

Theses on the Tactics (Rome Theses)

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I. Organic Nature of the Communist Party

1. – The Communist Party, political party of the proletarian class, presents itself in its action as a collectivity operating with a unitary approach. The initial motives which lead the elements and groups of this collectivity to incorporate themselves into an organism with a unitary action are the immediate interests of groups of the working class, arising out of their economic conditions. The essential characteristic of the Communist Party's function is utilization of the energies incorporated in this way for the attainment of objectives which are common to the entire working class and situated at the culmination of all its struggles; objectives which thus transcend – by integrating them – the interests of single groups, and such immediate and contingent aims as the working class may propose.

2. – The integration of all elemental thrusts into a unitary action occurs by virtue of two main factors: one of critical consciousness, from which the party draws its programme; the other of will, expressed in the instrument with which the party acts, its disciplined and centralized organization. It would be erroneous to consider these two factors of consciousness and will as powers that can be obtained by, or are to be expected of, individuals since they are only realizable through the integration of the activity of many individuals into a unitary collective organism.

3. – The precise definition of the theoretical and critical consciousness of the communist movement, contained in the programmatic declarations of individual parties and of the Communist International, as well as the organization of the one and the other, was and still is being arrived at through the examination and study of the history of human society and its structure in the present capitalist epoch, carried out on the basis of facts, experience and through active participation in the actual proletarian struggle.

4. – The announcement of these programmatic declarations, and the appointment of the men to whom are entrusted the various positions in the party organization, is formally carried out by means of a consultation, democratic in form, of the party's representative assemblies, but in reality they must be understood as a product of the real process which accumulates elements of experience and realizes the preparation and selection of leaders, thus shaping both the programmatic content and the hierarchical constitution of the party.

II. The Communist Party's Process of Development

5. – The organization of the proletarian party takes form and develops insofar as there exists – because of the level of maturity to which the social situation has evolved – the possibility of a unitary collective consciousness and action in the direction of the general and ultimate interests of the working class. On the other hand, the proletariat appears and acts as a class in history precisely when the tendency to construct a programme and a common method of action, and hence to organize a party, takes form.

6. – The process of formation and development of the proletarian party does not present a continuous and regular course, but is susceptible both nationally and internationally of highly complex phases and periods of general crisis. Many times there has occurred a process of degeneration whereby the action of the proletarian parties has lost, or has moved away from rather than towards, that indispensable character of a unitary activity inspired by the highest revolutionary aims. It has become fragmented in pursuit of the satisfaction of interests of limited groups of workers, or in achieving contingent results (reforms) at the cost of adopting methods which have compromised the work for revolutionary objectives and the preparation of the proletariat for such objectives. Thus the proletarian parties have often ended by extending the frontiers of their organization to the spheres of elements that could not yet place themselves upon the terrain of unitary and maximalist collective action. This process has always been accompanied by a deforming revision

of doctrine and programme, and by such a slackening of internal discipline that instead of having a general staff of capable leaders resolute in the struggle, the proletarian movement has been placed in the hands of hidden agents of the bourgeoisie.

7. – The path back from a situation of this kind towards the organization of a true class party, under the influence of new situations and new pressures to act exercised by events upon the working masses, takes place in the form of a separation of a part of the party which through debates on the programme, a critique of unfavorable experiences in the struggle, and the formation within the party of a school and an organization with its own hierarchy (fraction) reconstitutes that living continuity of a unitary organism, founded on the possession of a consciousness and a discipline, from which the new party arises. This is the process which, in general, led from the failure of the Second International Parties to the birth of the communist Third International.

8. – The development of the Communist Party after the resolution of such a crisis, allowing for the possibility of subsequent critical phases produced by new situations, can to facilitate analysis be defined as “normal” development of the party. By displaying the maximum continuity in upholding a programme, and in the life of its leading hierarchy (apart from individual replacement of disloyal or worn out leaders), the party will also perform the maximum of effective and useful work in winning the proletariat to the cause of revolutionary struggle. This is not simply a question of exerting a didactic effect upon the masses; and even less is it a desire to exhibit an intrinsically pure and perfect party. It is rather a question of achieving the maximum yield in the real process whereby – as will be seen better below – through the systematic work of propaganda, proselytism and above all active participation in social struggles, the action of an ever increasing number of workers is caused to shift from the terrain of partial and immediate interests to the organic and unitary terrain of the struggle for the communist revolution. For only when a similar continuity exists is it possible, not merely to overcome the proletariat’s mistrustful hesitations with respect to the party, but rapidly and effectively to channel and incorporate the new energies gained into a common thought and action, thus creating that unity of movement which is an indispensable revolutionary condition.

9. – For all the same reasons, the aggregation to the party of other parties or parts detached from parties must be seen as entirely abnormal. A group which up to that moment was distinguished by a different programmatic position and independent organization does not bring with it an ensemble of elements that can be effectively assimilated en bloc; on the contrary, it impairs the solidity of the old party’s political position and internal structure, so that the increase in overall numbers is far from corresponding to an increase in the party’s strength and potential – indeed

could on occasion paralyze its work of organizing the masses rather than facilitate it.

It is desirable that as soon as possible it should be declared inadmissible within the world communist organization to depart from two fundamental principles of organization: in each country, there can only be a single communist party; and it is only possible to join the Communist International by individual admission to the communist party of the country in question.

III. Relations between the Communist Party and the Proletarian Class

10. – The specification and definition of the characteristics of the class party, which is the basis for its constitutive structure as organ of the most advanced part of the proletarian class, does not mean that the party need not be bound by close relations with the remainder of the proletariat – indeed it demands that it should be.

