

## Lyon Theses

Draft Theses Presented by the Left of the Party

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With a document like this it is difficult to avoid a certain disproportion between the different parts, inasmuch as ongoing discussions have rendered certain points and certain arguments more topical, whilst others, of equal importance, have been cast in a minor light. In order to give as full an idea as possible of the thinking of the group of comrades responsible for the present theses, it is worth providing references to some texts, which, although well known, are nowadays rather difficult to find. We believe it therefore useful to precede the present text with references to some documents relevant to the same line that is reasserted and defended here.

*Rome Theses*: Voted on at the Second Congress of the Communist Party of Italy on March 26, 1922. The text presented at the congress is published in *Comunista*, no.67, 31/12/1921; in *Ordine Nuovo*, no.2, 3/1/1922; in the *Lavoratore*, No. 4960; in *Rassegna Comunista*, No.17 on the 30/1/1922. The few changes made to the first text at the congress are published in: *Comunista*, No.95, 4/4/1922; the *Lavoratore*, No.5014, 5/4/1922; in *Ordine Nuovo*, No.96, 6/4/1922; in *Rassegna Communista*, No.26, 31/7/1922.

*Theses on Tactics of the Communist International*: Presented at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International. Published in No. 16 of the *Stato Operaio* on 6/3/1924.

*Programme of Action of the Communist Party of Italy*: Presented at the Fourth

Congress of the Communist International. Published in the above-mentioned issue of *Stato Operaio*.

*Motions and Theses* approved at the national (consultative) conference of the Communist Party of Italy in May 1924, published in *Stato Operaio*, No.16 on 18/3/1924.

*Theses on Tactics of the Communist International*: Presented at the Fifth World Congress. Published (in French and German) in the *Congress Bulletin*, No.20, 8/7/1924.

## **I. General Questions**

### *1. – Principles of communism*

The key doctrines of the communist party are founded on Marxism, which the struggle against opportunist deviations reinstated and set in place as the cornerstones of the Third International. These consist of: Dialectical Materialism as the method of conceiving of the world and human history; the fundamental doctrines contained in Marx's *Capital* as method of interpretation of present-day capitalist economy; the programmatic formulations of *The Communist Manifesto* as the historical and political plan of emancipation of the world working class. The magnificent victorious experience of the Russian Revolution, and the work of its leader Lenin, master of international communism, constitute the confirmation, the restoration and the consequent development of this system of principles and methods. It is not possible to be a communist or to militate in the ranks of the International if even one part of this is rejected.

Consequently, the communist party rejects and condemns the doctrines of the dominant class, which range from spiritualistic and religious theories—idealist in philosophy and reactionary in politics—to those which are positivist and of a free-thinking Voltairean variety—and anti-clerical and democratic in the realm of politics.

It likewise condemns certain political schools which have a following amongst the working-class: social-democratic reformism, which cherishes peaceful transition, without armed struggle, from capitalist to workers' power, invoking class collaboration; syndicalism, which depreciates the political activity of the working class and the need for the party as supreme revolutionary organ; anarchism, which denies the historical necessity of the State and of the proletarian dictatorship as the means whereby the social order is transformed and class divisions suppressed. The communist party likewise opposes the many manifestations of spurious revolutionism which aim to resuscitate such tendencies by mingling them with communist

theses—a danger that is designated by the now well-known term “centrism.”

## 2. – *Nature of the Party*

The historical course of the proletariat’s emancipation and the foundation of a new social order derives from the existence of the class struggle. Every class struggle is a political struggle; that is to say, it has the tendency to end up as a struggle for the conquest of political power and control of the new State organism. *Consequently, the organ which leads the class struggle to its final victory is the class political party, which is the sole possible instrument firstly of revolutionary insurrection and then of government.* From these simple but brilliant assertions of Marx, brought into maximum relief by Lenin, arises the definition of the party as an organization of all those who are conscious of the system of opinions in which is summed up the historical task of the revolutionary class and who have decided to work for the victory of this class. Thanks to the party, the working class acquires the knowledge of the way forward and the will to take it. *Historically, the party therefore represents the class in the successive stages of the struggle, even if only a greater or smaller part of the class is regrouped in its ranks.* This equates with how Lenin defined the party at the Second World Congress.

Marx and Lenin’s conception of the party stands in sharp contrast to the typically opportunist conception of the labourist or workerist party to whom all those individuals who are proletarian in terms of their social condition are admitted by right. Within such a party, even if exhibiting an apparent numerical strength, there may, and indeed in certain conditions there will, prevail the direct counter-revolutionary influence of the dominant class; a class represented by the dictatorship of the organizers and leaders who as individuals can derive just as well from the proletariat as from other classes. This is why Marx and Lenin fought against this fatal theoretical error, and never hesitated to break up false proletarian unity in practice in order to ensure, even during moments when the social activity of the proletariat was eclipsed, and even by way of small political groups of adherents of the revolutionary programme, that there would be continuity of the political function of the party in preparation for the subsequent tasks of the proletariat. This is the only possible way to achieve in the future the concentration of the greatest possible section of workers around the leadership and under the banner of a communist party capable of fighting and winning.

An immediate organization of all workers on an economic basis cannot take on political—that is revolutionary—tasks since the separate and localized professional groups feel impelled to satisfy only the partial demands that arise as a direct consequence of capitalist exploitation. Only with the direct intervention at the head of the working-class of a political party, defined by the political adherence of its

members, do we find the progressive synthesis of these particular impulses into a common vision and activity, whereby individuals and groups are enabled to go beyond all particularism and accept difficulties and sacrifices for the final and general triumph of the working-class cause. The definition of the party as class party of the working class has a final and historical value for Marx and Lenin—not a vulgarly statistical and constitutional one.

Any conception of the problems of internal organization that leads to the error of the labourist conception of the party reveals a serious theoretical deviation, inasmuch as it substitutes a democratic vision for a revolutionary one, and attributes more importance to utopian schemes for designing new organizations than to the dialectical reality of the collision of forces between the two opposed classes. In other words, it represents the danger of relapsing into opportunism. As regards the perils of degeneration of the revolutionary movement, and of the means to guarantee the required continuity of the political line in its leaders and members, these dangers can't be eradicated with organizational formulae. Less still is it possible to eliminate them with the formula which states that only authentic workers can be communist, a position contradicted in our own experience by the vast majority of examples, relating to both individuals and parties. The aforementioned guarantee must be sought elsewhere if we don't wish to contradict the fundamental Marxist postulate; *“the revolution isn't a question of forms of organization”*; a postulate in which are summed up all the conquests achieved by scientific socialism with respect to the first rantings of utopianism.

Our resolution to the current problems regarding the internal organization of the International and the party set out from these conceptions on the nature of the class party.

### 3. – *Party Tactics and Party Action*

The way the party operates in response to specific situations, and relates to other groups, organizations, and institutions of the society in which it moves, constitute its tactics. The general elements of this question must be defined in relation to our overall principles; it is then possible, on a secondary level, to establish concrete norms of action in relation to different types of practical problems and the successive phases of historical development.

By assigning to the revolutionary party its place and its role in the genesis of a new society, the Marxist doctrine provides the most brilliant of resolutions to the question of freedom and determination in the activity of mankind. When extended to the abstract “individual” however, the question will continue to furnish material for the metaphysical lucubrations of the philosophers of the ruling and decadent class for years to come. Marxism on the other hand situates the problem in the

correct light of a scientific and objective conception of society and history. The idea that the individual—and indeed one individual—can act on the outside world and shape it and mold it at will as though the power of initiative partook of some kind of divine inspiration is a million miles from our view. We equally condemn the voluntarist conception of the party according to which a small group of men, after having forged for themselves a profession of faith, proceed to spread and impose it by a gigantic effort of will, activity and heroism.

It would, on the other hand, be a stupid and aberrant conception of Marxism to believe that the course of history and revolution proceed according to fixed laws, with nothing remaining for us to do apart from discovering what these laws might be through objective research and attempting to formulate predictions about the future whilst attempting nothing in the domain of action; The upshot of this fatalist conception is to annul the function of the party and indeed its very existence.

Marxist determinism doesn't attempt to find a solution halfway between these two solutions but in its powerful originality rises above them both. Because it is dialectical and historical, it rejects all apriorisms and doesn't claim to be able to apply, regardless of the historical epoch or the human groupings under consideration, one abstract solution to every problem. If the current development of the sciences does not allow for a complete investigation of what induces the individual to act, starting with physical and biological facts to arrive at a science of psychological activity, it is nevertheless possible to resolve the problem in the field of sociology by applying to the problem, like Marx, the methods of investigation appropriate to experimental and positive science fully inherited by socialism and which are quite different from the self-styled materialistic and positivist philosophy adopted during the historical advance of the bourgeois class. By taking rational account of the reciprocal influences between individuals, through the critical study of economy and history, after having cleared the decks of every prejudice contained in the traditional ideologies, we can in a certain sense remove indeterminacy from the processes operating within each individual. With this as its point of departure, Marxism has been able to establish an ideological system that isn't an immutable and fixed gospel, but a living instrument that enables the laws of the historical process to be followed and recognized. By means of the economic determinism discovered by Marx, which forms the basis of this system, the study of economic forms and relationships, and the development of the technical means of production, provides us with an objective platform on which to make soundly based enunciations about the laws of social life, and, to a certain degree, make predictions about its subsequent development. With this duly recorded, we must emphasize that the final solution doesn't mean we can say that having discovered the universal key, we may let economic phenomena follow their own immanent law and a predictable and established series of

political facts will inevitably take place.

Undoubtedly our critique is tantamount as completely and definitely devoid of any meaning the aims and perspectives individuals had in historical events, even when such individuals are considered protagonists of historical deeds, although this does not completely apply to their actions. This, however, does not imply that a collective organism, such as the class party, could not, and should not, express initiatives of its own or have its own will. The solution we get to is countless times expressed in our fundamental texts.

