the abrogation of legal ties enshrining an outdated relationship of social domination, if only because no legal principle obliges the proletarian to sell his labour power, the only commodity at his disposal and which has the particular character of generating surplus value. This point was brilliantly developed by Rosa Luxemburg in "Reform or Revolution?" (Part Two, Chapter 3: 'The conquest of political power'):

"Bernstein, thundering against the conquest of political power as a theory of Blanquist violence, has the misfortune of labelling as a Blanquist error that which has always been the pivot and the motive force of human history. From the first appearance of class societies having the class struggle as the essential content of their history, the conquest of political power has been the aim of all rising classes. Here is the starting point and end of every historic period. [...] Every legal constitution is the product of a revolution. In the history of classes, revolution is the act of political creation, while legislation is the political expression of the life of a society that has already come into being. Work for reform does not contain its own force independent from revolution. During every historic period, work for reforms is carried on only in the direction given to it by the impetus of the last revolution and continues as long as the impulsion from the last revolution continues to make itself felt. Or, to put it more concretely, in each historic period work for reforms is carried on only in the framework of the social form created by the last revolution. Here is the kernel of the problem.

It is contrary to history to represent work for reforms as a long-drawn out revolution and revolution as a condensed series of reforms. A social transformation and a legislative reform do not differ according to their duration but according to their content. The secret of historic change through the utilisation of political power resides precisely in the transformation of simple quantitative modification into a new quality, or to speak more concretely, in the passage of an historic period from one given form of society to another.

That is why people who pronounce themselves in favour of the method of legislative reform in place and in contradistinction to the conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer and slower road to the same goal, but a different goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new society they take a stand for surface modifications of the old society. Work for reform does not contain its own force independent from revolution. During every historic period, work for reforms is carried on only in the direction given to it by the impetus of the last revolution and continues as long as the impulsion from the last revolution continues to make itself felt. Or, to put it more concretely, in each historic period work for reforms is carried on only in the framework of the social form created by the last revolution. Here is the kernel of the problem.

On this opportunist path masterfully denounced by Rosa Luxemburg, Louis Blanc finds himself with Lassalle, Proudhon drags on with his followers Bakunin and Bernstein, Sorel and Jaurès. About trade unionism of the Sorelian type, we can read in the first volume of our "History of the Left":

"This was only a new type of gradualism with a revolutionary veneer, which had in common with its fierce opponents of the time (the reformists) the will to make gradual the only thing that cannot be accomplished gradually, that is to say the violent rupture of continuity in the operation of the State, this weapon that humanity, in order to throw it to the scrap heap, must first grab it by the horns to turn it in the other direction. The same error lies at the root of Gramscism, which sees a pragmatic series in the control and management of enterprises by workers councils and their progressive substitution to the capitalist state, a perspective that has made its epigones fall back into the old error common to both enemy camps of 1906, and finally in a sadly inferior form to that of the then right."

And in "Nature, function and tactics of the revolutionary party of the working class" (1945) we said:

"No less voluntaristic, also for its declared adherence to more recent bourgeois philosophies, was the syndicalist school of thought. Even if it spoke of open class conflict and the removal and abolition of the very bourgeois state mechanism that the reformists wanted to permeate with socialism, in reality, by localizing the struggle and social transformation to individual manufacturing companies, syndicalism also believed that
proletarians would be able to successively establish lots of victorious positions within islands of the capitalist world. The theory of factory councils put forward by the Italian movement of Ordine Nuovo, in which the international and historical unity of the class movement and of social transformation is fragmented in a series of positional gains within elements of the productive economy, in the name of a concrete and analytical preparation for action, was really a derivation of the syndicalist concept.\(^1\)

Given these presuppositions, despite the fact that some representatives of these currents have criticised, sometimes vehemently, this or that contingent aspect of representative democracy (but never, of course, the democratic principle!), it is understandable that such an orientation leads, under its many expressions, to a pure and simple tracing of demo-popular positions, and the historical block is not the least consequence. Once the proletariat has dispossessed of its class existence in itself and for itself, of its historical function and mission, workerism necessarily sinks into the interclassism of "new", "true", "direct", "pure" democracy, etc., in which the proletariat is the only one who has the right to be a class. In this sense, Gramsci’s evolution from Ordinovism to the national-popular theme of his later writings offers a perfect logical continuity, favoured by the international situation of reflux of the proletarian movement and the complete involution of the Third International.

Gramsci repeatedly and rightly states that he is inspired by Sorel and De Leon. In what sense plays the influence of the first, we see it in one of the chronicles of the "Ordine Nuovo" (11.10.1919) where, speaking of Sorel, he writes:

"In his best writings, seem to resurrect in him a little of the qualities of his two masters: Marx’s rigorous logic and the plebeian and touching eloquence of Proudhon. He did not lock himself into any formula, and today, keeping what was vital and new in his own doctrine, that is, the demand for the proletarian movement to express itself in its own forms, to give life to its own institutions, today he can follow not only with a penetrating eye but with understanding the realisation undertaken by Russian workers and peasants, and can still call ’comrades’ the socialists of Italy who want to follow their example.

We feel that Georges Sorel really remained as Proudhon had done: a disinterested friend of the proletariat. That is why his word cannot leave indifferent the workers of Turin, those workers who have understood so well that the proletarian institutions must be elaborated well in advance if we do not want the next revolution to be only a colossal deception."

The passage is convincing: one could not express more clearly the gradualism of the Ordinovist vision and its kinship with mutualism, the economic combination that Proudhon opposed frankly to the revolution claimed by Marx, and that Sorel had made his own in spite of all the "aesthetics" of the violence of his doctrine - which is founded, and this is not by chance, on the assimilation of the immediate organisations of the proletariat (trade unions) to the medieval corporations, cradle of the new capitalist manufacturing order.

These conceptions are inseparable from the theorisation of Daniel de Leon and his Socialist Labour Party. The latter repudiated armed revolution and even illegal work (in the army for example), with the conviction that the development within the bourgeois regime of the proletarian economic structure prefiguring the future society made bourgeois institutions a simple envelope gradually emptied of its contents, which, at a given moment, would collapse by itself. It was ignoring the Marxist theory of the State, and, consequently, refusing the principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

"which becomes, by the very logic of things, the dictatorship of a conscious and organised minority of the class, that is, of the Communist Party […] [According to the interpretation of the Third International] the proletariat must be protected against itself by its own dictatorship, in order to avoid the bourgeoisie seeking recruits in its mass for its counter-revolutionary plots."

\(^1\) "Nature, function and tactics of the revolutionary party of the working class", in "Defense of the continuity of the communist program" (Éditions Programme Communiste), p. 157.
This express criticism of "substitutionism" can be found in almost the same terms in Gramsci, Pannekoek and in the writings of Lukács, who applauded the merger with the social democrats that had dealt a fatal blow to the Hungarian revolution.

De Leon's actually pacifist and electoralist conception of "revolutionary socialism" stems from the postulate of a prior economic conquest of society. Similarly, the Sorelian exaltation of violence is dissolved in the myth of the general strike (which cannot be confused with insurrection) and peacefully manifests itself in the "concrete" achievements pursued by trade unionist corporatism, destined as such to a strictly reformist function going as far as the social-chauvinism of sacred union. Another typically anarcho-syndicalist aspect of De Leon's scheme is the "leap" over political power, over the proletarian political state, and the direct passage to a so-called "administration of things", presented in principle as planned, but in fact left to the decisions of some sort of "labor parliament" bringing together democratically elected representatives of workers from all branches of industry. If it excludes the criterion of territorial representation, this project certainly does not exclude the "factory spirit" (as they say: the parochial spirit) of which it extends only, in the most favourable case, the narrow limits, thus taking up in the end the old trade unionist scheme of industrial union democracy. The role of such "industrial representatives" would in fact necessarily consist in negotiating the exchange of products and raw materials between the various branches, which would introduce the commodity criterion with its monetary appendix, the general equivalent, and the overrun of the wage system referred to by De Leon would be short-lived. The system praised here, either as the final goal or in the idea that it constitutes "both the battering ram of the capitalist fortress and the successor of the capitalist social structure" ("Daily People" of 20.1.1913) is much closer to the Gramscian conception of councils than to that of the Leninist soviets. Lenin, however, rightly gave De Leon credit for supporting the need for a system of government based on workers alone, and in which exploiters are neither represented nor eligible; this position is remarkable, especially when one thinks of the Kautskyan variations on pure democracy and, in general, the vile interclassism of the theoreticians of the 2 and 2 a half Internationals. Just as Gorter and Pannekoek, who, albeit ill-advisedly, opposed Kautsky's theory of the extinction of the state, which internationalism, De Leon not only proposed as a slogan a "state of the workers" (workers state), but vigorously denounced it (even if he did not know how to draw all the consequences, For example, the absurdity of the peaceful conquest of power in modern capitalist states) Kautsky's "hypotheses", elaborated during the debate on Millerand's entry into the Waldeck-Rousseau government, on a possible neutrality of the bourgeois state in the face of class struggle. Like that of Gorter and Pannekoek, De Leon's conception, without being able to be qualified as Marxist, nevertheless represented a direct criticism of Kautskyism going in a Marxist direction. Unless we distort historical reality, however, we cannot consider Lenin's praise as a certification of orthodoxy given to De Leon (or to the Dutch "tribunists") and, at the same time, to Ordinovism. It is necessary to compare the terms in which Lenin pays homage to De Leon with the theses of the 2nd Congress on the Soviets, just as it is necessary to compare his objective appreciation of the merits of the Dutch theorists during the pre-war period and in the anti-chauvinist struggle with the theses of this same Congress on the role of the Party. What is essential is that these formidable resolutions, imperative for the international revolutionary movement, attack the very heart of the immediatist American or Dutch-German theories, which in certain cases, as we shall see, led to the pure and simple repudiation of the party as such.