11. – The nature of these relations derives from the dialectical way of viewing the formation of class consciousness and a unitary organization of the class party, which transports a vanguard of the proletariat from the terrain of partial, spontaneous movements provoked by the interests of groups on to the terrain of general proletarian action; and which does not achieve this by rejecting those elemental movements, but accomplishes their integration and transcendence through living experiences, by pushing for their realization, taking active part in them, and following them attentively throughout their development.

12. – The work of propagating its ideology and proselytizing for its ranks which the party continuously carries on is thus inseparable from the reality of the proletariat's activity and movement in all its myriad forms. It is a banal error to see as contradictory: participation in struggles for contingent and limited objectives, and the preparation of the final and general revolutionary struggle. The very existence of the party's unitary organism, with its indispensable conditions of clarity of programmatic vision and solidity of organizational discipline, gives a guarantee that partial demands will never be accorded the value of ends in themselves, and that the struggle to fulfil them will only be seen as a means of experience and training for useful and effective revolutionary preparation.

13. – Hence, the Communist Party participates in the organizational life of all forms of the proletariat's economic organization open to workers of all political faiths (unions, factory councils, cooperatives, etc.). If the party is to carry out its

work effectively, it is a fundamental position to maintain that all organs of this nature must be unitary, in other words must include all those workers who are to be found in a specific economic situation. The party participates in the life of such organs by organizing those of its members who belong to them into groups or cells linked to the party organization. These groups, participating in the front line in the actions of the economic organs to which they belong, draw to themselves – and hence into the ranks of the political party – those elements who become ready for this as the action develops. They aim to win majority support and leading positions in their organizations, thus becoming the natural vehicle for transmitting the party's slogans. A whole activity is thus carried on, which is one of conquest and organization; this is not limited to propaganda or proselytism or internal electoral campaigns in the proletarian assemblies, but above all involves entering into the thick of struggle and action and helping the workers to derive the most useful experience from them.

14. – The entire work and organization of the communist groups is designed to give the party definitive control over the leading bodies of the economic organisms, and first and foremost over national union executives, which seem the most secure mechanism for leading movements of the proletariat not integrated in the ranks of the party. The Communist Party – seeing it as its primary interest to avoid splits in the unions and other economic organs, so long as their leadership remains in the hands of other parties and political currents – will not enjoin its members to comport themselves, in the field of execution of movements led by such organisms, in contrast with the latter's directives as regards action, though they must express the most open criticism of the action itself and the work of the leaders.

15. – Apart from taking part in this way in the life of those proletarian organisms that have arisen naturally through the pressure of real economic interests, and facilitating their extension and reinforcement, the party will strive to bring to the fore through its propaganda those problems of real interest to the workers which, in the evolution of social situations, can give life to new organisms of economic struggle. By all these means, the party expands and strengthens the influence which via a thousand bonds stretches from its organized ranks to the proletariat as a whole, taking advantage of all its manifestations and potential manifestations in social activity.

16. – Any conception of the party organism based on the requirement of perfect critical consciousness and a complete spirit of sacrifice from the part of each of its members, individually considered, and that restricted the layer of the masses linked to the party to revolutionary unions of workers constituted in the economic field by a secessionist criterion and including only those proletarians who accepted given

methods of action, would be totally erroneous.

On the other hand, one cannot insist that by a given time, or on the eve of undertaking general actions, the party must have realized the condition of incorporating under its leadership – or actually in its own ranks – the majority of the proletariat. Such a postulate cannot be put forward aprioristically, abstracting from the real dialectical course of the party's process of development. And it is quite meaningless, even in the abstract, to compare the number of workers incorporated into the disciplined and unitary organization of the party, or following the latter, with the number of those who are unorganized and dispersed or attached to corporative organisms incapable of linking them together organically. The remainder of the present exposition will be an attempt to define the conditions to which relations between the party and the working class must correspond, in order to render given actions possible and effective, and how those conditions may be established.

IV. Relations between the Communist Party and other Proletarian Political Movements

17. – One part of the proletariat is especially resistant to incorporation into the ranks of the Communist Party or into its periphery, because it is organized in other political parties or sympathizes with them. All the bourgeois parties have proletarian supporters, but here we are above all interested in the social-democratic parties and syndicalist and anarchist currents.

18. – Faced with these movements, an incessant criticism of their programmes must be carried out, demonstrating their inadequacy for the purposes of proletarian emancipation. This theoretical polemic will be all the more effective if the Communist Party can show that the criticism long made by it of such movements, in accordance with its own programmatic conceptions, are confirmed by proletarian experience. For this reason, in polemics of this kind it is essential not to hide the conflict between our respective methods – including that part which does not apply solely to problems of the moment, but reflects the subsequent developments of the proletariat's action.

19. – Such polemics must, moreover, be reflected in the field of action. Communists taking part in struggles in proletarian economic organisms led by socialists, syndicalists or anarchists will not refuse to follow their actions unless the masses as a whole, in a spontaneous movement, should rebel against it. But they will demonstrate how this action, at a certain point in its development, was rendered impotent or utopian because of the incorrect method of the leaders, whereas with

the communist method better results would have been achieved, serving the aims of the general revolutionary movement. In their polemics the communists will always distinguish between leaders and masses, leaving the former all responsibility for their errors and faults; moreover, they will not omit to denounce with equal vigor the activity of those leaders who, albeit with sincere revolutionary feelings, propose dangerous and incorrect tactics.

20. – If it is an essential aim of the Communist Party to win ground among the proletariat by increasing its strength and influence at the expense of proletarian political parties and currents with which it disagrees, this aim must be achieved by taking part in the reality of the proletarian struggle upon a terrain which can be simultaneously one of common action and of mutual conflict – always on condition that the programmatic and organizational physiognomy of the party is never compromised.