Humanity, and its most powerful groupings such as classes, parties and States, have moved almost as if they were playthings in the grip of economic laws, up to now almost entirely unknown to them. These groupings at the same time have lacked theoretical awareness of the economic process, and the possibility of managing and controlling it. However, the class that appears in the present historical epoch, the proletariat, and the political groupings, which inevitably emanate from it—the party and the State—for them the problem, is modified. This is because the proletariat is the first class that isn't driven to base its rise to power on the consolidation of social privileges and class divisions, the first not to subject and exploit another class anew, whilst at the same time, it is the first that manages to shape a doctrine of the social and historical development of the economy—in other words: Marxist Communism.

For the first time then, a class fights for the suppression of classes in general and the suppression of private property in the means of production in general, rather than fighting for the mere transformation of the social forms of property.

The proletariat's programme, together with its emancipation from the present dominant and privileged classes, is the emancipation of the human collectivity from bondage to the laws of economy, which once understood, can be dominated within an economy which is finally rational and scientific, and which is subject to the direct intervention of Man. This is what Engels meant when he wrote that the proletarian revolution marks the passage from the world of necessity to the world of freedom.

This does not mean that we resuscitate the illusory myth of individualism, which wishes to liberate the human "ego" from external influences, especially since these influences tend to become ever more complex and the life of the individual ever more an indistinguishable part of a collective life. On the contrary, the parameters of the problem are changed, with will and freedom attributed to a class, a class destined to become the unitary human grouping itself, a grouping which one day will struggle against the adverse forces of the external physical world alone.

Whilst only proletarian humanity (still in the future for us) will be free and capable of a will isn't sentimental illusion but the capacity to organize and master the

economy in the broadest sense of the word; and whilst it is true that the proletarian class today still has the extent of its activity determined by influences external to it (though less so than other classes), the organ in which, on the contrary, is summed up the full extent of volitional possibilities and initiative in all fields of activity is the political party. Not just any old party though, but the party of the proletarian class, the communist party, linked as though by an unbroken thread to the ultimate goals in the future. The party's power of volition, as well as its consciousness and theoretical knowledge are functions that are exquisitely collective. Marxism explains that the leaders in the party itself are given their job because they are considered as instruments and operators who best manifest the capacity to comprehend and explain facts and to lead and will action, with such capacities nevertheless maintaining their origin in the existence and character of the collective organ. By way of these considerations, the Marxist conception of the party and its activity, as we have stated, thus shuns fatalism, which would have us remain passive spectators of phenomena into which no direct intervention is felt possible.

Likewise, it rejects every voluntarist conception, as regards individuals, according to which the qualities of theoretical preparation, force of will, and the spirit of sacrifice—in short, a special type of moral figure and a requisite level of “purity”—set the required standards for every single party militant without exception, reducing the latter to an elite, distinct and superior to the rest of the elements that compose the working class. The fatalist and passivistic error, though it might not necessarily lead to negating the function and the utility of the party, at the very least would certainly involve adapting the party to a proletarian class that is understood merely in a statistical and economic sense. We can sum up the conclusions touched on in the preceding theses as the condemnation of both the workerist conception, and that of an elite of an intellectual and moral character. Both these tendencies are aberrations from Marxism which end up converging on the slippery slope to opportunism.

In resolving the general question of tactics on the same terrain as that of the nature of party, the Marxist solution must be distinguished both from that doctrinal estrangement from the reality of the class struggle which contents itself with abstract lucubrations, whilst negating concrete activity, and from sentimental aestheticism; which aspires, with the noisy gestures and heroic posturing of tiny minorities, to bring about new situations and historical movements. Also, it must be distinguished from opportunism, which neglects the link with principles, i.e. with the general scope of the movement, and, keeping in view only an immediate and apparent success, is content to clamor for isolated and limited demands without bothering about whether these contradict the necessity of preparing for the supreme conquests of the working class. The mistake of anarchist politics derives both from

a doctrinal sterility, in its incapacity to comprehend the dialectical stages of real historical evolution, and from its voluntarist illusions, which cherish the fond hope of being able to speed up social processes by the force of example, and of sacrifices made by the one or the many. The mistake of social-democratic politics derives as much from a false conception of Marxism in holding that the revolution will mature slowly of its own accord, without a revolutionary insurrection willed by the proletariat, as it does from a voluntarist pragmatism, which, unable to relinquish the immediate results of its day-to-day initiatives and interventions, is happy to struggle for objectives which are of only superficial interest to proletarian groups. For once obtained, these objectives merely become parts of the game of conserving the dominant class rather than serving as preparation for the victory of the proletariat: such objectives are the partial reforms, concessions and advantages, both political and economic, obtained from the bosses and the bourgeois State.

The artificial introduction into the class movement of the theoretical dictates of “modern” voluntarist and pragmatist philosophy (Bergson, Gentile, Croce) based on idealism, can only but prepare the opportunist affirmation of new waves of reformism. It cannot be passed off as reaction to reformism just because it demonstrate a superficial liking for bourgeois positivism.

The party cannot and must not restrict its activity either to conserving the purity of theoretical principles and of the organizational collective, or to achieving immediate successes and numerical popularity regardless of the cost. At all times and in all situations, this activity must incorporate the following three points:

- a) Defense and clarification of the fundamental programmatic postulates in the light of new facts as they arise, that is to say of the theoretical consciousness of the working class;
- b) Assurance of the continuity of the party’s organizational unity and efficiency, and its defense against contamination by extraneous influences that are opposed to the revolutionary interests of the proletariat;
- c) Active participation in all of the struggles of the working class, including those arising from partial and limited interests, in order to encourage their development, but constantly highlighting their connection with the final revolutionary objectives and presenting the conquests of the class struggle as a bridge of passage to the indispensable struggles to come, by denouncing the danger of settling for partial achievements as if they were ends in themselves, to be bartered in exchange for the conditions of proletarian class activity and combativity, such as the autonomy and independence of its ideology and of its own organizations, the party being first and foremost among these.



The supreme purpose of this complex party activity is the creation of the subjective conditions for the proletariat's readiness, so that it is in a position to profit from revolutionary possibilities as soon as history presents them, and so that it emerges from the struggle victor rather than vanquished.

All this is the point of departure for responding to the questions of the relations between the party and the proletarian masses, the party and other political parties, and the proletariat and other social classes. We must consider the following tactical formulation wrong: all true communist parties should in all situations strive to be mass parties, that is to say, always be organizations with huge memberships and a very widespread influence over the proletariat such as to at least exceed that of the other self-styled workers' parties. Such a proposal is a caricature of Lenin's practical, relevant and eminently appropriate watchword of 1921, namely: in order to conquer power, it isn't sufficient to form "genuine" communist parties and launch them into the insurrectionary offensive because what is needed are numerically powerful parties with a predominating influence over the proletariat. In other words, before the conquest of power, and in the period leading up to it, the party must have the masses with it; must first of all conquer the masses. Such a formulation only becomes rather dangerous when used in conjunction with the notion of the majority of the masses, since it lends itself amongst "chapter and verse" Leninists, now as in the past, to the danger of a social-democratic interpretation of theory and tactics; for although expressing the perfectly correct idea that the dangerous practice of engaging in reckless actions with insufficient forces, or when the moment isn't ripe, must be avoided, the un-specificity about how the majority is to be measured i.e. whether in the parties, the unions or other organs, gives rise to the opposite danger of being diverted from action when it is both possible and appropriate; that is, at times when truly "Leninist" resolution and initiative is required.

The formula which states that the party must have the masses with it on the eve of the struggle has now become a typically opportunist formula in the facile interpretation of today's pseudo-Leninists when they assert that the party must in "all situations" be a mass party. There are objective situations when the balance of forces are unfavorable to revolution (although perhaps closer to the revolution in time than others—Marxism teaches us that historical evolution takes place at very different rates), in these situations, the wish to be the majority party of the masses and enjoy an overriding political influence at all costs, can only at such times be achieved by renouncing communist principles and methods and engaging in social-democratic and petty-bourgeois politics instead.

It must be clearly stated that in certain situations, past, present and future, the majority of the proletariat has adopted, does, and inevitably will adopt a non-revolutionary stance, either through inertia or collaboration with the enemy as the case

may be. Nevertheless, despite everything, the proletariat everywhere and always remains the potentially revolutionary class entrusted with the revolutionary counter-attack; but only insofar as within it there exists the communist party and where, without ever renouncing coherent interventions when appropriate, this party knows how to avoid taking paths, which although apparently the easiest way to instant popularity, would divert it from its task and thereby remove the essential point of support for ensuring the proletariat's recovery. On dialectical and Marxist grounds such as these (and never on aesthetic and sentimental grounds) we reject the bestial expression of opportunism, which maintains that a communist party is free to adopt all means and all methods. It is said by some that precisely because the party is truly communist, sound in principles and organization, it can indulge in the most acrobatic of political maneuverings, but what this assertion forgets is that the party itself is both factor and product of historical development, and the even more malleable proletariat is yet more so. The proletariat will not be influenced by the contorted justifications for such "maneuvers" offered by party leaders but by actual results, and the party must know how to anticipate these results, mainly by using the experience of past mistakes. It is not just by theoretical credos and organizational sanctions that the party will be guaranteed against degeneration, but by acting correctly in the field of tactics, and by making a determined effort to block off false paths with precise and respected rules of action.

Within the tactical sphere there is another error which clearly leads back to the classical opportunist positions dismantled by Marx and Lenin. This consists in asserting that in the case of struggles between classes and political organizations which take place outside the party's specific terrain, the party must choose the side which represents the development of the situation most favorable to general historical evolution, and should more or less openly support and coalesce with it. The pretext for this is that the conditions for a complete proletarian revolution (to be set in motion by the party when the time comes) will have arrived solely when there has been a sufficient maturation and evolution of political and social forms.