These "extremist" versions of the progressive, molecular conquest of power are also, in essence, only the heirs of the doctrinal and practical disfigurement of Marxism by the predominant vision in the 2nd International; this deformation did not let many of those who themselves tried to fight it, and who found themselves impregnated with it to the point of being out of state to base their "left" criticism on the integral claim of the fundamental Marxist theses. The "workerist" tendencies made the same mistake as "revolutionary syndicalism". Imputing to Marxism itself the opportunistic defects due to its revisionist

---

2 See our pamphlet "The Fundamentals of Revolutionary Communism", (Communist Program Editions) which deals in a general way with the problems of the immediatism, the concretism, the "reborn and tenacious Proudhonism".
distortions, it appeared from the beginning as a variant of revisionism, with foreseeable liquidationist consequences (and indeed foreseen, for example, by the rare Italian representatives of Marxist orthodoxy). Similarly, the "workerist" tendencies which tried to fight against the dominant social-democratic orientation on the basis of a so-called "libertarian" alternative, not only did not oppose any serious program, but fell to its level as left-wing opportunism during that of the right. Moreover, these qualifiers do not designate at all errors by excess or defect of radicalism, but the defence and illustration, under forms which are only apparently opposed, of a line opposed to Marxism, which, it, admits gradualism only after the seizure of the power. It is significant in this respect that not only opportunist "right" and "left" have always denounced the Blanquism and Jacobinism of Marxism, i.e. the principle of revolutionary leadership (and thus of an "art of insurrection") and the dictatorship exercised by the Communist Party, but also that they have always resorted to the same purely democratic arguments, whose range goes from liberal-conservative to libertarian-subversive nuances, but whose doctrinal content and material basis are, under these various appearances, always identical: it is a question of importing into the proletarian movement the dominant capitalist ideology in its petty-bourgeois version, therefore through particular layers of the working class, half nested in the petty-bourgeoisie, either because they have "embourgeoisified" in the workers' aristocracy (reformism), or because they come from ruined petty-bourgeois sectors, natural bearers of anarchist ideas.

This polemic against Blanquism and the Jacobinism of Orthodox Marxism is a fundamental point. From Bernstein to Kautsky and Otto Bauer (without forgetting, unfortunately, the contribution of Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg), from the Mensheviks to P. Levi, from Gramsci to Pannekoek, from Errico Malatesta to the modern epigones of the "socialism of the councils", it constitutes the distinctive feature of immediatism, the final word of the countless "anti-totalitarian" explanations of the process which has made the USSR what it is today. We identify this process as the counter-revolution which destroyed the only socialist conquest of October, the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party, and which did just that by physically eliminating even the cadres of Lenin's glorious party. The accusation of Blanquism is both general and particular; it calls into question the whole relationship of the party to the class and, in this context, denies the leading role of the party not only in the global revolutionary process, but in the very organisation of the seizure of power, which would, once again, result from the spontaneous "decision" of the masses. Let us recall the famous passage of Lenin's letter of 13-14 (26-27) September 1917 on "Marxism and the insurrection": it is understood that, contrary to classical Blanquism, Marxism does not believe it can arouse or provoke, but only lead, thanks to the party, the insurrection triggered by well-defined objective and subjective material conditions; it is also understood that the insurrection is the fact of broad layers of the working class in a situation of galvanisation of the masses, profound upheaval and disarray of the constituted power. But the fact remains:

"the opportunist lie that preparation for insurrection, and generally the treatment of insurrection as an art, is 'Blanquism'. Bernstein, the leader of opportunism, has already earned himself unfortunate fame by accusing Marxism of Blanquism, and when our present-day opportunists cry Blanquism they do not improve on or 'enrich' the meagre 'ideas' of Bernstein one little bit."

As for "Jacobinism", this term is used pejoratively by Gramsci in his first writings, up to the "Ordine Nuovo", then laudably in the "Notebooks", without there being any contradiction there, because first he wanted to criticise the pre-eminence and dictatorship of the party, while then he defended the national democratic-popular historical bloc (and then invokes the hegemony of a national party and illuminist, a "collective intellectual"). It is important to recall here that for Lenin the "Jacobin" role of the Marxist revolutionary party is absolutely not limited to a plebeian radicalism in the conduct of the first (democratic) phase of the double revolution. This is a much more important function which falls to the Communist Party as such, as a world organisation, and which, consequently, also - and above all! - in countries where democratic tasks are no longer on the agenda: it plays in relation to the proletariat the leading role that the Jacobins assumed in relation to the bourgeoisie, and this task is all the more important as the proletariat does not have the advantages that the revolutionary bourgeoisie had under the old regime. Similarly, the confrontation of the party with the Girondins of the proletariat, i.e. the opportunists, is all the more necessary because proletarian
power is not conditioned by a pre-existing economic relationship, but by the effectiveness of despotic interventions that disintegrate existing production relations, and only the dictatorship of the revolutionary party, which possesses and can apply a historical program of destruction of the old society, allows such interventions. This challenge to the Jacobin task that the party must fulfil with regard to the proletariat is, as we see, intimately linked to the gradualist representation of the construction of proletarian strongholds within bourgeois society, i.e. the opposite of the Marxist vision of the transition from capitalism to socialism, which derives from the objective laws governing the reproduction of capital and its crises. This proves once again the coherence, the unity, the organic harmony of the Marxist body of doctrine, part of which cannot be rejected, even apparently "secondary" (and these are major revisions), without being led to deny, or worse, to completely distort the whole.

In the Gramscian vision, revolution (if it is legitimate to use this word in such a context) does not result from the structural and insurmountable contradictions of the capitalist system, and above all from the opposition between the private character of appropriation and the social character of production; it derives from the development, within this economic form, of a different structure, which comes up against suffocating and discredited superstructures at a certain time: In this way, a kind of "change of direction" is outlined with a view to improved productivity, measured according to the parameters in force in the old society. That this is the perspective of Gramsci, countless documents, and in particular his speech at the Turin assembly of the Italian Socialist Party in June 1919, eloquently demonstrate it:

---

3 This is not an arbitrary deduction, or a distortion of Lenin's thesis tending to adapt it to our own current, which in party matters "pushes Bolshevism to the point of caricature" (as we read with pleasure under the pen of some immediatists). This can be ascertained by referring to Lenin's very clear statements, first of all in "What to do", but also in One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, where he states in paragraph q): "These "dreadful words"—Jacobism and the rest—are expressive of opportunism and nothing else. A Jacobin who wholly identifies himself with the organisation of the proletariat—a proletariat conscious of its class interests—is a revolutionary Social-Democrat. A Girondist who sighs after professors and high-school students, who is afraid of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and who yearns for the absolute value of democratic demands is an opportunist. It is only opportunists who can still detect a danger in conspiratorial organisations today, when the idea of confining the political struggle to conspiracy has been refuted thousands of times in the press and has long been refuted and swept aside by the realities of life, and when the cardinal importance of mass political agitation has been elucidated and reiterated to the point of nausea. The real basis of this fear of conspiracy, of Blanquism, is not any feature to be found in the practical movement (as Bernstein and Co. have long, and vainly, been trying to make out), but the Girondist timidity of the bourgeois intellectual, whose mentality so often shows itself among the Social-Democrats of today". The Jacobin, indissolubly linked to the organization of the proletariat now conscious of its class interests, is precisely the revolutionary social-democrat. The Girondin who sighs after teachers and secondary school students, who fears the dictatorship of the proletariat, who dreams of the absolute value of democratic demands, is precisely the opportunist. Only opportunists can still, in our time, see a danger in conspiratorial organizations today, when the idea of reducing the political struggle to conspiracy has been refuted thousands of times in the writings, refuted and eliminated for a long time by life, when the cardinal importance of mass political unrest has been explained and repeated to the point of disgust. The real reason for this fear of conspiracy, of Blanquism, is not this or that feature of the practical movement (as Bernstein and Cie have been trying for a long time - but in vain - to make people believe it), but the shyness of the bourgeois intellectual, whose mentality is so often piercing among the current social democrats". And this passage of Terrorism and Communism where Trotsky answers to Kautsky, who had brought the Bolsheviks, these "utopians", closer to the Proudhonians, is also luminous: "Kautsky might have compared us with the opponents of the Proudhonists, the Blanquists, who understood the meaning of a revolutionary government, but did not superstitiously make the question of seizing it depend on the formal signs of democracy. But in order to put the comparison of the Communists with the Blanquists on a reasonable footing, it would have to be added that, in the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, we had at our disposal such an organization for revolution as the Blanquists could not even dream of; in our party we had, and have, an invaluable organization of political leadership with a perfected programme of the social revolution. Finally, we had, and have, a powerful apparatus of economic transformation in our trade unions, which stand as a whole under the banner of Communism, and support the Soviet Government".  