21. – In order to draw to itself those proletarians who support other political movements, the Communist Party cannot follow the method of constituting within them organized groups and fractions of communists or communist sympathizers. In the trade unions, this method is logically applied to carry out penetration work, without any aim of causing the communist groups organized in the unions to leave them; with political movements, a method of this kind would compromise the party's organic unity, for the reasons already mentioned with respect to the development of the party's organization.

22. – In propaganda and polemics, it is opportune to bear in mind that many workers who are militants in the syndicalist and anarchist ranks were ready to understand the unitary revolutionary struggle, but were set on the wrong path solely through a reaction to the past degeneration of the political parties led by social-democrats. The bitterness of polemics and struggle directed against the socialist parties will be an element of prime importance in bringing these workers back on to the revolutionary terrain.

23. – The obvious incompatibility for a member of the Communist Party with simultaneously being a member of another party extends beyond political parties, to other organisms which, though they do not have the name or organization of a party, nevertheless have a political character, and to all associations which base their acceptance of members on political theses: the most important of these is freemasonry.

V. Elements of the Communist Party's Tactics derived from Study of the Situation

24. – With the preceding elements, the general criteria which govern organizational relations between the Communist Party and other proletarian organisms have been established, in accordance with the former's essential nature. Before coming to the more properly tactical terms of the question, it is necessary to dwell on those elements for resolving any tactical problem that are provided by examination of the momentary situation through which one is passing. The Communist Party's programme contains the perspective of a series of situations related to a series of actions which in the course of an unfolding process are generally attributed to them. There is, therefore, a close connection between the programmatic directives and the tactical rules. Studying the situation thus appears as an integral part of resolving tactical problems, considering that the party, on the basis of its consciousness and critical experience, has already predicted how various situations might unfold, and hence defined the tactical possibilities corresponding to the actions to be followed in the various phases. Examination of the situation serves as a check on the accuracy of the party's programmatic positions. On the day that any substantial revision of them should become necessary, the problem will be far more serious than any that could be resolved by means of a simple tactical switch, and the inevitable rectification of programmatic outlook cannot but have serious consequences on the strength and organization of the party. The latter must therefore strive to forecast how situations might unfold, in order to exercise the maximum possible degree of influence on them; but waiting for situations to arise in order to subject them, in an eclectic and discontinuous manner, to the guidelines and suggestions they have prompted, is a method characteristic of social-democratic opportunism. If communist parties were forced to adapt themselves to this, they would underwrite the ruin of the ideological and militant construction of communism.

25. – The Communist Party succeeds in possessing its character of unity, and its tendency to realize a whole programmatic process, only insofar as it assembles in its ranks that part of the proletariat which, by becoming organized, has overcome the tendency to move only under the direct impulses of limited economic situations. The influence of the situation on general movements of the party ceases to be direct and deterministic, becoming a rational and voluntary dependence, insofar as critical consciousness and the initiative of will, which have only the most limited value for individuals, are realized in the organic collectivity of the party. This is all the more true in that the Communist Party presents itself as the forerunner of those forms of human association which will draw from their transcendence of the existing

formless economic organization the faculty to direct rationally – instead of passively undergoing – the play of economic facts and their laws.

26. – The party, however, cannot utilize its will and its initiative in a capricious way or to an arbitrary degree; the limits which it can and must set to both the one and the other are imposed upon it precisely by its programmatic directives, and by the existing possibilities and opportunities for action, which can be deduced from an examination of the contingent situation.

27. – Having examined the situation, an assessment needs to be made of the party forces and the relation between these and those of enemy movements. Above all, it is necessary to take care to assess the degree of support the party could expect from the proletariat if the latter undertook an action or engaged in a struggle. This means forming a precise idea of the repercussions and spontaneous actions which the economic situation produces among the masses, and of the possibility of developing these actions, as a result of the initiatives of the Communist Party and the attitude of the other parties. The forms of influence of the economic situation on the class combativity of the proletariat are very complex, depending on whether we are passing through a period of growing prosperity of the bourgeois economy, or of crisis with sharpening consequences. The effect of these phases on the activity and organizational life of the proletarian organisms is complex, and cannot be considered simply by embarking on an examination of the economic situation at one given moment, and deducing from it the proletariat's level of combativity. For it is necessary to take account of the influence of the whole course of previous situations, in all their oscillations and variations. For instance, a period of prosperity can produce a powerful trade-union movement, which in a subsequent crisis of immiseration can be rapidly drawn on to revolutionary positions, while preserving the breadth of its mass organization and thus favoring the success of the revolution. Or a period of progressive immiseration can disperse the trade-union movement, in such a way that in a subsequent period of prosperity it finds itself at a stage of construction that does not offer a sufficient framework for revolutionary organization. These examples, which could equally well be reversed, go to prove that "the curves of the economic situation and of class combativity are determined by complex laws, the latter by the former, but do not resemble each other in form". To the rise (or fall) of the former, there may correspond in given cases indifferently a rise or a fall of the latter.

28. – The integrative elements of this study are extremely varied. They consist in examining the real tendencies involved in the constitution and development of the proletariat's organizations and the reactions – including psychological reactions – produced upon it by, on the one hand, economic conditions, and on the other, by

the specific attitudes and social and political initiatives of the ruling class and its parties. Examination of the situation is effected in the political field by examining the positions and forces of the various classes and parties in relation to the power of the State. With respect to this it is possible to classify the situations in which the Communist Party may find itself taking action into fundamental phases; situations which in the normal course of things lead it to grow stronger, by extending its membership, and at the same time define ever more precisely the limits of its tactical field. These phases can be specified as follows: Absolutist feudal power – democratic bourgeois power – social-democratic government – intermediate period of social war in which the bases of the State become unstable – proletarian power in the dictatorship of the Councils. In a certain sense, the question of tactics consists not just in choosing the right course for an effective action, but also in preventing the party's activity from going beyond the appropriate limits, and falling back upon methods that correspond to past situations – the consequence of which would be to arrest the party's process of development to the detriment of its revolutionary preparation. The considerations which follow will refer above all to the party's action in the second and third of the above-mentioned political phases.