For a start, the very presuppositions that lie behind such politics are at fault: the typical scheme of a social and political evolution, fixed down to the smallest detail, as allegedly providing the best preparation for the final advent of communism belongs to the opportunist brand of "Marxism," and is the basis on which the various Kautskys set about defaming the Russian Revolution and the present Communist movement. It isn't even possible to establish in a general way that the most propitious conditions for communist party work to bear fruit are to be found under certain types of bourgeois regime, e.g. the most democratic. For whilst it is true that the reactionary and "right-wing" measures of bourgeois governments have often obstructed the proletariat, it is no less true, and in fact occurs far more often, that the

liberal and left-wing politics of bourgeois governments have also stifled the class struggle and diverted the working-class from taking decisive action. A more accurate evaluation, truly conforming with Marxism's breaking of the democratic, evolutionist and progressive spell, maintains that the bourgeoisie attempts, and often succeeds, in alternating its methods and parties in government according to its counter-revolutionary interests. All our experience shows us that whenever the proletariat gets enthusiastic about the vicissitudes of bourgeois politics, opportunism triumphs.

Secondly, even if it were true that certain changes of government within the present regime made the further development of proletarian action easier, there is clear evidence that this would depend on one express condition: the existence of a party which had issued timely warnings to the masses about the disappointment which would inevitably follow what had appeared to be an immediate success; indeed not just the existence of the party, but its capacity to take action, even before the struggle to which we refer, in a manner which is clearly perceived as autonomous by proletarians, who follow the party not on the basis of schemes which it might be convenient to adopt at an official level but because of the party's down-to-earth attitude. When faced with struggles unable to culminate in the definitive proletarian victory, the party doesn't turn itself into a manager of transitional demands and accomplishments which are not of direct interest to the class it represents, and neither does it barter away its specific character and autonomous activity in order to become a kind of insurance society for all the political "renewal" movements or political systems and governments under threat from an allegedly "worse government."

The requirements of this line of action are often falsified by invoking both Marx's formulation that "communists support any movement directed against existing social conditions," and the whole of Lenin's doctrine directed against "the infantile disorder of Communism." The speculations attempted on these declarations of Marx and Lenin within our movement are substantially similar to analogous speculations continually indulged in by the revisionists and centrists of the Bernstein and Nenni stamp, who in the name of Marx and Lenin have mocked revolutionary Marxism.

We must make two observations; first of all, Marx's and Lenin's positions have a contingent historical value since they refer in Marx's case to a pre-bourgeois Germany, and in Lenin's case, as illustrated in *Left-wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder*, to the Bolshevik experience in Tsarist Russia. We shouldn't base our resolution of tactical questions under classical conditions, i.e. the proletariat in conflict with a fully developed capitalist bourgeoisie, on these foundations alone. Secondly, the support to which Marx refers, and Lenin's "compromises" (Lenin as a great

Marxist dialectician and champion of real, non-formal intransigence, aimed and directed at an immutable goal, liked to “flirt” with such terms) are support and compromises with movements still forced to clear the way forward with their insurrection against past social formations, even if this does contradict their ideology and the long-term aims of their leaders.

The intervention of the Communist party therefore occurs as an intervention in the setting of a civil war, and this explains Lenin’s positions on the peasant and the national question, during the Kornilov affair and in a hundred other cases. These two key observations aside, neither Lenin’s criticism of infantilism, nor any Marxist text on the suppleness of revolutionary politics, was ever meant to undermine the barrier deliberately erected against opportunism; defined by Engels, and later by Lenin, as “absence of principles,” or obliviousness of the final goal.

To construct communist tactics with a formalist rather than a dialectical method would be a repudiation of Marx and Lenin. It would, therefore, be a major error to assert that the means should correspond to the ends not by way of their historical and dialectical succession in the process of development, but depending on similarities and analogous aspects that means and ends may assume in a certain immediate sense and which we might call ethical, psychological and aesthetic. We don’t need to make in the realm of tactics the mistake made by anarchists and reformists in the realm of principle, for whom it seems absurd that the suppression of both classes and State power is prepared via the domination of the proletarian class and its dictatorship, and that the abolition of all social violence is realized by employing both offensive and defensive revolutionary violence; revolutionary to overthrow the existing power and conservative to maintain the proletarian power.

And it would be equally mistaken to make the following assertions: that a revolutionary party must struggle at all times without taking into account the strength of friends and foes; that in the case of a strike, for example, the communist must always insist it be continue to the bitter end; that a communist must shun certain means of dissimulation, trickery, espionage, etc., because they aren’t particularly noble or pleasant. Marxism and Lenin’s critique of the superficial pseudo-revolutionism that fouls the path of the proletariat consists of attempts to eliminate these stupid and sentimental criteria as ways of resolving the problem of tactics. This critique is a definitively acquired part of the communist movement’s experience. One tactical error that this critique allows us to avoid is the following: that since communists aim for a political split with the opportunists, we should therefore support splitting off from trade unions led by supporters of the yellow Amsterdam union. It is merely polemical trickery that has misrepresented the Italian left as basing its conclusions on notions like “it is undignified to meet the opportunist leaders in person,” and so on.

But this critique of “infantilism” doesn’t however mean that indeterminacy, chaos and arbitrariness must govern tactics, or that “all means” are appropriate to achieve our aims. To say that the guarantee of the co-ordination of the means with the ends resides in the revolutionary nature acquired by the party and in the contributions that eminent men or groups backed up by a brilliant tradition will bring to its decision-making, is just a non-Marxist play on words, because it doesn’t take into account the repercussions that its means of action themselves have on the party within the dialectical play of cause and effect, and the fact that we ascribe no value whatsoever to the “intentions” which dictate individual or group initiatives; let alone our “suspiciousness,” without meaning to give offence, about such intentions, which the bloody experience of the past means we can never set aside entirely.

In his pamphlet on infantilism, Lenin wrote that the tactical means must be chosen in advance in order to fulfil the final revolutionary objective and be governed by a clear historical vision of the proletarian struggle and its final goal. He showed it would be absurd to reject some tactical expedient just because it appeared “unpleasant” or was deserving of the definition “compromise”: what was necessary instead was to decide whether or not it was a means corresponding with the final goal. The collective activity of the party and the Communist International poses and will continue to pose this formidable task. If in matters of theoretical principle we can say that Marx and Lenin have bequeathed us a sound heritage, although that is not to say there are no new tasks of theoretical research for communism to accomplish, the same cannot be said as regards tactical matters, not even after the Russian Revolution and the experience of the first years of the life of the new International, which was deprived of Lenin all too soon. The question of tactics is much too complex to be resolved by the simplistic and sentimental answers of the “infantiles,” and it requires in-depth contributions from the whole of the international communist movement in the light of its experience, old and new. Marx and Lenin aren’t being contradicted if we state that in order to resolve this question, rules of conduct must be followed which, whilst not as vital and fundamental as principles, are nevertheless binding both on party members and the leading organs of the movement, who should forecast the different ways in which situations may develop so as to plan with the greatest possible degree of accuracy how the party should act when one of these hypothetical scenarios assumes specific dimensions.

Situations must be studied and understood before tactical decisions can be taken, because this signals to the movement that the time has come for an action that has already been anticipated to the greatest extent possible; they should not lead, at the arbitrary decisions of the leaders, to “improvisations” and “surprises.” To deny the possibility of predicting tactics in their broad outlines—not of predicting situations, which is possible with even less certainty, but of predicting what we should do in

the various hypothetical scenarios based on the progression of objective situations—is to deny the party’s task, and to reject the sole guarantee we can give that the party members and the masses will respond, in any eventuality, to the orders of the centre.

In this sense the party is not an army, nor even a state apparatus, that is to say an organ in which hierarchical authority prevails and voluntary adhesion counts for nothing; it is obvious that for the party member there always remains an option of not executing the orders, which doesn’t involve material sanctions: leaving the party. A good tactic is one which, should the situations change and the centre not have time to consult the party and still less the masses, does not lead to unexpected repercussions within the party itself and within the proletariat which could pull in the opposite direction to the success of the revolutionary campaign. The art of predicting how the party will react to orders, and which orders will obtain a good response, is the art of revolutionary tactics: this can only be entrusted to the collective use of the experience gained from past action, summarized in clear rules of action; by entrusting to leaders the fulfilment of these tasks, militants ensure that these leaders will not betray their mandate, and they undertake substantially, and not just apparently, to carry out the orders of the movement productively and decisively. Given that the party is perfectible and not perfect, we do not hesitate to say that much has to be sacrificed to the clarity and to the power of persuasion of the tactical guidelines, even if this involves a certain schematization: should our tactical schemes break down under the weight of circumstances, we will not remedy this by falling back into opportunism and eclecticism; rather, we will have to make renewed efforts to bring tactics back into line with the party’s tasks. It is not just the good party that makes good tactics, but good tactics that make the good party, and good tactics can only be those understood and chosen by everyone in their fundamentals.

Basically, what we oppose is that the party’s collective work of defining its tactical guidelines should be stifled by demands for unconditional obedience to one man, one committee, or one particular party of the International and its traditional ruling apparatus.

The party’s activity takes on a strategic aspect at crucial moments in the struggle for power, at which point it assumes an essentially military character. In the preceding situations the party’s action is not restricted, however, to its purely ideological, propagandistic and organizational functions, but consists, as we’ve already stated, of active participation in the individual struggles initiated by the proletariat. This being so, the system of tactical guidelines must therefore be constructed with the precise aim of establishing under what conditions the intervention of the party and its activity within such movements, its agitation at the heart of the proletarian

struggle, connects with the ultimate and revolutionary objective whilst simultaneously guaranteeing the advantageous progress of ideological, organizational and tactical preparation.