"In order for the revolution, from a simple physiological and material fact, to become a political act and open a new era, it must be embodied in an already existing power, whose old order, through its institutions, impedes and compresses development. This proletarian power must be the direct, disciplined and systematic emanation of the working and peasant masses. It is therefore necessary to develop a form of organisation that constantly disciplines the working masses. The elements of this organisation must be sought in the internal commissions of the factories, in accordance with the experiences of the Russian and Hungarian revolutions and the pre-revolutionary experiences of the British and American working masses, who, through the practice of the factory committees, began this revolutionary education and this psychological mutation which constitute, according to Karl Marx, the most promising symptom of the realisation of communism. The influence of the Socialist Party must serve to give a revolutionary form to this organisation, and to make it the concrete expression of the revolutionary dynamism on the march towards the greatest achievements."'3

What is striking in this formulation - besides its "concretism", its reference to the I.W.W. and the Shop stewards committees, and the Bergsonian and vitalist resonance of the "revolutionary dynamism" - is its educationalist and localistic accent (Marx spoke well of training in struggle, but through general defence associations and actions turned towards the whole class, in which the influence of the revolutionary program spreads). Moreover, this illuminist vision corresponds well to the analogy established between the proletarian revolution and the bourgeois revolution, which had especially to remove the legal obstacles which hindered the development and the free play of an already predominant economy. This fundamental aspect of Gramsci's thesis is not really contradicted by the frequent abstractly anti-jacobin polemics contained in his early writings, since they do not criticise the bourgeois-democratic ideology of Jacobinism, but its recourse to dictatorship and terror, its function as a vanguard party, the "substitution" of a ruling centre for the spontaneity of the masses channelled through managerial self-education. Besides shifting proletarian revolution to the model of bourgeois revolution - gradual consolidation of economic power and progressive clarification of consciences - Gramsci (implicitly in all his work, explicitly in his last writings) exalts and perpetuates the Jacobin leadership because it promotes the historical democratic bloc and, extrapolating to proletarian revolution, charges the communist party with this mission: the latter is therefore "Jacobin" not in relation to the proletariat, nor because it uses the weapons of dictatorship and terror, but because it proposes, at all times and in all places, a pure democratic programme constituting "the completion of the bourgeois revolution". On the other hand, in his early writings, Gramsci (and with assessments close to those of the "renegade Kautsky" who opposed the "good" Commune of 1871 to the "bad" of 1793 in France and 1919 in Russia) made a democratic critique of Jacobinism itself, insofar as it was forced by the general interests of the bourgeois class and notwithstanding the policy of popular union, to intervene against certain fractions of this class. By this, he denies the vanguard role of the class party, he denies the fact that, for Lenin, it was of a "simple and clear" truth, but that right, centre and left opportunism denies or disfigures at will: namely that the classes are guided by parties, the parties by "leaders", and that the communist party must assume with regard to the working class and its state the role assumed by the Jacobins with regard to the class and the bourgeois state. In short, in the Notebooks, Gramsci brings his stone to the base of a Jacobinism ad usum Delphini, presented as the historical national-popular block, and he reduces to this objective the function of the revolutionary party; whereas in the "Ordine Nuovo", he brought his water to the anti-Jacobin mill with the help of the classical arguments, both social-democrats and libertarians, which all come back to oppose the self-direction of the proletariat to the centralised and dictatorial leadership of the party: this, contrary to what the Marxist conception of proletarian revolution implies, would be a specific feature of bourgeois revolution. This polemic can be found under very different feathers: it was fuelled both by the "anti-substitutionist" Trotsky of 1903-1905 and, in 1903 and 1918, by Rosa Luxemburg, who took up the typical De Leonist concept of "usurpation of power by the party after the revolution". The same arguments can be found and exchanged like bullets in Paul Levi's and in the KAPD5, to whom we owe the aphorisms on

4 Citation for P. Spriano, "Gramsci and the Ordine Nuovo", Rome 1965, pp. 50-51.
5 For KAPD, Gorter and Pannekoek, see Chapter VIII of our "History of the Communist Left", Volume II, translated into French in "Programme Communiste" No. 58.
the "party of the masses" and not "of leaders", a party, if we can say so, "proletarianised, sovietised" (adherent to the productive fabric - the first formula of the future "Bolshevisisation" dear to Gramsci and fundamentally anti-Bolshevik!); a work of "education" dedicated to the "autonomous action" of the "great masses" and which must not neglect their "consent"; "This is in contrast to the "importation of class consciousness from outside", that is, by the party armed with a program that is neither local, episodic, nor changing, but that contains "the range of tactical possibilities" through which one can pursue goals that economic agitation is itself incapable of setting on the order of the day.

To repudiate the Jacobinism of the party as "bourgeois" and at the same time to present the proletarian revolution as the faithful replica of the bourgeois model (taking away from it, however, the unified political leadership and the dictatorial terror which the bourgeoisie had to arm itself with in order to defeat an adversary, though infinitely weaker than that represented by capitalism for the proletariat) is only contradictory in appearance. In reality, instead of "bourgeois Jacobinism", an economist parody is proposed to the proletariat; in other words, the Girondins with regard to the working class. The democratic critique of the bourgeois Jacobin revolutionary democratism of the 18th century does not lead to an overcoming of bourgeois democracy, but to an ultra liberal-libertarian democratism which, from the reactionary disavowal of the vanguard forces of the French revolution, leads to the pure and simple negation of the true revolutionary instruments of the anti-capitalist struggle.

The Italian Left has always shown that Ordinovism and the German-Dutch or Anglo-American variants of workerist and anarcho-syndicalist spontaneism are closely related. This can be seen, for example, in our text "The Infantile Disorder, Condemnation of Renegades to Come", from which we extract these lines:

"The danger that Lenin in 1920 had to describe with the expressions, thence become classic, of infantilism and left-wing doctrinairism, culminates in not acknowledging that the revolutionary content must fill of itself two typically political and central forms: the class party and the class state[...] The group called Ordine Nuovo, which a well orchestrated propaganda seeks to present as the truly Marxist and Leninist current, was formed, from its birth during the First World War, on erroneous positions, the very ones that denied or ignored the fundamental role of the Party and the State. [...] Its development at the time and thereafter shows that this pattern [...] represented, by its immediate nature, a petty-bourgeois left-wing position and not a Marxist one".

It is instructive to read the "Ordine Nuovo" of 8/5/1920, which contains two interviews collected by Boris Souvarine, one with the KPD Central Committee, the other with the KAPDist opposition. Souvarine began to express the opinion of the C.C. on the opposition, which

"presents a curious mixture of Proudhonism, Marxism and Sovietism"; which "considers the party's task outdated, considering that the political revolution has been accomplished and that an economic revolution must now be carried out";

which fights the centralisation of the party in favour of a "federation of autonomous local organisations"; which proposes for Germany the boycott of the parliament and even of professional trade unions, and the formation of new industry organisations to which Lenin would enter (following the formula in "Infantile Disorder", condemnation of the future renegades")

"The workers who are partisans of the dictatorship of the proletariat and of the system of councils", because in these hybrid, half-political and half-union organisations, "the workers who are still unconscious communists will become aware, and thus the existence of the party will become superfluous"; who, finally, "tends to the

---

6 "'Left-Wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder - Condemnation of the Renegades to Come" [Communist Program Editions], pp. 94-95.
7 By "sovietism" we mean what is called conseillisme in France, in Germany by Rätesozialismus, etc.
formation of workers' councils within bourgeois society itself and believes that thanks to these councils it will one day be possible to master the economic system and thus accomplish the social revolution”.

Taking into account the softening probably brought by the “reporter”, not only the judgment of the K.P.D. on the opposition is exact and coincides to a large extent with ours, but it analyses and condemns a vision completely identical to that of the Ordinovist councilism. This does not prevent Souvarine, in the continuation of his article devoted to the interview of the representatives of the opposition known as "left", to pass happily on the immediate aspects. of their doctrine, and does not hinder the "Ordine Nuovo" which, by publishing this report without reservations of any kind, even purely oratory, implicitly recognises its narrow affinities with the KAPD.

These international affinities and the characteristics of this "left-wing communism" are evident in the statements of the KAPDists. It is proposed that the former trade unions be "destroyed" and replaced by factory councils grouped into associations for each branch of industry.

"that the workers who accept the dictatorship of the proletariat and the system of the soviets; they must be governed by Soviet principles, that is to say that the initiatives and discussions will start from the base and not from a bureaucratic organisation".

These forms are "absolutely new and specific to Germany" (novelty, originality, national particularity, etc., are regularly invoked in this respect, whereas in the Italian factory council, as in the German Betriebsrat and the Scottish shop stewards committee, one finds, with insignificant variations, the same phenomenon (and the same fallacious confusion with the soviet); these forms must be

"instruments of struggle not for the interests of categories, but for socialism", and "after the revolution, they will change into soviets";

but, as the previous sentence shows, they would already have played the role of soviets during the period of "duality of power" and until they could become governing bodies - which amounts to completely reversing the real system of Communist representation, as noted by "Il Soviet" of 14/9/1919. The aim is to

"1) destroy the old professional union organisations as well as the mechanism of the bourgeois state and create new forms of proletarian power;

2) to create a new psychology in the workers".

Thus, even this last function of educator does not belong to the party, which deals "with its own attributions: political directives, propaganda, etc.". This vague formula covers the centrist conception of the party, which limits itself to spreading "ideas", but does not introduce class consciousness into the proletariat by forming and preparing the workers vanguard, and thus organising it for a subversive purpose. Once again, the class consciousness is conceived as an immediate data and not subordinated to the appropriation of the doctrine transmitted by the party, to which ultimately falls an accessory if not purely decorative role, and in any case temporary. This party "reduced to its simplest expression" must, moreover, organise itself "on Soviet bases", that is to say, follow the immediate movement.