29. – The Communist Party's possession of a critical method and a consciousness which lead to the formulation of its programme is a condition of its organic life. For that very reason, the party and the Communist International cannot limit themselves to establishing the greatest liberty and elasticity of tactics, by entrusting their execution to the relevant leading bodies, subject to examination of the situation, in their judgement. Since the party programme cannot be characterized as a straightforward aim to be achieved by whatever means but rather as a historical perspective of mutually related pathways and points of arrival, the tactics adopted in successive situations must be related to the programme, and thus the general tactical norms adopted in successive situations need to be clearly specified within not too rigid limits, becoming clear and clearer and fluctuating less and less as the movement gains in strength and approaches the final victory. Only such a criterion as this can allow us to approach ever closer to the optimum level of genuine centralization within the parties and the International needed to direct action effectively; in such a way that orders emanating from the centre will be willingly accepted, not just within the communist parties but also within the mass movement they have managed to organize. One must not however forget that, having once accepted the movement's organic discipline, there is still the factor of initiative on the part of individuals and groups which is dependent on how situations develop and what arises out of them; and on a continual, logical advance in terms of experiences, and changes to the course being followed, to discover the most effective

way of combating the conditions of life imposed on the proletariat by the existing system. Thus it is incumbent upon the party and the International to explain the totality of its general tactical rules in a systematic manner – since it might eventually call upon those within its own ranks, and within the strata of the proletariat which have rallied around them, to put these tactical rules into practice and to make sacrifices on their behalf – showing how such rules and prospects for action constitute the inevitable route leading to victory. It is, therefore, a practical and organizational necessity, and not the desire to theorize and schematize the complexity of the maneuvers that the party may be called upon to undertake, which leads us to establish the terms and limits of the party's tactics. And it is for these entirely concrete reasons that the party must take decisions which appear to restrict its possibilities for action, but which alone provide a guarantee of the organic unity of its activity in the proletarian struggle.

VI. “Indirect” Tactical Activity of the Communist Party

30. – When the conditions are lacking for a tactical activity that can be defined as direct, having the character of an assault on bourgeois power with the forces at the Communist Party's disposal, and which will be discussed below, the party can and must – far from restricting itself to a pure and simple work of proselytism and propaganda – exert an influence on events through its relations with and pressures upon other parties and political and social movements, with the aim of determining developments of the situation in a direction favorable to its own objectives, and in such a way as to hasten the moment when resolute revolutionary action will be possible.

The initiatives and attitudes to adopt in such a case constitute a delicate problem, and the basic condition which must be laid down that they must on no account be or appear to be in contradiction with the long-term requirements of the party's specific struggle, in accordance with the programme of which it is the sole proponent and for which at the decisive moment the proletariat will need to fight. Any stance which causes or entails the demotion to a secondary level of the complete affirmation of this propaganda, which not only has theoretical value, but is mainly derived from day-to-day positions adopted within the actual proletarian struggle, and which continually has to emphasize the need for the proletariat to embrace the communist programme and methods; any stance which made the reaching of given contingent benchmarks appear to be an end in itself rather than a means to proceed further would lead to a weakening of the party structure and its influence in preparing the masses for the revolution.

31. – In the historico-political situation which corresponds to democratic bourgeois power there generally takes place a division in the political field into two currents or “blocs” – the left and the right – which vie with each other to run the State. The left bloc is normally supported more or less openly by the social-democratic parties, which favor coalitions on principle. How this contest unfolds is not a matter of indifference to the Communist Party, both because it concerns points and demands which affect the proletarian masses and attract their attention, and because its settlement in a victory of the left really can smooth the path to the proletarian revolution. In examining the problem of the tactical advisability of coalitions with the left political elements – and wanting to avoid all falsely doctrinaire or stupidly sentimental and puritanical apriorism – one must above all bear in mind that the Communist Party enjoys freedom of movement insofar as it is capable of pursuing with continuity its process of organization and preparation, from which it draws that influence upon the masses which permits it to call them to action. It cannot propose a tactic with an occasional and transitory criterion, reckoning that it will be able subsequently, at the moment when such a tactic ceases to be applicable, to execute a sudden switch and change of front, transforming its allies of yesterday into enemies. If one does not wish to compromise one’s links with the masses and their reinforcement at the very moment when it is most essential that these should come to the fore, it will be necessary to pursue in all public and official declarations and attitudes a continuity of method and intention that is strictly consistent with the uninterrupted propaganda and preparation for the final struggle.

32. – An essential task of the Communist party, in preparing the proletariat ideologically and practically for the revolutionary struggle for the dictatorship, is to engage in a ruthless criticism of the programme of the bourgeois left and of any programme that seeks to resolve social problems within the framework of bourgeois parliamentary democratic institutions. The substance of the disagreements between the bourgeois right and left for the most part affect the proletariat only insofar as they are demagogic falsifications, which naturally cannot be disarmed purely by theoretical criticism, but must be revealed for what they are in practice, in the thick of struggle. In general the political demands of the left, whose aims certainly do not at all include taking one step up the ladder to some intermediary rung between the economic and political system of capitalism and that of the proletariat, correspond to conditions which give more breathing space to modern capitalism and ensure its more effective defense, as much in their intrinsic value as because they tend to give the masses the impression that the existing institutions can be utilized to achieve their emancipation. This is true of the demands for extension of the suffrage and for other guarantees and improvements of liberalism, as it is of the anti-clerical struggle

and the whole baggage of “masonic” politics. Legislative reforms in the economic or social fields have a similar value: either they will not be carried through, or they will be carried through only insofar as they create an obstacle to the revolutionary dynamic of the masses and with that intention.