In the next part, we will take particular problems and examine how our elaboration of the particular norms of communist activity relates to the present stage of development of the revolutionary movement.

## **II. INTERNATIONAL QUESTIONS**

### *1.— The constitution of the Third International*

The crisis in the Second International caused by the world war has, with the constitution of the Communist International, been completely and definitively resolved as far as the restoration of revolutionary doctrine is concerned, whereas, from the organizational and tactical point of view, despite the formation of the Comintern certainly constituting an immense historical victory, the crisis in the proletarian movement has not been resolved to the same extent.

A fundamental factor in the formation of the new International was the Russian Revolution, first glorious victory of the world proletariat. However, owing to the social conditions in Russia, the Russian Revolution hasn't provided the general historical model for revolutions in other countries on the tactical side. In it, in the transition from feudal autocratic power to the proletarian dictatorship, there was no epoch of political dominion by the bourgeois class, organized in its own exclusive and stable State apparatus.

It is precisely for this reason that the historical confirmation of the conceptions of the Marxist programme in the Russian Revolution has been of such enormous significance, and of such great use in routing social democratic revisionism in the realm of principles. In the organizational field, however, the struggle against the Second International—an integral part of the struggle against global capitalism—hasn't met with the same decisive success, and a multitude of errors has been committed which have resulted in the Communist parties not being as effective as objective conditions would have allowed.

The same has to be said as regards the field of tactics, where many problems have not been resolved, and still haven't been properly resolved today, in the sector where figure: bourgeoisie, modern bourgeois parliamentary state with a historically stable apparatus, proletariat; and the communist parties have not always derived all they could have from the proletarian offensive against capitalism and from the liquidation of the social democratic parties, i.e. the political organs of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie.

## *2. – World economic and political situation*

The international situation today appears less favorable to the proletariat than in the immediate post-war years. From the economic point of view, we witness a partial re-stabilization of capitalism. However, we understand this stabilization only to mean only that certain parts of the economic structure have been contained, and not that a state of affairs has arisen which excludes the possibility, even in the immediate future, of new disturbances.

There is still a marked capitalist crisis and its definitive worsening is inevitable. In the political sphere, we witness a weakening of the revolutionary movement in almost every advanced country, counter-balanced, happily, by the consolidation of soviet Russia and by the struggles of the colonial peoples against the capitalist powers.

Such a situation presents a double danger however. In the first place, by pursuing the erroneous method of situationism, a certain tendency towards Menshevism arises in the way the problems of proletarian action are evaluated. Secondly, if the pressure from genuine classist actions diminishes, the conditions which Lenin saw as necessary for a correct application of tactics in the national and peasant question risk being misapplied within the overall politics of the Comintern.

The post-war proletarian offensive was followed by an employers' offensive against proletarian positions, to which the Comintern replied with the watchword of the United Front. There then arose the problem of the rise in various countries of democratic-pacifist situations, which comrade Trotsky correctly denounced as representing a danger of degeneration for our movement. We must avoid all interpretations of situations which present as a vital question for the proletariat the struggle between two parts of the bourgeoisie, the Right and the Left, and the too strict identification of these with socially distinct groups.

The correct interpretation is that the dominant class possesses several governmental methods that are in essence reduced to two: the reactionary fascist method, and the liberal democratic method.

Setting out from an analysis of economy, Lenin's theses have already reliably proved that the most modern strata of the bourgeoisie tend to unify not only the productive mechanism, but also their political defenses into the most decisive forms.

It is therefore false to state that as a general rule the road to communism must pass through a stage of left-wing bourgeois government. If nevertheless such a case arose, the condition for proletarian victory would reside in a party tactic of marshalling against the illusions generated by the accession of such a left-wing government and continuous opposition, even during periods of reaction, to political



democratic formations.

### *3. – The International's Method of Work*

One of the Communist International's most important tasks has been dispelling the proletariat's mistrust of political action, which arose as a result of the parliamentary degeneracies of opportunism.

Marxism doesn't interpret politics as the art of using cunning techniques in parliamentary and diplomatic intrigues, to be used by all parties in pursuit of their special ends. Proletarian politics rejects the bourgeois method of politics and anticipates higher forms of relations culminating in the art of revolutionary insurrection. This rejection, which we will not present in greater theoretical detail here, is the vital condition both for the effective linking up of the revolutionary proletariat with its communist leadership, and for ensuring effective selection of personnel for the latter.

The working methods of the International fly in the face of this revolutionary necessity. In the relations between the different organs of the communist movement a two-faced politics frequently gains the upper hand, and a subordination of theoretical rationale to fortuitous motives, and a system of treaties and pacts between persons which fails to faithfully convey the relations between the parties and the masses, has led to bitter disappointments.

Improvisation, surprises, and theatrical scene changes, are factors that are entering all too easily into the major and fundamental decisions of the International, disorientating both comrades and the proletariat alike.

For example, the majority of internal party questions are resolved in international organs and congresses by a series of unwieldy arrangements which make them acceptable to the various leadership groups but add nothing useful to the real process of party growth.

### *4. – Organizational Questions*

During the founding of the Comintern, the view that it was necessary to establish a vast concentration of revolutionary forces carried a lot of weight because it was predicted at the time that objective conditions would develop much more rapidly than they did. Nevertheless, in retrospect we can see that it would have been preferable to establish organizational criteria which were more rigorous. The formation of parties and the conquest of the masses has been favored neither by making concessions to anarchist and syndicalist groups, nor by the small compromises made with the centrists allowed for in the 21 conditions; neither by organic fusions with parties or fractions of parties as a result of political "infiltration," nor by tolerating in some countries a dual communist organization alongside sympathizer

parties. The watchword of organizing the party on the basis of factory cells, launched after the Fifth Congress, hasn't achieved its aim of remedying the glaring defects concordantly observed in the various sections of the International.

Once applied as a general rule, especially in the way the Italian leadership has interpreted it, this watchword lends itself to serious errors and to deviation both from the Marxist postulate that revolution isn't a question of forms of organization, and from the Leninist thesis that an organic solution can never be valid for all times and all places.

For parties operating in bourgeois countries with a stable parliamentary regime, organization on a factory cell basis is less suitable than territorial units. It is also a theoretical error to assert that whilst parties organized on a territorial basis are social-democratic parties, those based on cells are genuine communist parties. In practice, the cell type of organization makes it even more difficult to carry out the party's task of unification amongst proletarians in trade and industry groups; a task that is all the more important the more unfavorable the situation is and the more the possibilities of proletarian organization are reduced. Various drawbacks of a practical nature are connected with the proposal to organize the party on the exclusive basis of factory cells. In tsarist Russia, the issue appeared in a different context: relations between the owners of industry and the State were different and the obligation of posing the central question of power rendered the corporatist danger less acute.

The factory cell system does not increase workers' influence in the party since the key links in the network all consist of the non-worker and ex-worker elements which constitute the official party apparatus. Given the faulty working methods of the International, the watchword "bolshevization," from the organizational point of view, manifests as a pedestrian and inadequate application of the Russian experience, which has in many countries already prompted a paralysis, albeit unintentional, of spontaneous initiatives and proletarian and classist energies by means of an apparatus whose selection and functions are for the most part artificial.

Keeping the organization of the party on a territorial basis doesn't mean having to relinquish party organs in the factories: indeed there must be communist groups there, linked to the party and subject to party discipline, in order to form its trade-union framework. This method establishes a much better connection with the masses and keeps the party's main organization less visible.

##### *5. – Discipline and fractions*

Another aspect of the watchword "Bolshevization" is entrusting the guarantee of the party's effectiveness to centralized discipline and a strict prohibition of factionism.

The final court of appeal for all controversial questions is the international central organ, with hegemony being attributed, if not hierarchically, at least politically, to the Russian Communist Party.

Such a guarantee doesn't actually exist, and the whole approach to the problem is inadequate. The fact of the matter is that the spread of factionism within the International hasn't been avoided but has been encouraged instead to assume masked and hypocritical forms. Besides which, from a historical point of view, the overcoming of fractions in the Russian party wasn't an expedient or a magical recipe applied on statutory grounds, but was the outcome, and the expression of, a sound approach to the questions of doctrine and political action.

Disciplinary sanctions are one of the elements that prevent degeneration, but on the understanding they are only applied in exceptional cases, and do not become the norm and become almost the ideal of how the party should function.

The solution doesn't reside in a useless increase in hierarchical authoritarianism, whose initial investiture is lacking both because of the incompleteness of the historical experiences in Russia, impressive though they are, and because even within the Old Guard, the custodian of the Bolshevik traditions, disagreements have been resolved in ways which cannot be considered as a priori the best ones. But neither does the solution lie in the systematic application of the principles of formal democracy, which for Marxism have no other function than as organizational practices which can be occasionally convenient.

The communist parties must achieve an organic centralism, which, whilst including as much consultation with the base as possible, ensures the spontaneous elimination of any grouping which starts to differentiate itself. This cannot be achieved by means of the formal and mechanical prescriptions of a hierarchy, but, as Lenin says, by means of correct revolutionary politics.

The repression of factionalism isn't a fundamental aspect of the evolution of the party, although preventing it is.

Since it is fruitless and absurd, not to say extremely dangerous, to claim that the party and the International are somehow mysteriously ensured against any relapse or tendency to relapse into opportunism, which could just as well depend on changing circumstances or on the playing out of residual social-democratic traditions, then we must admit that every difference of opinion not reducible to cases of conscience or personal defeatism could well develop a useful function in the resolution of our problems and serve to protect the party, and the proletariat in general, from the risk of serious danger.

If these dangers accentuate then differentiation will inevitably, but usefully, take on the fractionist form, and this could lead to schisms; not however for the childish reason of a lack of repressive energy on the part of the leaders, but only in the awful

hypothesis that the party fails and becomes subject to counter-revolutionary influences.