The "leftists" finally rejected "any participation in parliament, but only in Germany [...] the present era being revolutionary". Their abstentionism is therefore no more a criticism of the democratic principle than an appreciation of the historical role of democracy in the already or even highly developed areas of capitalism; it is a means of fortune, which smells of maximalist handiwork.

Two weeks after the KAPD interview was published, "Il Soviet" wrote in an article on "Trends in the Third International" that the German opposition

“actually departs from sound Marxist conceptions and adopts a utopian and petty-bourgeois method."
The opposition says that the political party does not have a preponderant importance in the revolutionary struggle. This must take place in the economic field, without being directed centrally. To counter old economic unions that have fallen into the hands of opportunists, new organisations based on factory councils must emerge. It will be enough that the workers act in this new type of organizations for their action to be communist and revolutionary. If this tendency advocates electoral abstentionism, it is because it denies the importance of political action and of the party in general, because it denies that the political party is the main instrument of revolutionary struggle and of the proletarian dictatorship. Such abstentionism is similar to trade unionist criticism for which action should focus on the economic field and libertarian criticism - which leads to the characteristic horror for "leaders". We will not repeat here the criticisms that we have formulated against these conceptions, which are somewhat those of the "Ordine Nuovo" of Turin.8

Educationism is common to KAPD and Ordinovism. The revolution is subordinated to the class consciousness of the great working masses, which is accomplished at the level of the immediate organisations (network of councils) and coincides with the appearance of the "communist" economic fabric. It is to reduce the function of the party to almost zero, dissolved in a class that would, by definition, have gained a whole existence "in itself and for itself" through pre-revolutionary self-government. The party dictatorship would no longer make sense, since the revolution can only be achieved by a conscious act of the whole class: otherwise, for Pannekoek as for Gramsci, it would be a fiasco in advance. The party must therefore limit itself to propaganda for councils, unions, etc. Finally, if K.A.P.D. theorists affect to take into account the grip of bourgeois ideology on the proletariat, they nevertheless postulate that it is sufficient, to free itself from it, to enter immediate organisations such as the Unions, whose members are by definition "partisans of the dictatorship of the proletariat". Thus, KAPDist illuminism and Ordinovist educationism join hands to sink into the sands of spontaneity and economism.

3. Overall meaning of our criticism

It is hardly necessary to underline the importance of the criticism that the Left has constantly addressed to anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism in all their forms, as well as the position it has taken in the face of the tactics of the Third International, which called on groups of this nature - even if they were openly "non-political" - to associate themselves as such (and not their militants, who were often valid, combative and even "recoverable" elements on condition that they practised a policy of intransigent salvation) with the constitution of the world communist movement. But the Left also recognized in time the "Marxist" disguise (K.A.P.D., "Ordine Nuovo"...) of the libertarian and immediatist positions, and this, not certainly thanks to a divinatory "intuition" nor even to the political "flair" of its representatives, but quite simply because it referred to the very bases of Marxism, which had been reaffirmed again within the 2nd International by this "orthodox radical" wing intended to preside over the formation of the Comintern. Zinoviev wrote in an October 1916 article:

"The task of the Marxist revolutionaries consists in showing that during the twenty-five years of existence of the 2nd International, two essential tendencies have clashed in it with alternating successes and setbacks: Marxism and opportunism. We do not want to erase the whole history of the 2nd International. We do not deny what was Marxist in it.

A number of theorists and leaders have renounced revolutionary Marxism; Kautskyists in all countries have turned away from revolutionary Marxism. In the last years of the 2nd International’s existence, the opportunists and the centre won the majority over the Marxists. Nevertheless the revolutionary tendency has always survived in the 2nd International. We don't think for a moment about giving up his legacy.

During the 1914-1916 war opportunism on the one hand and anarchism and trade unionism on the other went bankrupt. The war has dealt a terrible blow to socialism, but it also represents a positive aspect for the workers movement in that it will help to bury the two petty-bourgeois deviations of socialism.

Our struggle against anarchism and trade unionism must not be less harsh than our struggle against opportunism. Our propaganda work does not consist at present in seeking the 'grain of truth', the 'healthy core' that trade unionism can contain, but on the contrary in showing that official trade unionism has come, like opportunism, to betray the working class, to also serve the bourgeoisie. Much more: the fault of trade unionism and anarchism is much more serious. Consistent opportunism has at least remained true to itself: many opportunists were already saying well before the war what they are saying today. But the trade unionists and anarchists divided the workers movement in France and Italy - under the pretext of intransigent struggle against the bourgeoisie, militarism, war - to behave now with a felony worthy of the worst opportunists; the anarchists and the trade unionists did all that it was humanly possible to do in the field of the revolutionary speech, and thus they only more compromised in the eyes of the workers the watchwords, the revolutionary directives.

Against opportunism and against anarchism! And against the 'Marxists of the centre' in the front line! The 'centre' has always supported the opportunism of the 2nd International. Kautskyism plays a reactionary role: we clearly see it today with the action of "Longuettism", this Kautskyist tendency on French soil, which actually helps the worst chauvinists.

Let’s go back to Marx! And for that, let us found the Third International!⁹

It is therefore a question of going back to the source, of restoring old Marxism without any preoccupation with "new ways", of joining a revolutionary tradition: this is, globally, the position of the Italian Left, and it was necessary to be fundamentally foreign to the Marxist lineage to attribute it, in a Bergsonian way, to the brilliant "intuition", or, even better (following Sorel and... Nietzsche) to Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov's "will to power". In chapter V (significantly entitled "Fight against the two anti-Bolshevik camps: reformism and anarchism") of "Infantile disorder", a condemnation of future renegades", we wrote:

"We affirm that no movement was as closely linked to Lenin as the Italian Marxist Left in the fight against these insanities [democratic-libertarian]. But, in 1920, in almost all left-wing parties of Europe and America this disease was spreading: a left-wing doctrinaire, with such a store, can sabotage more than right-wing doctrinaireism; and Lenin rightly struck pitilessly, in that very important moment, although the distinction between the two sorts of danger is evident in all the pages.

We heard him say that both before and after the conquest of power it is more difficult to defeat the petty-bourgeois spirit than the power of big bourgeoisie. His clairvoyant greatness is confirmed by the hard experience of the times. It was the petty-bourgeois who killed the revolution and put the proletariat in a state of lethargy. The bourgeoisie hasn’t won with the right (fascism), but rather with the left (democratic and libertarian corruption of the working class)".

One can also consult the two letters sent by the Communist Abstentionist Fraction to the Executive of the Third International in November 1919 and January 1920¹⁰ to see, among other things, the differences of principle which separated the programme (and the corresponding tactics) of this fraction from any libertarian and spontaneous position. Consequently, at the preparatory meetings for the 2nd Congress of the International, the Italian abstentionists affirmed that it was not necessary to grant deliberative votes to bodies without a defined political character such as the Spanish C.N.T., the extreme left of the French C.G.T., the Anglo-Scottish Shop Stewards committees, etc., with regard to which the texts of the 2nd World Congress of the Comintern maintained a rather "possibilist" attitude.

However, it is in its centrist-maximalistic form (and that is why the "early diagnosis" formulated by "Il Soviet" about the German independents is so important) that immediatism proves to be the most dangerous - as

---

¹⁰ French translation in "Programme Communiste" No. 58, pp. 137 et seq.
Lenin had never ceased to repeat. Indeed, it firmly established itself in the Communist International, where it was important, so to speak, the heritage of the right-wing majority of the Third International (which was not really a world communist party, but a federation of national parties where opportunist currents prevailed, and where the revolutionary tradition was quantitatively as frail and minority as it was qualitatively high), as well as of the

"centrism even more despicable, which, defaming us as it defamed Bolshevism, Leninism and the Russian Soviet dictatorship, made all its efforts to throw again a bridge - for us it was a trap - between the proletariat in march and the criminal democratic illusions". 11

Gramsci's centrist position at the time of the so-called "Bolshevisation" is thus only a development of his earlier immediatism tinged with anarcho-syndicalist "extremism", just as, later, his national-reformist position - openly expressed in the "Notebooks" where he consecrates the Pantheon of National Glories - explains the subsequent and inevitable outcome of immediatism.

One can truly say that Gramsci synthesised and formulated with the greatest relief, at successive moments, the respectively leftist, centrist and rightist aspects of opportunism (immediatism), aspects which nevertheless involve each other and thus coexist in power. It is easy to understand why the "historiographers" fought so hard for the "true Gramsci" (claimed by both the Stalinists and the anti-Stalinists, by the Trotskyists, the anarchists, the social democrats, the liberal-socialists, the radicals...) succeeding each time in presenting the image of a "different" Gramsci by tone, accentuation, particular proposals, but always and necessarily characterised, in all these interpretations, by democratism and pragmatist and voluntarist concretism. The fact is that all of Gramsci's avatars, real or invented by historiographers' ideology, cover exactly the gamut of opportunist positions, and only it. Along with his interest as a synthesiser of apparently contradictory extra, pre and anti-Marxist positions, this explains his success as an inspirer (by this or that aspect of his theorisation and philosophy) of the apparently most disparate ideological-political currents, and as the patron of the countless current incarnations of revisionism.