33. – The advent of a left bourgeois or even a social-democratic government may be seen as a preliminary to the final struggle for the proletarian dictatorship; but not in the sense that their practical activity would create useful preconditions of an economic or political kind, and certainly not in the expectation that they would allow the proletariat greater freedom to organize, prepare and engage in revolutionary action. The Communist Party knows and has the duty to proclaim, by force of critical reason and of bloody experience, that these governments will only respect the freedom of movement of the proletariat when it recognizes them and defends them as its own representatives, whereas faced with an assault by the masses against the machinery of the democratic State, they would respond with the most ferocious reaction. It is thus in a very different sense that the advent of such governments may be useful: insofar as, that is, that their activity allows the proletariat to deduce from harsh experience that only the installation of its dictatorship can really defeat capitalism. Clearly the exploitation of such an experience will only be effective to the extent that the Communist Party has denounced the government’s failure in advance, and preserved a strong independent organization around which the proletariat can regroup, after it is forced to abandon the groups and parties which it would have partly supported in their government experiment.

34. – Thus not only would a coalition of the Communist Party with parties of the bourgeois left or of social-democracy damage revolutionary preparation and make it difficult to utilize a left government experiment, but also in practice it would normally postpone the victory of the left over the right bloc. These are rivals for the support of the bourgeois centre, which moves to the left because it is rightly convinced that the left is no less anti-revolutionary and conservative than the right, proposing concessions that are largely apparent and only minimally effective in order to brake the pressing revolutionary movement against the identical institutions accepted by right and left alike. Thus the presence of the Communist Party in a left coalition would lose the latter more support, above all on the terrain of electoral and parliamentary struggle, than it would bring it through its backing, and the whole experiment would probably be delayed rather than accelerated by such a policy.

35. – On the other hand, the Communist Party does not disregard the undeniable fact that the demands around which the left bloc focuses its agitation attract the interest of the masses and, in their formulation, often correspond to their real

requirements. The Communist Party will not uphold the superficial thesis that such concessions should be rejected on the grounds that only the final and total revolutionary conquest merits the sacrifices of the proletariat. There would be no sense in proclaiming this since the only result would be that the proletariat would be sure to go behind the democrats and social-democrats and end up enslaved to them. The Communist Party will thus call upon the workers to accept the left's concessions as an experiment but emphasize in its propaganda its pessimistic forecast as to that experiment's outcome, and the necessity for the proletariat, if it is not to be ruined by this venture, not to stake its organizational and political independence upon it. The Communist Party will urge the masses to demand of the social-democratic parties – who guarantee the possibility of the promises of the bourgeois left being achieved – that they honor their commitments, and, with its independent and incessant criticism, it will prepare to reap the harvest of the negative outcome of such experiments by showing how the entire bourgeoisie is in fact arrayed in a united front against the revolutionary proletariat and how those parties which call themselves workers' parties, but which support the coalition with part of the bourgeoisie, are merely its accomplices and agents.

36. – The demands put forward by the left parties, and especially by the social-democrats, are often of a sort that it is appropriate to urge the proletariat to move directly to implement them; since if a struggle did get underway the inadequacy of the means by which the social-democrats proposed to arrive at a programme of benefits for the proletariat would at once become apparent. The Communist Party would then highlight those same demands, making them more specific, and raise them as a banner of struggle for the whole of the proletariat, urging the latter to compel the parties which talk of such demands purely for opportunist reasons to demonstrate their commitment to winning them. Whether these are economic demands or of a political nature, the Communist Party will propose them as the objectives of a coalition of trade-union organisms, shunning the setting up of committees to lead the struggle and agitation in which the Communist Party would be represented and involved alongside other political parties; the aim being always to focus the attention of the masses on the distinctive communist programme, and maintain its own freedom of movement so it can choose the right moment to widen its sphere of activity when it needs to by ousting the other parties who had revealed their impotence and been abandoned by the masses. The trade-union united front, understood in this way, offers the possibility of combined actions by the whole of the working class from which the communist method can only emerge victorious, it being the only method susceptible of lending the unitary movement of the proletariat real substance, free from any co-responsibility for the activity of parties which

express their verbal support for the proletariat's cause merely out of opportunism, and with counter-revolutionary intentions.

37. – The situation which we are considering may take the form of an assault by the bourgeois right upon a democratic or social-democratic government. Even in this case the stance of the Communist Party cannot be one of proclaiming solidarity with governments of this sort since we cannot present to the proletariat as a gain to be defended a political order whose experiment we greeted, and are following, with the intention of accelerating in the proletariat the conviction that it is not one designed in its favor but for counter-revolutionary ends.

38. – It may happen that the left government allows the right-wing organizations, the bourgeois white gangs, to engage in their dramatic exploits against the proletariat and its institutions, and not only does not ask for the proletariat's support, but insists that the latter has no right to respond by organizing armed resistance. In such a case the communists will demonstrate that it can only be actual complicity, indeed a division of functions between liberal government and reactionary irregular forces. The bourgeois is then no longer discussing whether the method of democratic and reformist lullabies or that of violent repression suits it best, but utilizes them both at the same time. In this situation, the real and most deadly enemy of revolutionary preparation is the liberal side in government: it tricks the proletariat into taking its side in the name of legality so that it can render it defenseless and disorganized, and so it can defeat it, in full collusion with the whites, on the day the proletariat finds itself forced by events to struggle against the legal apparatus which presides over its exploitation.