We have an example of the wrong method in the artificial solutions applied to the plight of the German party after the opportunist crisis in 1923, when whilst these artifices failed to eliminate fractionism they at the same time hindered the spontaneous determination within the ranks of the highly advanced German proletariat of the correct classist and revolutionary response to the degeneration of the party.

Historically the peril of bourgeois influence on the class party doesn't appear as the organization of fractions but rather as a shrewd penetration which stokes up unitary demagoguery and operates as a dictatorship from above, immobilizing initiatives by the proletarian vanguard.

The identification and elimination of such a defeatist factor is achieved not by posing the issue of discipline against fractionist initiatives, but rather by managing to orientate the party and the proletariat against such an insidious danger when it takes on the aspect not just of a doctrinal revision, but of an express proposal for an important political maneuver with anti-classist consequences.

One negative effect of so-called bolshevization has been the replacing of conscious and thoroughgoing political elaboration inside the party, corresponding to significant progress towards a really compact centralism, with superficial and noisy agitation for mechanical formulas of unity for unity's sake, and discipline for discipline's sake.

The consequence of this method is damaging both to the party and to the proletariat and delays the attainment of the "true" communist party. This method, applied in several sections of the International, is in itself a serious indication of a latent opportunism. At the moment, there doesn't appear to be any international left opposition within the Comintern, but if the unfavorable factors we have mentioned worsen, the formation of such an opposition will be at the same time both a revolutionary necessity and a spontaneous reflex to the situation.

#### *6. – Tactical Questions up to the Fifth Congress*

Mistaken decisions have been made in the way the tactical problems posed by the previously mentioned international situations were settled. Like analogous mistakes made in the organizational sphere, they derive from the claim that everything can be deduced from problems previously faced by the Russian Communist party.

The united front tactic shouldn't be interpreted as a political coalition with other so-called workers' parties, but as a utilization of immediate demands in particular situations to increase the communist party's influence over the masses without compromising its autonomous position.

The basis for the United Front must therefore be sought in the proletarian

organizations which workers join because of their social position and independently of their political faith or affiliation to an organized party. The reason is two-fold: firstly, communists aren't prevented from criticizing other parties, or gradually recruiting new members who used to be dependent on these other parties into the ranks of the communist party, and secondly, it ensures that the masses will understand the party when it eventually calls on them to mobilize behind its programme and under its exclusive leadership.

Experience has shown us countless times that the only way of ensuring a revolutionary application of the united front lies in rejecting political coalitions, whether permanent or temporary, along with committees which include representatives of different political parties as means of directing the struggle; also there should be no negotiations, proposals for common action and open letters to other parties from the communist party.

Practical experience has proved how fruitless these methods are, and even any initial effect has been discredited by the abuses to which they have been put.

The political united front based on the central demand of the seizure of the State becomes the "workers' government" tactic. Here we have not only an erroneous tactic, but also a blatant contradiction of the principles of communism. Once the party issues the call for the assumption of power by the proletariat through the representative organisms of the bourgeois State apparatus, or even merely refrains from explicitly condemning such an eventuality, then it has abandoned and rejected the communist programme not only vis-à-vis proletarian ideology, with all the inevitable damaging consequences, but because the party itself would be establishing and accrediting this ideological formulation. The revision to this tactic made at the Fifth Congress, after the defeat in Germany, hasn't proved satisfactory and the latest developments in the realm of tactical experimentation justify calls for the abandonment of even the expression: "workers' government."

As far as the central problem of the State is concerned, the party should issue the call for the dictatorship of the proletariat and that alone. There is no other "Workers' Government."

The slogan "Workers' Government" leads to opportunism, and to opportunism alone, i.e. support for, or participation in, self-styled "pro-worker" governments of the bourgeois class.

None of this contradicts the slogan: "All Power to the Soviets" and to soviet-type organisms (representative bodies elected by workers), even when opportunist parties predominate in them. The opportunist parties oppose the assumption of power by proletarian organizations since this is precisely the proletarian dictatorship (exclusion of non-workers from the elective organs and power) which the communist party alone will be able to accomplish.

Suffice to say the formula of the dictatorship of the proletariat has one synonym and one alone: “the government of the communist party.”

### 7. – *The Question of the “new tactics”*

The united front and the workers’ government used to be justified on the following grounds: that just having communist parties wasn’t enough to achieve victory since it was necessary to conquer the masses, and in order to conquer the masses, the influence of the social democrats had to be fought on the terrain of those demands which are understood by all workers.

Today, a second step has been taken, and a perilous question is posed: to ensure our victory, they say, we must first ensure that the bourgeoisie is governing in a tolerant and compliant way, or, that classes intermediate between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat should govern, allowing us to make preparations. This latter position, by admitting the possibility of a government originating from the middle classes, sinks to the total revision of Marx’s doctrine and is equivalent to the counter-revolutionary platform of reformism.

The first position aims to refer solely to the objective utility of conditions insofar as they allow propaganda, agitation and organization to be better carried out. But as we have already pointed out with regard to particular situations, both are equally dangerous.

Everything leads us to predict that liberalism and bourgeois democracy, whether in antithesis or in synthesis with the “fascist” method, will evolve in such a way as to exclude the communist party from their juridical guarantees—for what little they’re worth—since it places itself outside them by negating such guarantees in its program. Such an evolution in no way contradicts the principles of bourgeois democracy, and in any case, it has real precedents in the work of all the so-called left-wing governments, and, for example, in the programme of the Italian Aventine Parliament. Any “freedom” given to the proletariat will just mean substantially greater freedom for counter-revolutionary agents to agitate and organize within its ranks. The only freedom for the proletariat lies in its dictatorship.

We have already mentioned that even if a left-wing government created conditions that we found useful, they could only be exploited if the party had consistently held to clearly autonomous positions. It isn’t a matter of attributing diabolical cleverness to the bourgeoisie, but of holding on to the certainty—without which it is possible to call oneself a communist! —that during the final struggle the conquests of the proletariat will come up against a united front of the bourgeois forces, be they personified by Hindenburg, Macdonald, Mussolini or Noske.

To habituate the proletariat to picking out voluntary or involuntary supporters from within this bourgeois front would be to introduce a factor of defeat, even if

any intrinsic weakness of any part of this front will clearly be a factor of victory.

In Germany after the election of Hindenburg, an electoral alliance with social-democracy and with other “republican” parties, i.e. bourgeois parties, such as the parliamentary alliance in the Prussian Landstag, was proclaimed in order to avoid a right-wing government; in France, support was given to the *Cartel des gauches* in the last municipal elections (the Clichy tactic). For the reasons given above such tactical methods must be declared unacceptable. Even the theses of the Second Congress of the C.I. on revolutionary parliamentarism impose on the communist party the duty of only operating on electoral terrain on the basis of rigorously independent positions.

The examples of recent tactics indicated above show a clear, though not complete, historical affinity with the traditional methods of the Second International: electoral blocs and collaborationism which were also justified by laying claim to a Marxist interpretation.

Such methods represent a real danger to the principles and organization of the International. Incidentally, no international congresses have passed resolutions which authorize them, and that includes the tactical theses presented at the Fifth Congress.

#### 8. – *The Union Question*

On the global level, the International has successively modified its conception of the relationship between political and economic organisms. Herein lies a remarkable example of the method which, rather than having particular actions derive from principles, prefers to improvise various new theories to justify actions chosen because of their apparent ease of execution and their likelihood of producing quick results.

The International originally supported the admission of unions to the Communist International, then it formed a Red International Labour Union. It was held that, since the unions were the best point of contact with the masses, each communist party should struggle for trade-union unity and therefore not create its own unions through scissions from unions led by the yellows, nevertheless on the International level the Bureau of the Amsterdam International was to be considered and treated not as an organization of the proletarian masses, but as a counter-revolutionary political organ of the League of Nations.

At a certain point, based on considerations which were certainly very important, but limited mainly to a project for using the left-wing of the English union movement, it was announced that the Red International Labour Union should be abandoned in order to effect an organic unity, on an international scale, with the Amsterdam Bureau.

No amount of conjecture about changing circumstances can justify such a major policy shift since the question of the relations between international political organizations and trade unions is one of principle, inasmuch as it boils down to that of the relations between party and class for the revolutionary mobilization.

Internal statutory guarantees weren't respected either since this decision was presented to the relevant international organs as a *fait accompli*.

The retention of "Moscow against Amsterdam" as our watchword hasn't prevented the struggle for trade-union unity in each nation and nor will it: in fact the liquidation of separatist tendencies in the unions (Germany and Italy) was only made possible by addressing the separatists' argument that the proletariat was being prevented from freeing itself from the influence of the Amsterdam International.

On the other hand, the apparent enthusiasm with which our party in France adhered to the proposition of world trade-union unity didn't prevent it from demonstrating an absolute incapacity to deal *de facto* with the problem of trade-union unity at a national level in a non-scissionist way.

The utility of a united front tactic on a world basis isn't however ruled out, even with union organizations that belong to the Amsterdam International.

The left wing of the Italian party has always supported and struggled for proletarian unity in the trade-unions, and this serves to distinguish it from the profoundly syndicalist and voluntarist pseudo-lefts which were fought by Lenin. Furthermore, the Left in Italy has a thoroughly Leninist conception of the problem of the relations between trade unions and factory councils. On the basis of the Russian experience and of the relevant theses of the Second Congress, the Left rejects the serious deviation from principle which consists of depriving the trade unions, based on voluntary membership, of any revolutionary importance in order to substitute the utopian and reactionary concept of a constitutional apparatus with obligatory membership which extends organically over the entire area of the system of capitalist production. In practice, this error is expressed by an overestimation of the role of the factory councils to the extent of effectively boycotting the trade union.