The Left's early criticism of the fundamental aspects - those which seemed to be the most "revolutionary" - of Ordinovism thus acquires principled value and is of obvious historical importance. It is indeed addressed to a current much more "refined", under its extremist disguise, than the traditional maximalism, and intimately related to the tendencies as well "extremist" anarchoid as "centrist" of the Comintern in formation, which all concealed the opportunist bacillus which was going to infect then to destroy the world party of the revolution. So it is not a matter for us to criticise Gramsci or Tasca as "thinkers" who are clearly foreign to the line and terrain of scientific communism, and even less to take a petty pleasure in "demystifying" what is called "the greatest Italian Marxist" by gathering his "pearls", but to bring to light a whole pseudo-communism (Lenin would have said a "communist opportunism") which, by its catastrophic effects, first favoured Stalinism, then became its effective instrument.

4. The pre-Ordinovism proves its worth (1914-1918)
Gramsci’s attitude during the imperialist war - an attitude which, defying the grotesque, his epigones have claimed to be "Leninist" - objectively and subjectively reproduces the positions of democratic interventionism in favour of the Entente which Mussolini had aligned himself with and which, in this case, justified treason. Moreover, it appropriated all the empiricism of Mussolini's positions (the attachment to the contingent, to the situation, to the "concrete", which would later return to Gramsci as an obsessive leitmotiv) - and this aspect, which is not episodic, will represent the pivot, first of the "strategy" of the councils, then of the "historical block".

11 Cf. in our brochure "Defending the continuity of the communist programme" the "Theses on the historical task, action and structure of the World Communist Party". This publication also contains our "Draft theses for the IIIrd Congress of the Communist Party" ("Theses of Lyon", Lyon, January 1926) where we will find a precise analysis of the meaning to be given to "the investiture" granted to Gramscism by the degenerated IIIrd International.
In the first volume of this "History of the Communist Left" we recall the violent reaction of the Left to Mussolini's famous article "From absolute neutrality to active and acting neutrality". Gramsci, on the contrary, publishes in "Il Grido del Popolo" of 31-10-1914 an article entitled significantly "Active and acting neutrality", which is guided by a localist and nationalist concretism in which we can see that Gramsci thinks above all of the action of the proletarian party and the working class as a national force:

"What should be the function of the Italian Socialist Party [notice, not the proletariat or socialism in general!] in the present moment of Italian life? This immediate task, always current, confers on it special, national characters, which oblige it to assume in Italian life a specific function, a specific responsibility."

A passage follows where the proletarian state is presented as already developing, by an "internal dialectic", within the bourgeois state, in order to "create organs to overcome and absorb it". The maturation of the proletarian state is seen here on a national level: it is

"autonomous, independent of the International, except by the supreme goal to be achieved and by the fact that this struggle must always have the characteristic of a class struggle".

According to Gramsci, the formula of absolute neutrality had the value of a defensive reaction; as such it had been

"extremely useful at the first moment of the crisis, when events struck us unexpectedly and found us relatively unprepared for their enormity, because only a dogmatically intransigent, sharp affirmation allowed us to oppose a compact, impregnable rampart to the first overflow of passions, of particular interests"; now, however, it would condemn the proletariat to inaction. Just like Mussolini, Gramsci distorted the meaning that the Left attributed to the claim of the neutrality of the bourgeois state, which had nothing to do with the neutrality of the proletariat in the face of imperialist conflict, nor with the indifference corresponding to the "neither adhere to nor sabotage" scheme.

In the first volume of this "History", we showed how the Left had denounced the inadequacy of the formula of neutrality by affirming the necessity of revolutionary defeatism, of recourse to class intervention means such as the general strike in a first phase, then of more effective revolutionary offensive instruments; in short, that it placed itself in the line of the transformation of the imperialist war into civil war and the foundation of the Third International. At the same time as the balloon of a Gramscian "Leninism", this fact deflates the legend, more subtle but no less fanciful, according to which the Bolshevik positions would not have had a correspondent in Italy, where the Left would have aligned itself on... the centrist maximalism of the Zimmerwaldian majority. This thesis, taken up by many "specialists in the history of the workers movement", aims, among other things, at reducing the scope and political responsibility of what has been called Gramsci's "interventionist crisis"; thus, it is argued against all evidence that his "refusal to sabotage the war" meant nothing other than a "renunciation of immediate confrontation" similar to that expressed (in words) by the leadership of the Italian Socialist Party and allegedly also shared by the Left. On the contrary, the latter supported the sabotage of the war with all its consequences, that is, revolutionary defeatism. The leadership remained attached to the equivocal and capitular position of "neither join nor sabotage". As for Gramsci, he placed himself on the very positions of Mussolini, whose formula he adopted to:

"to give back to the life of the nation its pure and frank character of class struggle, insofar as the working class, obliging the class holding power to assume its responsibilities, obliging it to push to the absolute the premises from which it derives its raison d'être, to show the value of the preparation by which it sought to achieve the ends it claimed to be proper, obliges it (in our case, in Italy) to acknowledge that it has completely failed in its task, since it is leading the nation, whose sole representative it proclaimed itself, into a cul-de-sac from which it can only escape by abandoning to their fate all the institutions directly responsible for its current sad state".
Through the ideological mists of this text, one can easily distinguish the cherished themes of democratic interventionism and that national perspective in which (Mussolini will say it in 1919 in Dalmine, far preceding Stalin's famous declaration) the working class must pick up the bourgeois flags and defy the bourgeoisie on its own ground and for its own objectives - a challenge that leads to the honest management of bourgeois affairs by national socialism.

To avoid being accused of supporting the sacred union, Gramsci also resorted to a classical Turatian argument, caught in the revisionist arsenal and which Rosa Luxemburg had already brilliantly refuted, the affirmation of "the immaturity of the proletariat":

"It is therefore not a general embrace that Mussolini wants, nor a merger of all parties in a national unanimity; if such were his position, it would be anti-socialist. He would like the proletariat, having acquired a clear awareness of its class strength and its revolutionary potential, and recognising for the time being its own immaturity to be at the helm of the state, to make the... [Here, a line is missing in the text, but the meaning is clear: it is about “the immaturity to make revolution”; it follows that the author would like the socialists to let the bourgeoisie establish for its war effort]... an ideal discipline, and allow those forces to be allowed to act in history that the proletariat, considering them as stronger, does not feel able to replace. And the fact of sabotaging a machine (because absolute neutrality amounts to real sabotage, sabotage accepted with enthusiasm by the ruling class) certainly does not mean that this machine is not perfect and does not serve any purpose".

We find here the typically Mussolinian reasoning according to which proletarian interventionism would "displease" the bourgeoisie under the pretext that it would give a "revolutionary" tone to the war. The Stalinists took up this opportunist sophism during the Second World War in their "double-sided" tactics, justifying the party's use of their national unity policy by an alleged revolutionary potential of the partisan movement. For Gramsci, the Mussolini position did not imply "that the proletariat renounces its antagonistic attitude" and did not exclude "that it could, after a bankruptcy or a demonstration of impotence of the ruling class, get rid of it and make itself master of the public thing".

It presents the "revolutionary" hypothesis as conditioned by the activity of elites, conceived in a strictly "Mussolini" vision and with Sorelian hints, i.e. as an expression of a "heroic" will for power. It is significant that this function of the elites is retained as especially necessary in Italy, a country which "is neither proletarian nor bourgeois in its entirety, given the little interest that the great mass of the people has always shown for political struggle, and which is therefore all the easier to conquer for those who can manifest their energy and a clear vision of their own destiny.”

The theoretical background, if we can say so, of this perspective decorated with brilliant colours in the D'Annunzio style is synthesised in the vision of history as "the creation of one's own mind, realised by an uninterrupted series of tremors acting on the other active and passive forces of society which prepare the most favourable conditions for the definitive tremor (the revolution)".

This conception will remain the basis of the theoretical building of the "Ordine Nuovo", which proposes to create in the masses of workers and peasants a revolutionary elite capable of creating the State of workers’ and peasants’ councils and of establishing the conditions for the advent and stabilisation of the Communist Society".

Even in less overtly immediatist formulations, the elite is not conceived as the vanguard party that follows an invariant and impersonal program reflecting the meaning and modalities of the proletarian movement imposed by material forces. It is seen in an idealistic way, as an illuminated and illuminating nucleus whose will prefigures the new society within the capitalist society, or an ideal to which the masses are rallied by
persuasion; a new society which (in a kind of "competitive coexistence" before the letter) replaces the old regime now exhausted, by the force of its intrinsic superiority. Even if we ignore the Sorelian resonances (which are also found in the works of ultra-bourgeois authors such as Mosca and Pareto), we are dealing here with a conception of the elite not as a guide and leader of the revolutionary process, but as "liberator of the spirit of the masses", quite analogous to that of the tribunists and the KAPD.12

In April-July 1917, Gramsci gives an appreciation of Menshevism and the Kerensky regime, which, on the one hand, agrees with the favourable judgment of the Social Democrats, and on the other hand accords with that - no less favourable in substance - of the libertarians.13 From his assessment, it is evident not only that he is totally alien to the revolutionary positions of the Bolsheviks, but also, and by this very fact, that his conception is purely democratic-libertarian: it is expressed in formulations similar to those which will become common in the texts of European "infantile extremism". What strikes him in the February revolution is the absence of the "purely bourgeois phenomenon that is Jacobinism" which replaces an authoritarian regime with another no less authoritarian; instead of instituting an authoritarianism, the regime of the cadets and the social-chauvinists (enslaved to the imperialism of the Entente!) is supposed to have brought according to him "universal suffrage [...] freedom [...] the free voice of universal conscience [...]. Russian revolutionaries are not Jacobins, so they have not replaced the dictatorship of one by the dictatorship of a bold and desperate minority to make its program triumph".