39. – Another hypothesis is that the government and the left-wing parties which compose invite the proletariat to participate in the armed struggle against a right-wing attack. This invitation is inevitably a trap, and the Communist Party will reply to it by proclaiming that weapons in the hands of proletarians means advent of the proletarian power and State, and the disarming of the traditional bureaucratic and military machinery of the State, since the latter will never follow the orders of a left government which has attained power by legalitarian means when it summons the people to armed struggle, and since only the proletarian dictatorship could lend a stable character to a victory over the white bands. As a consequence no "loyalism" should be proclaimed or practiced towards such a government, and, most important of all, the masses will need to be made aware that the consolidation of the latter's power with the help of the proletariat against a right-wing rising or attempted coup d'état, would be very dangerous, because it would mean the consolidation of the very organization that will oppose the proletariat's revolutionary advance when this has become its only way out; if control of the armed organization of the State had

been left in the hands of the democratic parties in government, in other words, if the proletariat had laid down its arms without having used them to overturn the existing political and state forms, against all the forces of the bourgeois class.

VII. “Direct” Tactical Activity of the Communist Party

40. – In other cases, however, immediate and pressing demands of the working class, whether for conquest or for defense, find the left and social-democratic parties indifferent. Not having at its disposal sufficient forces to call the masses directly to those conquests, because of the influence upon them of the social-democrats, the Communist Party – avoiding offering any alliance to the social-democrats, indeed proclaiming that they betray even the contingent and immediate interests of the workers – in formulating these objectives of proletarian struggle will invoke a proletarian united front realized on the trade union terrain for their attainment. The implementation of this front will find at their posts the communist militants in the unions; but at the same time it will leave the party the possibility of intervening when the struggle takes a further development, against which the social democrats will inevitably come out – and at times the syndicalists and anarchists too. On the other hand, the refusal of the other proletarian parties to implement a trade-union united front for these objectives will be utilized by the Communist Party to strike down their influence – not merely with criticism and propaganda which shows how what is involved is real complicity with the bourgeoisie, but above all by participating in the front line in those partial actions of the proletariat which the situation will not fail to provoke, by doing so on the basis of those precise strong points for which the party had proposed the trade union united front of all local organizations and all categories, and by drawing from this a concrete demonstration that the social-democratic leaders by opposing the extension of activity are preparing its defeat. Naturally, the Communist Party will not limit itself to this task of pinning the responsibility for an incorrect tactic on the other parties; but with extreme caution and tight discipline it will study whether the moment has not arrived to overcome the resistance of the counterrevolutionaries, when in the course of the action a situation is produced among the masses such that they would follow a call to action of the Communist Party against any resistance. An initiative of this kind can only be a central one, and it is never admissible for it to be taken locally by organisms of the Communist Party or trade unions controlled by the communists.

41. – The expression “direct” tactics is applied more specially to the activity of the party in a situation which suggests to it that it should take the independent initiative of an attack on bourgeois power, in order to bring it down or to strike it a

blow which will gravely weaken it. The party, in order to be able to undertake an action of this kind, must have a solid internal organization at its disposal, which will give absolute certainty of strict discipline to the orders of the central leadership. It must, in addition, be able to count on the same discipline from the union forces which it leads, so as to be sure of the support of a broad segment of the masses. It also needs a military type of organization of a certain degree of efficiency, and all the equipment for illegal activity – above all for communications and forms of contact that cannot be checked by the bourgeois government – that will allow it to preserve its leadership of the movement securely in the predictable situation of being outlawed under emergency provisions. But above all, in taking a decision for offensive action upon which may depend the fate of a whole, extremely long labour of preparation, the Communist Party must base itself on a study of the situation which does not just ensure it the discipline of the forces directly organized and led by it; which does not just encourage it to predict that the links which bind it to the best of the proletarian masses will not break in the struggle; but which gives it confidence that the party's support among the masses and the breadth of the proletariat's participation in the movement will grow progressively in the course of the action, since the order for this will serve to awaken and set in operation tendencies naturally diffused in the deepest layers of the masses.

42. – It will not always be possible for a general movement initiated by the Communist Party for an attempt to overturn bourgeois power to be announced as having this open objective. The directive to engage the struggle may (other than in the case of an exceptional precipitation of revolutionary situations stirring the proletariat) refer to strong points which are something less than the conquest of proletarian power, but which are in part only to be realized through this supreme victory – even though the masses merely see them as immediate and vital demands: objectives which to a limited extent, insofar as they can be realized by a government which is not yet that of the proletarian dictatorship, leave open the possibility of halting the action at a certain point which leaves the level of organization and combativity of the masses intact, if it appears to be impossible to continue the struggle to the end without compromising, through the outcome, the conditions for resuming it effectively in subsequent situations.

43. – It is not even to be excluded that the Communist Party may find it opportune to give the word for an action directly even though it knows that there is no question of arriving at the supreme revolutionary conquest, but only of waging a battle from which the enemy will emerge with his prestige and his organization damaged, and the proletariat materially and morally strengthened. In such a case, the party will call the masses to struggle by formulating a series of objectives which

may either be the actual ones to be achieved, or appear more limited than those which the party proposes to achieve if the struggle is crowned with success. Such objectives, above all in the party's plan of action, must be arranged in progression, so that the attainment of each of them constitutes a position of possible reinforcement through a halt on the path towards successive struggles. It is necessary to avoid as far as possible the desperate tactic of launching oneself into struggle in conditions such that only the supreme triumph of the revolution constitutes the favorable alternative, while in the opposite event there is a certainty of defeat and dispersal of the proletarian forces for a period impossible to foresee. Partial objectives are thus indispensable to maintain safe control over the action, and to formulate them does not conflict with criticism of their specific economic and social content, insofar as the masses might welcome them not as opportunities for struggle which are a means and a preliminary to the final victory, but as ends of intrinsic value with which to be satisfied once they have been won. Naturally, it is always a delicate and terrible problem to fix these goals and limits to action; it is through the exercise of its experience and the selection of its leaders that the party tempers itself for this supreme responsibility.