### *9. – The Agrarian Question*

The agrarian question has been defined by Lenin's theses at the Second Congress of the International. The main aim of these theses was to restore the problem of agricultural production to its historic place in the Marxist system, and show that in an epoch where the premises for the socialization of enterprises had already matured in the industrial economy, they were still lacking in the agricultural economy.

Far from delaying the proletarian revolution (which alone will create these premises), this state of affairs renders the problems of the poor peasants insoluble within the framework of industrial economy and bourgeois power. This allows the



proletariat to link up its own struggle with freeing the poor peasant from a system of exploitation by the landed proprietors and the bourgeoisie, even if freeing the peasants doesn't coincide with a general change in the rural productive economy.

Large-scale landed property, deemed as such in law, is technically speaking composed of tiny productive enterprises. When the legal superstructure that holds it together is destroyed, we witness a redivision of land amongst the peasants. In reality, this is nothing other than the freeing of these small productive enterprises already separated from a collective exploitation. This can only happen if the property relations are broken up in a revolutionary way, but the protagonist of this rupture can only be the industrial proletariat. The reason for this is that the proletariat, as distinct from the peasant, isn't merely a victim of the relations of bourgeois production but is the historical product of its maturity, condemning it to clear the path to a new, different system of production. The proletariat will therefore find precious reinforcements in the revolt of the poor peasant. The essential elements in Lenin's tactical conclusions are, firstly, that there is a fundamental distinction to be made between the proletariat's relations with the peasant class, and its relations with the reactionary middle strata of the urban economy (mainly represented by the social-democratic parties); and secondly, there is the definitive principle of the pre-eminence and hegemony of the working class as leader of the revolution.

The peasant therefore appears at the moment of the conquest of power as a revolutionary factor, but if during the revolution his ideology is modified as regards the old forms of authority and legality, it doesn't change much with regard to the relations of production which remain the traditional ones of isolated family farms in mutual competition with one another. Thus the peasant still represents a threat to the construction of the socialist economy, and only the large-scale development of productive capacity and agricultural technology is likely to interest him.

On the tactical and organizational plane the landless agricultural proletariat (day-labourers) must be considered, in Lenin's view, the same as the rest of the proletariat, and be incorporated into the same framework; the policy of proletarian alliance with the poor peasants—working alone on their plots of land on whatever level of sufficiency—becomes a policy of mere neutralization with regard to the middle peasant, who is characterized as being both a victim of certain capitalist relations and an exploiter of labour. Finally, there is the wealthy peasant who is generally an exploiter of labour and the direct enemy of the revolution.

In the field of agrarian tactics, the International must avoid those mistaken applications already discernible for instance in the policies of the French party, which is drawn to the idea of a new type of peasant revolution to be considered on the same level as the worker's revolution, or to the belief that the revolutionary movement of the workers may be determined by an insurrection in the countryside, whilst

in fact the actual relationship is the other way around.

The peasant, once won over to the communist programme, and therefore accessible to political organization, should become a member of the communist party; this is the only way to combat the rise of parties composed solely of peasants inevitably prey to counter-revolutionary influences.

The Krestintern (Peasants' International) must incorporate the peasant organizations of all countries characterized, like workers' trade-unions, by the fact of accepting as members all those who have the same immediate economic interests. Also the tactics of political negotiations, the united front, or constitution of fractions within the peasant parties—even with the intention of breaking them up—must be rejected.

This tactical norm is not at odds with the relations established between the Bolsheviks and the Social-Revolutionaries during the civil war period when the new representative organizations of the proletariat and the peasants already existed.

#### *10. – The National Question*

Lenin has also produced a fundamental clarification of the theory of the popular movements in colonial countries and in certain exceptionally backward countries. Even though internal economic development and the expansion of foreign capital hasn't provided a mature basis for modern class struggle in these countries, demands are being made which can only be resolved by insurrectional struggle and the defeat of world imperialism.

In the epoch of struggle for proletarian revolution in the metropolises, the complete realization of these two conditions will allow the launching of a struggle which, nevertheless, will take on locally the aspects of a conflict not of class but of races and nationalities.

The fundamental tenets of the Leninist conception nevertheless still remain that the world struggle will be directed by organs of the revolutionary proletariat, and that the indigenous class struggle, and the independent development of local communist parties, must be encouraged, and never held back or stifled.

The extension, however, of these considerations to countries in which the capitalist regime and the bourgeois State apparatus has been established for a long time constitutes a danger, insofar as here the national question and patriotic ideology become counter-revolutionary devices, and serve only to disarm the proletariat as a class. Such deviations appear, for example, in the concessions made by Radek with regard to the German nationalists fighting against the inter-allied occupation.

The International must also call for the stamping out in Czechoslovakia of any nationalist and dualist reaction within the proletarian organizations since the two races are at the same historical level and their common economic environment is

completely evolved.

To elevate the struggle of the national minorities, per se to the level of a matter of principle is therefore to distort the communist conception, since altogether different criteria are required to discern whether such struggles offer revolutionary possibilities or reactionary developments.

### *II. – Russian Questions*

The new political economy of the Russian State, based mainly on Lenin's 1921 speech on the tax in kind and Trotsky's report to the Fourth World Congress, is evidently an important matter for the Communist International. Given the condition of the Russian economy, and the fact that the bourgeoisie remains in power in the other countries, Marxists couldn't have presented otherwise the prospects for the development of the world revolution, and the construction of the Socialist economy.

The serious political difficulties that the internal relations of social forces, and the problems of productive technology and foreign relations have caused the Russian State, have led to a series of divergences within the Russian Communist Party; and it is really deplorable that the international communist movement hasn't found a way of making more soundly based and authoritative pronouncements on the matter.

In the first discussion with Trotsky, his considerations on the internal life of the party and its new course were undoubtedly correct, and his observations on the development of the State's political economy were also, on the whole, clearly revolutionary and proletarian. In the second discussion he was no less justified when he remarked on the International's mistakes, and demonstrated that the best traditions of the Bolsheviks did not militate in favor of the way the Comintern was being led.

The way the party reacted to this internal debate was inadequate and contrived, due to the well-known method of relying on anti-fractionist, and even worse, anti-Bonapartist intimidation based on absolutely nothing of substance. As to the latest discussion, it must above all be realized that it revolves around problems of an international nature, and just because the majority of the Russian Communist Party has pronounced on the issue, there is no reason why the International cannot discuss and pronounce on it in its turn; the question still stands even if has ceased to be asked by the defeated Opposition.

As has often happened, questions of procedure and discipline have stifled really essential questions. What is at issue here is not the defense of the rights of a minority, whose leaders at least are co-responsible for numerous errors committed on the international level, but rather questions of vital importance for the world movement.

The Russian question must be brought before the International for an in-depth

study. The following features must be taken into account: today the Russian economy is composed, according to Lenin, of elements that are pre-bourgeois, bourgeois, State-capitalist and socialist. State-controlled large-scale industry is socialist insofar as it is production organized by, and in the hands of a politically proletarian State. The distribution of the products derived from this industry operates however under a capitalist form, namely, through a competitive free-market mechanism.

One cannot deny in principle that workers will not only be kept in less than brilliant economic circumstances by this system (in fact that is the case) even if they do accept it because of the revolutionary consciousness they have acquired, but that it will also evolve in the direction of an increased extraction of surplus value by means of the price paid by the worker for foodstuffs, and the prices paid by the State for its purchases, as well as the conditions it obtains in concessions, commerce and in all its relations with foreign capitalism. It is therefore necessary to ask whether the socialist elements in the Russian economy are increasing or decreasing, a problem that also means taking into account the degree of technical efficiency and how well the State industries are organized.

The building of full socialism extended to production and distribution, to industry and agriculture, is impossible in just one country, but the progressive development of the socialist elements in the Russian economy can nevertheless be achieved by thwarting the plans of the counterrevolutionaries; supported inside Russia by the rich peasants, new bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie, and outside the country by the imperialist powers. Whether such counter-revolutionary plotting takes the form of internal or external aggression, or of a progressive sabotage and influencing of Russian social and State life such as to force a progressive involution and de-proletarianization of its main features, it is a fundamental condition for success that all parties belonging to the International collaborate with each other and are able to make their contribution.

Above all, it is a matter of assuring the Russian proletariat and the Russian Communist Party of the active support of the proletarian vanguard, especially in the imperialist countries. Not only must aggression be prevented and pressure is exerted against the bourgeois States as regards their relations with Russia, but most importantly of all, the Russian party needs to be helped by its brother parties to resolve its problems. Whilst these other parties, it is true, do not possess direct experience of governmental problems, nonetheless they can help resolve them by acting as a classist and revolutionary coefficient, with experience derived directly from the real class struggles taking place in their respective countries.

As we have shown above, the internal relationships of the International do not lend themselves to this task. Urgent changes therefore need to be made in order to redress the problems in the realm of politics and in the tactical and organizational

spheres that have been exacerbated by “bolshevization.”

### **III. ITALIAN QUESTIONS**

#### *1. – The Italian Situation*

Evaluations of the Italian situation that attribute decisive value to the insufficient development of industrial capitalism are wrong.

The weak expansion of industry in a quantitative sense, along with its relatively late historical appearance, were counterbalanced by a set of other circumstances which allowed the bourgeoisie to completely entrench itself politically during the period of the Risorgimento and develop an extremely rich and complex tradition of government.

The political polarities that historically characterize conflicting parties—such as the old Left and Right division, clericalism and masonry, and democracy and fascism—cannot be automatically identified with the social differences which exist between landed proprietors and capitalists, and the big and petty bourgeoisie.

The fascist movement must be understood as the attempt to politically unify the conflicting interests of various bourgeois groups under the banner of counter-revolution. Fascism, created and directly fostered by the entire upper classes (landowners, industrialists, commercial sectors, bankers, supported by the traditional State apparatus, the monarchy, the Church, and masonry) pursued this aim by mobilizing elements within the disintegrating middle classes which, in close alliance with the bourgeoisie as a whole, it has managed to deploy against the proletariat.