What is condemned here under the name of "bourgeois Jacobinism" is obviously the dictatorship of the proletariat led by the party. Gramsci also clearly expresses a "Luxemburgist" conception of the revolution by general or majority consent, when he affirms that the "Russian revolutionaries" (i.e. Kerensky and Co) are certain that "When the whole Russian proletariat has been questioned by them, the answer cannot be in doubt: it is in the consciousness of all and will be transformed into an irrevocable decision as soon as it can express itself in an atmosphere of absolute spiritual freedom";

because "new order" essentially means "liberation of minds" and "establishment of a new moral consciousness" (we see that its terminology itself is similar to that of Gorter and Pannekoek). It should also be noted the passage where he states that "The industrial proletariat is already prepared, including culturally, for transformation; the agricultural proletariat, which knows the traditional forms of communism, is also prepared for the transition to a new form of society".

He thus confirms that the workerist immediatism and the populist immediatist are closely linked!

When a little later the Kerenskyian repression will rage against the revolutionary proletariat, the Bolshevik party will be forced to go underground, Lenin in particular will have to hide so as not to suffer the unnecessary martyrdom that German social democracy will reserve for Luxemburg, Liebknecht, Jogiches and Leviné; when, therefore, the counter-revolutionary nature of the "non-Jacobin" government revealed itself through the shootings of the demonstrators by the junkers and the setting at price of the heads of the communists "agents of the Kaiser", on 28 July, Gramsci published an article whose orientation obviously cannot be explained by a simple "lack of information". It states that the Bolsheviks have the... Socratic function of the

12 It is interesting to confront this vision, anti-materialist par excellence, with Trotsky's affirmation in the article "The psychological problems of war" (11 Sept. 1915): "Human psychology is the most conservative force there is. Far from the great events springing from consciousness, it is the events, their new relationships, their connections, the interfacing of the great historical forces, which force our passive and lazy psychology to adapt painfully and clumsily to them". Trotsky takes up here the classical thesis according to which existence precedes consciousness or, to use an expression which often returns in our texts, the head is the last human organ set in motion by objective and material social forces.

13 See his Scritti giovanili, Turin, 1958.
"gadfly of the state", that is, of the "sting" of "becoming revolutionary"; and that, if they can accomplish this, it is precisely because of this "chance" that the absence of "Jacobinism" represents for Russia, the fact that

"The moderate socialist group, which had power in its hands, did not destroy or try to stifle the vanguard in blood"; thus Lenin "did not know the fate of Babeuf [...] and was able to transform his thought into a force acting in history".

It is perhaps worth recalling here that if Lenin and his whole party did not succumb to the blows of the democracy of the cadets, the Mensheviks and the socialists-revolutionaries, and if Lenin was then able (against the majority of his own central committee, but helped by the perfect "execution" of the essential frameworks and a strict general discipline) to implement the Marxist program which was at the very basis of the existence of the Bolshevik movement, it is essentially thanks to what Gramsci qualified with the other demo-liberals of "Jacobinism": i.e. thanks to a centralisation of the party which really proved to be "organic" beyond the oscillations of individuals and even of the majority of leaders.

It should also be noted that this article already clearly contains the concept of the "creative will" of the Bolsheviks. This vision will culminate in Gramsci's article after October "The Revolution versus' Capital!", and the Left will respond among other things to his interpretation

"which claims that the Russian revolution is a defeat of the method of historical materialism and, conversely, the affirmation of idealistic values"

in the article entitled "The lessons of the new history"14. In Gramsci's article, we find explicit the statement that runs like a thread through its entire theoretical elaboration, and according to which

"Marxist thought, that which never dies [...] is the continuation of the Italian and German idealistic thought which, in Marx's case, had become contaminated with positivist and naturalistic incrustations".

Later, Gramsci (and he is not the only one!) will more or less openly blame Engels for this contamination, and make Marx the one and only "continuator" of Italian (subjectivist!) and German idealistic thought - objectivist in Hegel, subjectivist in all the others! What Gramsci repudiates in positivism and naturalism is determinism, objectivism, materialism. The very order of the epithets of idealism - "Italian and German" - betrays his unwavering attachment to Croce, which makes his positions even more explicitly anti-Marxist than those, for example, of a Lukacs, or a Korsch first way, which affect to refer to Hegel.

When it is then a question of assessing the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly and the slogan "All power to the Soviets", Gramsci's democratism becomes obvious15. He considers the soviets as "a first model of direct representation of producers". In this formula, we find:

a) the model theory;

b) the principle of direct democracy;

c) the criterion of the representation of the producers (and not of the proletarians as such, and therefore also of the soldiers).

With the negation of the role of the party, these will be the axes of the Ordinovist vision. Moreover, the elementary meaning of the dictatorship of the proletariat is totally disfigured by the statement that

"A minority which is sure to become the absolute majority, if not the totality even of the citizens, cannot be Jacobin, cannot have for program the perpetual dictatorship":

---

14 These two articles, reproduced in Volume I of the "Storia della Sinistra Comunista"

far from constituting the political form and the first condition of the period of transformations which can only be completed on a global scale, the Bolshevik dictatorship would thus only be a temporary measure taken to allow the "effective majority to organise itself"!!!

A certain tendency to rectify (at least in part) the shooting manifests itself in Gramsci's later writings, but in fact, whether it be the Brest-Litovsk problem or that of internationalism, it is confined to general or banal considerations. Thus, he affirms that Marxism consists in the recognition of a growing antagonism between the classes, but was the truly distinctive point of scientific communism, that is, its solution to put an end to this antagonism. There are vaguely "historicist" formulas in Croce's sense:

"The culture of the Bolsheviks is made of historicist philosophy; they conceive political action and history not as a contractual free will, but as a development; not as a definitive and crystallised myth in an external formula, but as an infinite process of perfection."

Or: "Russian political life is oriented in such a way that it tends to coincide with moral life[sic!], with the universal spirit of Russian humanity."

Alongside these expressions, one finds others more imbued with a voluntarist and rationalist tone:

"Lenin is the one who coldly studies historical reality, who organically tends to build a new society on solid and permanent foundations, according to the precepts of Marxist doctrine: he is the revolutionary who builds without frenetic illusions, obeying reason and wisdom"[16];

passages where we find the themes of concretism, the "construction" of a "model of socialism" in Russia, almost the "prototype" of a structure to be "grafted" by a series of "practical achievements" in the capitalist economy, so as to absorb and overcome it (on its own productivist ground): in short, the characteristic elements of Ordinovism that Gramsci will develop in his later theorisations, but which are part of the invariant aphorisms of international immediate opportunism. An article like the one on "Economic organisation and socialism" ("Il Grido del Popolo", 9-2-1918) will show that he understands this "model" more or less like a Rosmer, naively convinced that "The State and Revolution" was written to "reconcile" Marx and Bakunin. In this article it is stated that revolutionary socialism

"Leads social activity back to its unity and strives to make politics and the economy without adjectives, that is, helps the spontaneous, free, historically necessary proletarian and capitalist energies to develop and to become aware of themselves, so that through their antagonism ever more complete and perfect provisional synthesizes assert themselves, which will have to culminate in the act and in the ultimate fact that contains them all, without residues of privileges or exploitation. Antagonistic social activity will lead neither to a professional state, as the trade unionists dream of, nor to a state monopolising production and distribution as the reformists advocate. But to an organisation of freedom for all and for all, which will have no stable and definitive character, but will be a continuous search for new forms, new relationships, which always adapt to the needs of men and groups, so that all initiatives are respected as long as they are useful, so that all freedoms are supported as long as they do not entail privilege. These considerations are experimented in a lively and exciting way in the Russian revolution which, until now, has consisted above all in a titanic effort so that none of the static conceptions of socialism are consolidated definitively by putting an end to the revolution and by fatally reducing it to a bourgeois regime which, if it were liberal and respected freedoms, would give more guarantees of historicity than a professional regime or a centralising and statist regime".

This passage, where a liberal-socialism intermingles before the letter and a neo-idealistic historicism with Croce (including the "religion of freedom"), shows a flagrant and total incomprehension, not only of the meaning of October on the Russian level and internationally, but of the whole Marxist doctrinal construction.

---

In fact, there are themes that Gramsci had already presented before, writing in the same "Grido del Popolo" in 1916:

"Man is above all spirit, that is to say historical creation, and not nature. Otherwise we would not understand why, since there have always been exploiters and exploiters, wealth creators and selfish consumers of wealth, socialism has not yet come about. And this consciousness was not formed under the stimulus of physiological necessity, but through intelligent reflection, first by a few and then by a whole class, on the reasons for certain facts and on the best means of transforming them from opportunities for submission into flags of revolt and social reconstruction. This means that any revolution was preceded by an intense work of criticism, of cultural penetration".

In 1917, again, in the single issue of "La città futura", he presents Croce as

"Europe's greatest thinker at the moment", and proclaims that "Socialists must replace order with order: they must restore order in itself ".