44. – The party must avoid harboring or spreading the illusion that, in a situation of stagnation of the proletariat's combativity, it is possible to bring about the awakening of the masses for struggle through the simple effect of the example given by a group of brave men launching themselves into combat, and attempting coups de main against bourgeois institutions. The reasons why the proletariat may lift itself out of a situation of depression are to be sought in the real unfolding of the economic situation; the party's tactics can and must contribute to this process, but with work that is far more profound and continuous than the dramatic deeds of a vanguard hurled into the attack.

45. – The party, however, will use its strength and organization for actions that are properly controlled both in their conception and in their execution, on the part of armed groups, working-class organizations and street-crowds, which have a demonstrative and defensive value in giving the masses concrete proof that it is possible with organization and preparation to confront certain forms of resistance and offensive sallies by the ruling class, whether in the form of terrorist outrages by reactionary armed groups or in the form of police obstruction of given types of proletarian organization and activity. The aim will not be to provoke a general action, but to raise the depressed and demoralized masses up again to the highest level of combativity, with a series of actions designed to reawaken within them sentiments and a need of revolt.

46. – The party will absolutely avoid, in such local actions, any infraction of

the internal discipline of the trade-union organisms on the part of the local organs and the militants within them who are members of the Communist Party, since these must never be allowed to break with the national executive bodies led by other parties. For as has already been stated, they must serve as indispensable footholds for winning those bodies to the party. The Communist Party and its members will, however, follow the masses actively and offer them all their help when they respond through a spontaneous impulse to bourgeois provocations, even if they go beyond the limits of discipline to the criteria of inaction and passivity of the reformist and opportunist union leaders.

47. – In the situation which is characteristic of the moment in which the power of the State is shaken to its foundations, and is about to fall, the Communist Party, amid the full unfurling of its forces and of the agitation of the masses around its banner of maximum demands, will not miss the possibility of influencing moments of unstable equilibrium in the situation by taking advantage of all such forces as may momentarily be acting in harmony with its own independent activity. When it is quite certain that it will win control of the movement as soon as the traditional State organization has collapsed, it can have recourse to transitory and contingent agreements with other movements which have forces at their disposal in the field of struggle – but without raising such alliances to themes of propaganda or slogans addressed by the party to the masses. Success will in any case be the sole yardstick for assessing the correctness of having yielded to such contacts, and for judging what calculations are to be made in this respect. It is not theoretical preconceptions or ethical and aesthetic preoccupations that dictate the tactics of the Communist Party; its entire tactics are dictated solely by the real appropriateness of the means to the end and to the reality of the historical process, applying that dialectical synthesis of doctrine and action which is the patrimony of a movement destined to play the lead role in an immense social renewal, the commander of the great revolutionary war.

VIII. The Italian Communist Party and the Present Moment

48. – The phase, and thus the problem, of the party's formation has now been completely surmounted in Italy. With the Socialist Congress of Milan – prior to which, the possibility was not definitively excluded of a substantive modification of the constitutive basis of the Italian Communist Party, through fusion with a left faction of the Socialist Party, which would have assumed the significance of an essential and integrative element – with the Milan Congress and its decisions this possibility has vanished entirely. It now seems evident that only the far left faction

which split away at Livorno could constitute the party's creative nucleus. And it is now equally clear that its normal progressive development will, in future, not proceed through a rapprochement with organized groups splitting off from other political formations; instead, it will proceed solely through individual recruitment of single persons who, as they enter its ranks designed precisely to receive them, will not introduce disorder or changes, but simply greater strength – in numbers, and hence in action.

49. – The Party, therefore, freed from the cares inherent in every period of initiation, must devote itself completely to its work of ever more extensive penetration among the masses, establishing and multiplying the linking organs between them and itself. No field of proletarian activity must remain unknown to the communists: the trade unions, the cooperatives, the savings trusts, must be penetrated ever more deeply – with the establishment of communist groups and their linking together – and won to the Party's directives. While the various Aid Committees, for political victims, for Russia, etc., must see the communists represented and enjoy their collaboration. This, however, is simply because the party must not remain indifferent to any instrument which will put it in closer contact with the proletariat; and because it must take care to satisfy the latter's contingent necessities. It is never in order to establish lasting relations with other political parties, even subversive ones.

50. – With respect to the latter, the polemics aimed at clarifying their attitude in the eyes of the workers, and at breaking the ambiguity of their programmatic declarations, must continue unflaggingly. Socialists and libertarians pursue the weakening of the proletarian class in two different ways in Italy today: the former with their tactics of submission and disarmament in the face of capitalism's attack; the latter with their struggle against the Republic of Soviets and against the principle of dictatorship of the proletariat, to which they counterpose the empty and theoretical apotheosis of an abstract freedom.

The present Italian situation, characterized by the ever vaster and more complete offensive of the bourgeoisie, daily offers a thousand unhappy documents for our polemics against the anarchists and social democrats, who give manifest proof of their lack of understanding of the moment. For this, rather than representing anything exceptional and transitory, is in reality a natural and predictable stage of development of the capitalistic order: a specific manifestation of the function and purposes of the democratic State.