What has taken place in Italy shouldn't be interpreted as the arrival in power of a new social strata, as the formation of a new State apparatus with a new programme and ideology, nor as the defeat of part of the bourgeoisie, whose interests would be better served by the adoption of liberal and parliamentary methods. The Democrats and the Liberals, the Nittis and the Giolittis, are the protagonists of a phase of counter-revolutionary struggle which is dialectically linked to the fascist phase and just as decisive in effecting the proletarian defeat. In fact it was precisely their concessionary politics, with the complicity of reformists and maximalists, which allowed the bourgeoisie to resist the pressure from the proletariat and head it off during the post-war period of demobilization, at precisely a time when every component of the dominant class was unprepared for a frontal attack.

Directly favored in this period by governments, the bureaucracy, the police, judiciary, army etc., Fascism has since gone on to completely replace the bourgeoisie's old political personnel. However, we shouldn't be fooled by this and neither should it serve as a reason for rehabilitating parties and groups who were removed

not because they achieved better conditions for the working class, but because for the time being they had completed their anti-proletarian task.

## 2. – *Political Positions of the Communist Left*

As the above situation was taking shape, the group which formed the Communist Party set out with these criteria: a break from the illusory dualisms of the bourgeois and parliamentary political scene and an affirmation of the revolutionary antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie; propaganda amongst the proletariat aimed at destroying the illusion that the middle classes were capable of producing a political general staff, of taking power and clearing the way for proletarian victories; instilling confidence in the proletariat in its own historic task through propaganda based on a series of critical, political and tactical positions which were original and autonomous, and solidly linked through successive situations.

The tradition of this political current goes back to the left wing of the Socialist party before the war. Whilst a majority capable of struggling both against the errors of the reformists and the syndicalists (the latter having personified the proletarian left until then) was formed at the congresses of Reggio Emilia (1912) and Ancona (1914), an extreme left aspiring to even more radical classist solutions also emerged within this majority. Important problems for the working class were correctly resolved during this period, namely with regard to the questions of electoral tactics, links with the trades-unions, colonial war and freemasonry.

During the World War, virtually the entire party opposed the *union sacre* politics, and at successive meetings and Congresses (Bologna, May 1915; Rome, February 1917; Florence, November 1917; Rome, 1918), its extreme Left-wing, now clearly differentiated, defended the following Leninist positions: the rejection of national defense and defeatism; exploitation of military defeat to pose the question of power; and unceasing struggle against the opportunist trade-union and parliamentary leaders along with the call for their expulsion from the party.

Immediately after the war, *Il Soviet* became the mouthpiece of the Extreme Left, and the first newspaper to support the policies of the Russian revolution and to confront anti-Marxist, opportunist, syndicalist, and anarchistic misinterpretations. It correctly set out the essential problems of the proletarian dictatorship and the party's tasks, and from the very start defended the necessity of a split in the Socialist Party.

This same group supported electoral abstentionism but the Second Congress of the International would dismiss its conclusions. Its abstentionism however didn't derive from the anti-Marxist theoretical errors of the anarcho-syndicalist type, as its' resolute polemics against the anarchist press have shown. The application of the abstentionist tactic was recommended above all for fully developed parliamentary

democracies, because this political environment creates particular obstacles to the winning over of the masses to an accurate understanding of the word “dictatorship”; difficulties which, in our opinion, continue to be underestimated by the International.

In the second place, abstentionism was proposed at a time when huge struggles were setting even hugger mass movements into motion (unfortunately not the case today), and not as a tactic applicable for all times and all places.

With the 1919 elections, the bourgeois Nitti government opened up an immense safety valve to the revolutionary pressure, and diverted the proletarian offensive and the attention of the party by exploiting its tradition of unbridled electoralism. *Il Soviet's* abstentionism was then entirely correct, in that it responded to the true causes of the proletarian disaster that ensued.

At the subsequent Bologna Conference (October 1919), only the abstentionist minority posed correctly the question of a split with the reformists, but it sought in vain to come to an agreement with a section of the maximalists on this point, even after abstentionism had been renounced in order to achieve it. The attempt having failed, the abstentionist fraction remained the only section of the party which, up until the Second World Congress, worked on a national scale for the formation of the communist party.

This was therefore the group which represented the spontaneous adherence, setting out from its own experiences and traditions, of the left of the Italian proletariat to the policies of Lenin and Bolshevism which had lately emerged victorious with the Russian revolution.

### *3. – The work of the Party's Left leadership*

Within the new communist party, constituted at Leghorn in January 1921, the abstentionists made every effort to forge solid links with other groupings in the party. But whilst for some of these groups it was international relations alone which necessitated the split from the opportunists, for the abstentionists (who for discipline's sake had expressly renounced their positions on elections) and indeed for many other elements besides, it was because the theses of the International and the lessons of recent political struggles were completely consistent with each other.

In its work, the interpretation of the Italian situation and the tasks of the proletariat mentioned earlier inspired the party leadership. With hindsight it is clear that the delay in the formation of the revolutionary Party (for which the other groups were responsible) made the subsequent proletarian retreat inevitable.

In order to place the proletariat in the best position during the ensuing battles, the leadership took the stance that although the greatest efforts should be made to use the traditional apparatus of the Red organizations, it was also necessary to warn

the proletariat not to count on anything from the maximalists and reformists, who would even go so far as accepting a peace treaty with fascism.

From its very inception, the party defended the principle of trade-union unity, going on to propose the central postulate of a united front which culminated in the formation of the Labour Alliance. Whatever opinions one might have about the political united front, the fact is that the situation in Italy in 1921–22 made it impossible; in fact the party never received any invitation to attend any meetings aimed at founding an alliance of parties. The party didn't intervene at the meeting to constitute the trade-union alliance called by the railway workers because it didn't want to lend itself to maneuvers which might have compromised the alliance itself, and which might have been blamed on the party; it had already shown beforehand though that it approved of the initiative by stating that all communist workers within the new organization would observe discipline towards it.

Certain contacts between political groups would eventually take place; the communist party wouldn't refuse to take part but they would come to nothing, demonstrating both the impossibility of arriving at an understanding on the terrain of political action, and the defeatism of every other group. During the retreat, the leadership was able to preserve the confidence of the workers in their own class, and raise the political consciousness of the vanguard, by heading off the traditional maneuverings of pseudo-revolutionary groups and parties within the proletariat. Despite the efforts of the party, it was not until later, August 1922, that a generalized mobilization took place; but proletarian defeat was inevitable and from then on fascism, openly supported in their violent campaigns by the forces of a declaredly liberal democratic State, became master of the country. The "March on Rome" which happened afterwards merely legitimized fascism's predomination in a formal sense.

Even now, despite reduced proletarian activity, the party's influence still predominated over the maximalists and reformists, its progress having already been demonstrated by the 1921 election results and the extensive consultations that took place within the Confederation of Labour.

#### *4. – Relations between the Italian Left and the Communist International*

The Rome Congress, held in March 1922, crystallized a theoretical divergence between the Italian Left and the majority of the International. It was a divergence which had been expressed before, rather badly, by our delegations to the Third World Congress and the Enlarged Executive of February 1922, where, especially on the first occasion, some errors of the infantalist variety were certainly committed. The Rome Theses would constitute the happy theoretical and political liquidation of any peril of left-wing opportunism in the Italian Party.



As far as Party practice was concerned the only divergence with the international was over what tactic to adopt towards the maximalists, but such divergences appeared resolved by the unitary results which emerged from the socialist Congress in October 1921.

The Rome Theses were adopted as a contribution by the party to the International's decision-making and not as an immediate line of action; this was confirmed by the party directorate at the Enlarged Executive of 1922, and we didn't embark on a theoretical debate precisely out of discipline to the International and its ruling against it.

In August 1922, however, the International didn't interpret the various factors in the same way as the Party directorate, but reckoned that the Italian situation was unstable in the sense of the State's weakened resistance and thought of reinforcing the party on the basis of a fusion with the maximalists considering as the decisive factor not the lessons learnt during the vast strike maneuver in August, but the split between the maximalists and the Unitarians.

It is from this moment that the two political lines diverge in a definitive way. At the Fourth World Congress in December 1922, the old Directorate opposed the majority thesis and, on their return to Italy, the delegates would pass the matter over to the merger Commission, unanimously declining to take any responsibility for the decision, though of course retaining their administrative functions.

Then came the arrests in February 1923 and the big offensive against the party; finally during the Enlarged Executive meeting in June 1923 the old executive was deposed and completely replaced and several party leaders would simply resign as a logical consequence. In May 1924, a party consultative conference would still give the Left an overwhelming majority over the Centre and the Right and thus it would attend the Fifth World Congress in 1924.

##### 5. – *The “Ordinovist” tradition of the present leadership*

The *Ordine Nuovo* group was formed in Turin by a group of intellectuals, who established contacts with the proletarian masses in industry at a time when the abstentionist fraction in Turin already had a large following. The volatile ideology of this group is mainly derived from philosophical conceptions of a bourgeois and idealist nature partly inherited from Benedetto Croce. This group aligned itself with communist directives very late in the day, and would always display residual errors linked to its origins. It understood the significance of the Russian Revolution too late to be able to apply it usefully to the proletarian struggle in Italy. In November 1917, comrade Gramsci published an article in *Avanti!* asserting that the Russian Revolution had given the lie to Marx's historical materialism and the theories in “Capital,” and gave an essentially idealist explanation. The extreme left current that

the youth federation belonged to responded immediately to this article.

The subsequent ideological development of the “Ordinivist” group, as their publication *Ordino Nuovo* shows, has led to a non-Marxist and non-Leninist interpretation of the workers’ movement. The questions of the role of the unions and the party, armed struggle and conquest of power, and the construction of socialism are not posed correctly in their theory, and they have evolved instead the conception of a systematic organization of the labouring classes which was “necessary” rather than “voluntary,” and strictly bound up with the mechanism of capitalist industrial production.