This expression is not in contradiction with the later title of "The New Order", in which "the order" means "the Fourth State", the class downgraded to "the category of producers", which, like the Third State before it, should build its foundations within the old regime. What Gramsci denies, however, is that socialism constitutes an order of production-distribution that is the opposite of capitalism, and that the dictatorship of the proletariat constitutes the dialectical opposite of the bourgeois dictatorship. For him, these are "closed" and "Jacobin" schemes, whereas his "open" ideology advocates, like Proudhonism, the use of the "good sides" of capitalism, freed from the defects of protectionist statism. Far from recognising in this "statism" imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism, he sees it as a precapitalist residue or at least an obstacle to capitalism, which will largely determine his "understanding" of fascism. It is precisely on this pitfall of "totalitarianism" that all the variants of immediacy and opportunism fail!

We see what Gramsci's historicism (à la Croce) is worth, since it is a period when the true spokesmen of revolutionary socialism - from Lenin to Bukharin and the "Italian" Left - identified statist totalitarianism, centralist and militarist, as the inevitable expression of imperialism and, unlike the deformations of a Kautsky who presented imperialism as "super-capitalism" or as "politics", recognised the supreme stage of capitalism. Moreover, to claim parliamentarianism and implicitly accuse abstentionism of "petty-bourgeois weakness", Gramsci will not hesitate to refer to the same Kautsky.

Besides the fact that the theory of the "model", of the experimental "construction" of socialism in pre-capitalist Russia as a "proposal" to be imitated in partibus infidelium is fundamentally aberrant, it should be noted that Gramsci ignores or rejects on the contrary what Lenin precisely defines in "Infantile Disorder" as the international characters of the Russian revolution. If these characters manifested themselves even in a "double" revolution, whose first phase (until the victory of the proletarian dictatorship in at least one series of advanced countries) could only be, in the economic and social domain, "radical" bourgeois-democratic, they must manifest themselves with all the more force in a historical area of "purely" proletarian, "simple" and no longer "double" revolutions. Let us hear Lenin:

"the Bolsheviks could not have retained power for two and a half months, let alone two and a half years, without the most rigorous and truly iron discipline in our Party, or without the fullest and unreserved support from the entire mass of the working class, that is, from all thinking, honest, devoted and influential elements in it, capable of leading the backward strata or carrying the latter along with them. [...] I repeat: the experience of the victorious dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia has clearly shown even to those who are incapable of thinking or have had no occasion to give thought to the matter that absolute centralisation and rigorous discipline of the proletariat are an essential condition of victory over the bourgeoisie".

This point, which constituted the great lesson of the October Revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia, formed at the same time the core of the opposition between revolutionary Marxism
and immediatism, alias opportunism. It would be vain to think that Gramsci, immersed in positions that evoke Gobetti's "liberal revolution" and "liberal-socialism", did not see this opposition. In fact, he was in solidarity with the immediatism of all kinds, and his "principal" eclecticism led him simply to be a conciliator of the multiple opportunist tendencies.

What constitutes, in the end, the lesson of October and of Bolshevism in general, from its formation until its victory, is precisely the proletarian Jacobinism, opposed to the national-popular Jacobinism (of which Gramsci will then be the zelator). For Gramsci, on the contrary (even after the article "The revolution against 'Capital'") the essential problem is that of

"the vital impulse [we think we hear Bergson!] of the new Russian history [...]. The Russian revolution is dominated by freedom: the organisation is formed spontaneously, and not by the arbitrary decision of a "hero" who would impose himself through violence. It is a continuous and systematic human evolution, which follows a hierarchy and gradually creates the organs necessary for the new social life [...]. For socialism is not established on a fixed date, but is a continuous becoming, an infinite development in a regime of freedom organised and controlled by the majority of citizens, or by the proletariat".17

For "dictatorship is the fundamental institution which guarantees freedom, which prevents factious minorities from helping themselves. It is a guarantee of freedom because it is not a method to be perpetuated, but allows to create and solidify the permanent organisations in which it will dissolve after having accomplished its mission".

Consequently, the dictatorship will not remain in force until the total extinction of the State; consequently (exactly contrary to Engels' affirmation of principle in his letter to Bebel of 18-28 March 1875:

"so long as the proletariat still makes use of the state, it makes use of it, not for the purpose of freedom, but of keeping down its enemies and, as soon as there can be any question of freedom, the state as such ceases to exist."

The State is employed by the proletarians "in the interest of freedom", or, better still, it dissolves into workerist and at the same time populist self-management.

For Gramsci, a "freedom" is thus possible, and this thanks to non dictatorial organisations. Since it is obvious that the "permanent bodies" of which he speaks have nothing to do with the administration of things, which in any case can only be centralised to the maximum until the "unique world plan", the whole Marxist conception of the State is reversed here: the context clearly shows that these democratic bodies are the basis of this regime of "freedom organised and controlled by the majority of the citizens" with which socialism is supposed to identify; in other words, dictatorship is only admitted as a prelude to the "free popular State"!

The themes of the I.W.W. style (unionist parliament, etc.) marry here with the social-democratic refrain on "pure democracy" and we are once again obliged to stress that the pious legend of Gramsci's "Leninism" is only a monstrous falsification, truly worthy of the Stalinist school that spread it. This all the more so as at the time, the positions of Marx, Engels, Lenin, were ignored by no one, as demonstrated by all the publications and all the activity of the Left. It was obviously not a question of whether or not one had read "The State and Revolution", but whether or not one claimed the classical sources, accessible to all and from which Lenin himself had drawn his synoptic "reminder".

Of course, the phenomenon was not limited to Gramscism alone; it was with other movements of similar orientation that it found itself aligned, objectively and explicitly, on positions relating to certain crucial issues and openly defended by the centre and right of social democracy, if not by the bourgeoisie large and small. This is the case for Wilsonism, whose condemnation could, however, appear to be a sort of common

---

17 “Utopia”, in "Avanti!" July 25, 1918.
denominator of an "international left" of heterogeneous origins and motivations. Gramsci adopts an openly conciliatory attitude towards bourgeois pacifism, with expressions that could be claimed by any Longuet, but not a Rosmer, for example, of a Marxist and even anti-Marxist background:

"Wilson's agenda, peace among nations, will only be realised through Russia's sacrifice, through Russia's martyrdom. Between the average ideologies of the Italian, French, English, German bourgeoisie, and Russian maximalism, there was an abyss; the distance was shortened by approaching the most advanced bourgeois logical ring, President Wilson's program. The American president will be the triumphant of peace; but for his triumph, Russia's martyrdom was necessary: Wilson felt it, and he paid tribute to those who are nevertheless also his adversaries."

Here, the intrinsically opportunistic nature of immediatism... immediately jumps out at us, in the apology of imperialist peace and the olive branch openly extended to the "pacifists" of the centre and right of the P.S.I. This confirms that unity at all costs ("from Bordiga to Turati"), expressed before and after the Bologna Congress, only reflects the total absence of orientation of the "concrete" thinker by definition. It reflects his inability to make the "distinction" (even the most superficial) between the forces of revolution and the forces of conservation, and to grasp the antithesis between the "apocalyptic antipodes" Lenin and Wilson. Various groups of "fellow travellers" have nevertheless perceived this antithesis, even if they have not been able to draw the necessary consequences or frame it in a solid perspective and doctrine, and even if they were condemned to undergo the inevitable evolution of the immediatism towards more or less openly reactionary and defeatist conclusions. Thus Gramscism was not only congenitally incapable of adhering to Lenin's restoration of Marxism; even at the level of formal convergence or "tactical" alignment it remained alien to the most common aspects, to the most widely distinctive themes of Bolshevik propaganda.

We can return to the "culturalist" aspect of immediatism with a comment to an article from A. Leonetti, a comment that raises this question long after the "youth" discussions of 1912-13 and long before the "Ordine Nuovo":

"The socialist movement is developing, bringing together multitudes, whose individual members are prepared to varying degrees for conscious action, prepared to varying degrees for social life in common in the future regime. This preparation is all the weaker here, since Italy has not gone through the liberal experience, has known few freedoms, and illiteracy is even more widespread than the statistics say."

The idea that Italy lacked the liberal (bourgeois-democratic) revolution will be a leitmotiv, both of later Gramscism ("Notebooks") and of "Togliattism". Let us simply note here the appearance of this characteristic theme of this vision, which attributes the fact that parliament loses control of the government not to the development of the bourgeois regime, but to its so-called local "immaturity". For the Left, on the contrary, it was clear that it was not the task of parliament - and less than ever in the imperialist phase - to lead bourgeois "civil society"; that it no longer even had, in imperialist times, the task of representing the "living forces" of the system, as it was once able to do to a greater or lesser extent; but that its main function is now to divert and exorcise the class struggle.

This other passage is no less significant:

18 “Lenin and Wilson are the apocalyptic antipodes of our time." Trotsky said in 1917. In a similar way the organ of the Left "Il Soviet" wrote on January 1, 1919: "We Socialists must not applaud Wilson, but fight him openly [...] Filippo Turati discovers the dilemma: Wilson or Lenin. That’s the dilemma we see too: capitalism or socialism!"

19 See Trotsky's article: "Jean Longuet: Forfeiture of Parliamentarism" (1919), reproduced in our brochure "The Parliamentary Question in the Communist International".

20 "Il Grido del Popolo", March 2, 1918.

21 "Il Grido del Popolo", 31 August 1918.
"For the organised proletariat, the duty to educate itself is even greater, the duty to release from its group the prestige necessary to assume social management without having to fear Vendée revolts that destroy the conquests of the party of action[sic]!".