51. – Today, in Italy, one can perceive a characteristic involution of the State with respect to its mode of functioning. The constitutive period of the bourgeois State, which marked a progressive centralization of all the functions of rule within

the organization of a central authority, finds its counterpart and its negation in the present period, in which the stable unity of all powers – previously removed from the arbitrary decision of individuals – now crumbles and scatters. The powers of the State are once again exercised individually by each private person. And it would no longer even be necessary for the State to place its organs explicitly – though it does so – at the disposal of bourgeois conservation: from the army to the magistrature, from Parliament to the functionaries of the executive power. For each of these, in the person of its practitioners, uses its own powers to the same end, in an autonomous and uncontrollable manner.

In order then to prevent an unexpected halt in this crisis of dissolution from allowing the State to regain any control over the activity of individuals, the bourgeois class proceeds hastily to the establishment of supplementary organs. These, perfectly in agreement with the statutory organs – when these function according to the explicit desires of conservation – instead counterpose themselves to those organs and replace them whenever they show signs of moving away from the most supine acquiescence (Civil Committees, Defense Committees, etc.).

To invoke, as the social-democrats do, a return to the authority of the State and to respect for the law shows that, even though they do assert that the democratic parliamentary State is a class State, they do not succeed in understanding that precisely for this reason it is today carrying out its essential task – by violating the written laws which were necessary to its progressive consolidation, but which would henceforward damage its conservation.

52. – The present Italian situation contains synthetically within itself all the constitutive elements of the coup d'état, even though the external probative fact of the military deed has not occurred. The progressive occurrence of episodes of violence which successively annul the normal conditions of social life for a whole class of citizens; the superposition of the capricious will of groups and individuals over the dispositions of the written law; the immunity guaranteed to such groups and individuals; and the persecution ordained for their enemies – all this has produced the same results as would have been produced by a more grandiose and more violent single act, which set more numerous forces in motion simultaneously.

The bourgeois class is perfectly aware of this state of affairs, but its interests require that the outward appearance of a formal democracy should not be destroyed; and that the general economy should not be deeply shaken by a violent change which ultimately would not offer any greater safeguard for its privilege than that which it enjoys today. It is thus probable that divided as it is on its evaluation of the necessity for it, and still being powerful enough to break it, the bourgeois class

would oppose a disruptive military putsch motivated almost solely by personal ambitions. No new form of government could have more contempt than the present one for freedom; for rights already won and sanctioned; for the lives of the workers. Only in a further perfecting of the democratic State, rendering it more able to conceal the real substance of the bourgeoisie's dictatorial régime, can it find its goal. This will be achieved with the formation of a social-democratic government.

To invoke, as social democrats do, a return to State authority and to respect of the law indicates that they, though stating that the parliamentary democratic State is a class State, don't get to understand that it is precisely for this reason that it fulfils today its essential duty, by breaking the written laws that were instrumental to its gradual stabilization, but which would today endanger its conservation.

53. — The present Italian situation engenders and brings to fruition precisely this further stage in the martyrdom of the proletariat. Work is proceeding towards this result from two sides: a strong current in the Socialist Party and the left parties of the bourgeoisie are alike testing the ground, in order to find the most favorable spot for a meeting and an alliance. Both, in fact, motivate their actions solely by the necessity of finding and constructing a defense against destructive fascist violence. And on this terrain they seek the assent of all the subversive parties, demanding an end to polemics and mutual attacks.

If a social-democratic government would have the strength to fight and defeat fascism — which we strongly doubt, both through our theoretical convictions and because of the examples of recent history — and it therefore becomes necessary to prepare a terrain favorable to its formation, this will be all the more easily and rapidly constituted insofar as the communists continue their present determined and unflagging polemic against the Socialist Party. The communist attack gives the Socialist Party credit in bourgeois eyes, as a target of revolutionary violence and as an impediment and obstacle to the unfurling of the class struggle, and thus makes more probable an agreement and an alliance between them. For it must not be forgotten that left groups of the bourgeoisie began to present socialist collaboration as attainable in Italy from the time that the Livorno split liberated the Socialist Party from any communist current. A quietening down of the struggle between communists and socialists would restore the latter to the ostensible, though false, position of being favorable to the doctrine and practice of the III International; it would thus impede the reinforcement of that trust which is the precondition for creation of the social-democratic bloc.

Hence, the most absolute intransigence towards the subversive parties should be practiced in the field of political struggle, even allowing the perspective

– which for us is fallacious – that a change of men in a formally unchanged State could conceivably occur in a sense that would favor the proletariat.

54. – As for fascism, the P.C.I., though considering it as an inevitable consequence of the régime's development, does not draw the conclusion that an attitude of inert passivity should be taken up with respect to it. To combat fascism does not mean to believe that it is possible to annul one function of bourgeois society without destroying the latter's existence; nor to delude oneself that fascism can be defeated in itself, as an episode cut off and isolated from the overall offensive activity of capitalism. It aims instead at rendering less serious and painful the damage which enemy violence inflicts upon the combative and unyielding spirit of the working class.

55. – The P.C.I. does not exclude but indeed bears in mind the possibility that from the present unstable situation there may arise the opportunity for violent action by a part of the bourgeoisie. Preparing, therefore, a minimum of means necessary to confront and overcome this, it takes up with respect to the problem of direct action an attitude of preparation.

The world crisis of the capitalist economy has had a negative influence on the advance of the proletariat, which has seen its most solid organizations broken. For they had not foreseen the crisis, and hence had not prepared themselves to surmount it victoriously. The party believes that today it is necessary to reconstruct that former solidity, guided by the conviction that in a situation analogous to the one recently traversed, a proletariat solidly organized and led by a revolutionary party could justly go over to the attack. Thus to construct this party and enlarge its influence over the masses; to give its own members coherence, discipline and preparation; to draw behind it ever broader layers of the working class: these are the essential tasks of the Italian Communists, who will accomplish them taking as their norm the theses on the various questions (trade union, agricultural, etc.) which will be approved and discussed by the present Congress.

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