Gramsci will return heavily on this aspect in the "Nuovo Ordine" of 20-3-1920, polemicising against a comrade from Bologna. This one

"was seriously scandalised by reading that 'Ordine Nuovo' had published the following opinion: 'if a monk, a parish priest, a nun, do any work of social utility, and therefore are workers, they have the right to be treated like other workers' and believes that the comrades of 'Ordine Nuovo' should be asked if, in writing as they do, they do not give reasons to suspect that it is about... of the new order of parish priests, monks and socialist nuns".

Gramsci asks him:

"What action does he think the power of the Italian soviets should develop in relation to Bergamo, if the working class of Bergamo chooses as representatives priests, monks, nuns? Should Bergamo be set on fire and slain? Will it be necessary to extricate from Italian soil the race of workers and peasants who politically follow the flag of the Popular Party through its left wing? Will the communist workers, not content with having to fight against the economic ruin that capitalism will leave to the workers state, not content with having to fight against the bourgeois reaction, also have to provoke a war of religion in Italy alongside the civil war? And this, even if some of the Catholics, priests, monks, nuns, accept the power of the soviets, asking only for freedom of worship?"

One would be mistaken to think that Gramsci only means that religion cannot (unfortunately!) be extirpated by arms: he has a conciliatory attitude towards the Church itself, this capitalist-financial power, this counter-revolutionary organisation if ever there was one. Here, he not only announces future agreements with the "popular left" but he explicitly wants a "socialist" Concordat:

"The issue is very important and deserves to be dealt with broadly and thoroughly. As the majority party of the working class, as the government party of the future Italian workers state, the socialist party must have an opinion on the matter, and should disseminate it among the proletarian masses who politically follow the clerics. In Italy, in Rome, there is the Vatican, there is the Pope: the liberal State had to find a system of balance with the spiritual power[sic] of the Church: the proletarian State will also have to find a system of balance".

Again, let us insist that such statements cannot be explained by "provincialism", but that the correct diagnosis is: "anti-Jacobinism". Indeed, we find quite similar expressions in authors as little suspected of pro-Catholic sympathy as Pannekoek and Lukacs, but closely related to Gramsci by spontaneous immediatism. All these people bring about the revolution, and the act of insurrection itself, not from the material mobilisation of the masses by a crisis of the established regime and the propaganda and organisational action of the party, but from an "awareness" (similar to that of a mayonnaise) of the masses themselves, and without this universal consent they declare the revolution lost.

The truth is that both right-wing and left-wing immediatists would like, through their subsequent capitulations, to avoid a "fratricidal struggle" between "proletarians" or between "oppressed" in general: the result is that they send the revolution back to the Greek Calends of the general consensus, even more utopian than the trap of "the general conscious-acceptance" into which even the Spartakists have fallen. Lenin asserts that the resistance of the bourgeoisie is inevitable; the phenomenon of the Vendees is just as inevitable, whether they are of petty-bourgeois origin, whether they come from the working class aristocracy or from backward labour sectors. In "Terrorism and Communism" Trotsky recalls that even in the double revolution in Russia, and even in its first democratic, popular phase, the bloc with the "left-wing" socialists-

---

22 See in particular de Pannekoek: "Der neue Blanquismus" in "Der Kommunist" by Bremen, No. 27, 1920; and Lukacs: "Opportunismus und Putschismus" in "Kommunismus", Vienna, 1/32, 1920.
revolutionaries did not hold: there was the revolt of the left S.R., the insurrection of Makhno, Kronstadt gangs, etc.. At the 3rd Congress of the P.O.S.D.R. already held in London in 1905, Lenin had announced:

"Even to seize Petersburg and send Nicolas II to the guillotine, we will find ourselves in front of a certain number of Vendees";

and that's what happened. In the West the seizure of power would have been (and will be) more difficult, because of the "attachment of the working class to the bourgeois regime" denounced by Trotsky and - that is to say otherwise the same thing - the resistances to the establishment of the revolutionary dictatorship would have been (and will be) much greater than in Russia, even on the part of the "oppressed". These resistances cannot be remedied by education and propaganda, and even less by tricks to obtain the arithmetic "majority" of the working class as those which will, alas, impose themselves in the decadent International.

Let us note again the insistent return of some concerns: in "Il Grido del Popolo" of 7-9-1918, Gramsci writes that

"Italian democracy is still a "demagogy", since it has not constituted itself into a hierarchical organisation, since it does not obey an ideal discipline coming from a programme to which one freely adheres";

and on 14-9 he states that the Congress of the P.S.I. in Rome

"reaffirmed, within the political organisation of the workers, the triumph of the intransigent revolutionary faction, reaffirmed within the Italian Socialist Party the triumph of socialism.... The Socialists have shown that they are within the Italian nation the social force most sensitive to the calls of reason and history, that they are an aristocracy that deserves to assume the management of social responsibility".

The two leitmotifs of the subsequent elaboration of Gramsci thus appear clearly here: the alleged absence of a democratic maturity in Italy - which would impose on the proletariat the task of accomplishing, in this geo-historical area too, the bourgeois democratic revolution - and the concept of the party as a national and popular force.

As for the kinship between "right" and "left" immediatism, we see it, for example, in this declaration:

"The socialist state, and thus the organisation of the collectivity after the abolition of private property, does not continue the bourgeois state, is not an evolution of the capitalist state made up of the three powers, executive, parliamentary and judicial, but systematically prolongs and develops the professional organisations and local unions that the proletariat has already been able to spontaneously create in the individualist regime [...]. The arrangement that the capitalist state has adopted in England is much closer to the soviet regime than our bourgeois who speak of "Leninist utopia" will admit..."

There is not much from spontaneous "corporatism" to the most vulgar "labourism"; nor is there much from anarchistic "socialism" to De Paepe to the anti-Marxism of De Man. It is not by chance that the Communist

---

23 "The Russian proletariat is poor in history and tradition. This undoubtedly facilitated his revolutionary preparation for the October Revolution. But at the same time he made his constructive task more difficult after October. Apart from their upper layer, our workers lack the most basic cultural knowledge and skills (cleanliness, reading and writing skills, punctuality, etc.). The European worker slowly acquired these habits during a long period of bourgeois domination, which is why he is so closely linked - through his upper layer - to the bourgeois order, with his democracy, his free capitalist press, and other benefits. Our very late bourgeois order could not offer the Russian proletariat almost any of these benefits: that is why the Russian proletariat could break more easily with the bourgeois social system, and overthrow it. But for the same reason the great majority of our proletariat is obliged to collect and appropriate only today, that is to say already on the basis of the socialist workers' state, the rudimentary cultural achievements. History gives nothing for free: when it grants a discount in the political field, it increases the price in the cultural field". (Trotsky, "Problems of everyday life", 1924, chapter "We don't live only on politics"; translated from the German text.)
Left forged itself in the struggle against the immediatism of all kinds, just as its predecessors and Bolshevik masters had asserted themselves by resolutely fighting all the varieties of economism.

The great lesson of Bolshevism is the primacy of the party. Even in autocratic Russia, where the most elementary struggle, a strike for example, necessarily took the character of a direct clash with the forces of the state, Lenin recognised that the protest movement could not go beyond trade-unionist and therefore politically bourgeois limits. All the more so in countries such as England or even Giolitti’s Italy, castrated by decades of "evangelical socialism". In the West, where old parliamentarist and labourist traditions weigh on the protest movement, the primacy of the party is thus even more imperative, and the Left will repeat it with insistence thereafter.

By showing that Bolshevism is a plant of all climates, the Left will affirm that, if it had to get rid of any populist residue on the ground par excellence of the popular movements that is a bourgeois revolution still to be done; if, even there, it had to repel any kind of coalition with the so-called related parties; if it had to take sole power in hand to accomplish purely democratic tasks on the economic level and to physically defend the revolution, revolutionary intransigence24 would have been (and will be) all the more necessary in the West because communist revolution and capitalist conservation collide there more directly and because, as Lenin said, power there is more difficult to take.

This revolutionary intransigence is not reflected in a weakening of the lessons of October, but in their accentuation and insistence on the indispensable character of the party, this programmatic, strategic, tactical and organisational instrument, without whose preparation any "revolutionary" desire is only a hollow maximalist declamation.

Source: "Programme Communiste" No. 71, September 1976.

---

24 On the legend which presents Lenin as a "great opportunist", see Bordiga's commemorative speech, "Lenin on the road to revolution" (Rome, 1924) published in no. 12 of this journal, and our brochure on " 'Left-Wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder - Condemnation of the Renegades to Come"). Trotsky’s passage (in his "Critique des thèses fondamentales du projet de programme de l'I.C." of June 1928) is also worth mentioning, although it is far from completely framing the problem of the relationship between strategy and tactics: "It was not flexibility that was the fundamental characteristic of Bolshevism (any more than it should be now), but its firmness as bronze. It was precisely this quality - of which he was legitimately proud - that his enemies and adversaries blamed him. Not blissful "optimism", but intransigence, vigilance, revolutionary mistrust, struggle for every inch of independence: these are the essential features of Bolshevism. This is where the communist parties of the West and the East must begin". Needless to say, in the East as in the West, the communist parties should have taken this path - that of 1903 Bolshevik - well before 1928. But only the "left" direction of the Italian CP, set up "too late" and eliminated "too soon", tried to do so. That is why his eviction has led to the suppression of the only genuine spark of Bolshevism, of a European communism that is not a farce.