Setting out from the internal commissions, this system was supposed to culminate simultaneously in the proletarian and Communist International, in the Soviets and in the workers’ State by way of the factory councils, which were held to embody the latter even before the collapse of capitalist power.

And what is more, even during the bourgeois epoch, this system was supposed to assume the function of constructing the new economy by calling for and exercising workers’ control over production.

Later on, all the non-Marxist aspects of “Ordinivist” ideology—utopianism, Proudhon inspired syndicalism, and economic gradualism before the conquest of power, i.e., reformism—were apparently dropped in order to be gradually substituted with the entirely different theories of Leninism. However, the fact that this substitution took place on a superficial and fictitious level could only have been avoided if the “Ordinovists” hadn’t split from and opposed the Left; a group whose traditions, rather than converging with the Bolsheviks in an entirely impulsive way, represented a serious contribution, derived not from academic and bookish dissertations on bourgeois tomes but from proletarian class experience. Certainly the “Ordinovists” hadn’t been prevented from learning and improving within the strictly collaborative framework which was lacking later on. As it turned out, we greeted the announcements of the “Ordinivist” leaders with a certain tinge of irony when they announced that they were bolshevizing the very people who had actually set them on the road to Bolshevik positions by serious and Marxist means, rather than by chattering about mechanistic and bureaucratic procedures.

Up until shortly before the 1920 World Congress, the “Ordinovists” were opposed to a split in the old party, and they posed all trade-union questions incorrectly. The International’s representative in Italy had to polemicize against them on the questions of the factory councils and the premature constitution of the Soviets.

In April 1920, the Turin Section approved the famous *Ordine Nuovo* theses, which were drawn up by comrade Gramsci and adopted by a committee composed of both “Ordinovists” and Abstentionists. These theses, cited in the Second Congress’s resolution, in fact expressed, despite disagreements about elections, the

common thinking of the nascent communist fraction; they weren't distinctly "Ordinovist" positions, but consisted of points already clarified and accepted by the party's left-wing long before.

The "Ordinovists" would rally around the Left's positions on the International for a while, but the thinking expressed in the Rome Theses was essentially different from theirs, even if they considered it opportune to vote for them.

The true precursor of "Ordinovism's" present adherence to the tactics and general line of the International was really comrade Tasca and his opposition to the Left at the Rome Congress.

Given, on the one hand, the "Ordinovist" group's characteristic particularism and its taste for the concrete inherited from idealistic bourgeois positions, and, on the other hand, the superficial and therefore incomplete adherences allowed for by the International's leadership, we are forced to conclude, despite all their loud protestations of orthodoxy, that the theoretical adherence (of decisive importance in terms of providing a basis for actual policies) of the Ordinovists to Leninism is about as worthless as their adherence to the Rome Theses.

#### *6. – The political work of the present Party leadership*

From 1923 until now, the work of the Party leadership, which we must bear in mind took place in difficult circumstances, has led to mistakes which are essentially similar to those pointed out apropos the international question, but which have been severely aggravated at least partly by the initial Ordinovist deviations.

Participating in the 1924 elections was a very fortunate political act, but one cannot say the same about the proposal for joint action with the socialist parties nor of the way it was labelled "proletarian unity." Just as deplorable was the excessive tolerance shown towards some of the "Terzini's" electoral maneuvers. But the most serious problems are posed apropos the open crisis that followed Matteotti's assassination.

The leadership's policies were based on the absurd view that the weakening of fascism would propel the middle classes into action first, and then the proletariat. This implied on the one hand a lack of faith in the capacity of the proletariat to act as a class, despite its continued alertness under the suffocating strictures of fascism, and on the other, an over-estimation of the initiative of the middle-class. In fact, even without referring to the clear Marxist theoretical positions on this matter, the central lesson to draw from the Italian experience has been that the intermediary layers will passively tail along behind the strongest and may therefore back either side. Thus in 1919-1920 they backed the proletariat, then between 1921-22-23 they went behind fascism, and now, after a significant period of major upheaval in 1924-25, they are backing fascism again.

The leadership were mistaken in abandoning parliament and participating in the first meetings of the Aventine when they should have remained in Parliament, launched a political attack on the government, and immediately taken up a position opposed to the moral and constitutional prejudices of the Aventine, which would determine the outcome of the crisis in fascism's favor. This wouldn't have prevented the communists from making the decision to abandon parliament, and would have allowed them to do so whilst keeping their specific identity intact, and allowed them to leave at the only appropriate time, i.e. when the situation was ripe to call on the masses to take direct action. It was one of those crucial moments which affect how future situations will turn out; the error was therefore a fundamental one, a decisive test of the leadership's capabilities, and it led to a highly unfavorable utilization by the working class both of the weakening of fascism and the resounding failure of the Aventine.

The Return to Parliament in November 1924 and the statement issued by Repossi were beneficial, as the wave of proletarian consensus showed, but they came too late. The leadership wavered for a long time, and only finally made a decision under pressure from the party and the Left. The preparation of the Party was made on the basis of dreary directives and a fantastically erroneous assessment of the situation's latent possibilities (report by Gramsci to the Central Committee, August 1924). The preparation of the masses, which leant towards supporting the Aventine rather than wishing for its collapse, was in any case made worse when the party proposed to the opposition parties that they set up their own Anti-parliament. This tactic in any case conflicted with the decisions of the International, which never envisaged proposals being made to parties which were clearly bourgeois; worse still, it lay totally outside the domain of communist principles and tactics, and outside the Marxist conception of history. Any possible explanation that the leadership might have had for this tactic aside—an explanation which was doomed to have very limited repercussions anyway—there is no doubt that it presented the masses with an illusory Anti-State, opposed to and warring against the traditional State apparatus, whilst in the historical perspective of our programme, there is no basis for an Anti-State other than the representation of the one productive class, namely, the Soviet.

To call for an Anti-parliament, relying in the country on the support of the workers' and peasants' committees, meant entrusting the leadership of the proletariat to representatives of groups that are socially capitalist, like Amendola, Agnelli, Albertini, etc.

Besides the certainty that such a situation won't arise, a situation which could only be described as a betrayal anyway, just putting it forward in the first place as a point of view derived from a communist proposal involves a betrayal of principles

and a weakening of the revolutionary preparation of the proletariat.

Other aspects of the work of the leadership also lend themselves to criticism. There has been a welter of watchwords that correspond neither to any genuine possibility of realization, nor to any visible signs of agitation outside the party machine. The core demand for workers and peasants' committees, justified in a confusing and contradictory way, has been neither understood nor abided by.

#### *7. – The party's trade-union activity*

During the March 1925 metalworkers strike another serious mistake was made. The leadership should have predicted that the proletariat's disillusionment with the Aventine would propel it into class actions and a wave of strikes. If the leadership had foreseen this, it might have been possible to push the F.I.O.M. into a national strike (just as it had managed to get it to take part in the strike initiated by the fascists) by setting up a metalworker's agitation committee based on the local organizations, which throughout the country had been highly supportive of the strike.

The stance the leadership has taken on the trade unions hasn't corresponded clearly with the watchword of trade-union unification inside the Confederation; a watchword that should still be adhered to despite the organizational decomposition of the latter. The party's directives on the unions have shown evidence of Ordinovist errors as regards action in the factories: not only has it created, or is proposing to create, a multitude of conflicting organisms in the factories, but it has frequently issued watchwords which depreciate trade-unions and the idea of their necessity as organs of proletarian struggle.

A consequence of this error was the paltry settlement with FIAT in Turin; as was the confusion surrounding the factory elections, where the criteria for choosing between classist or party lists of candidates, that is on trade-union terrain, wasn't posed correctly.

#### *8. – Party activity in agrarian and national matters*

It is quite correct to have issued the call for the formation of peasant defense associations, but this work has been conducted too exclusively from on high by a party bureau.

Despite the situation's inherent difficulties, it is necessary to declare that viewing our tasks in this area in a bureaucratic way is dangerous, indeed the same goes for every other party activity.

A correct relationship between peasant associations and workers' unions must be clearly established along the following lines: whilst agricultural wage labourers must form a federation which adheres to the Confederazione del Lavoro, a strict alliance must exist between the latter and the peasant defense associations at both

the central and local levels.

All regionalist, and particularly “southernist,” conceptions (and there is already some evidence of this) must be avoided when dealing with the agrarian question. This is equally true with regard to the demands for regional autonomy which have been advanced by certain new parties; who we must fight openly as reactionaries, instead of sitting around the table with them engaging in pointless negotiations.

The tactic of seeking an alliance with the left wing of the Popular Party (Miglioli) and the peasant’s party has not given favorable results.

Once again concessions have been made to politicians who are outside any classist tradition; without obtaining the expected shift in the masses this has, on the contrary, often disorientated parts of our organization. It is equally wrong to overestimate the significance of the maneuvers amongst the peasantry for a hypothetical political campaign against the influence of the Vatican; the problem certainly exists but it won’t be resolved adequately by such means.

#### *9. – The Leadership’s organizational work*

There is no doubt that the work of reorganizing the party after the fascist storm has produced some excellent results. However, it has retained an overly technical character; instead of ensuring centralization by means of clear and uniform statutory norms applicable to every comrade and local committee, the attempt was made to enforce it solely by means of interventions by the central apparatus. It would have been a major step forward to have allowed the base organizations to return to electing their own committees, especially during the periods when the circumstances most favored it.

Regarding the increase, then the subsequent decrease, in the party’s membership, not to mention the departure of elements recruited during the Matteotti crisis who are leaving with the same facility as they arrived, it goes to show how matters such as these depend on changing circumstances rather than on any hypothetical advantages that a general change of direction might have.

The effects and advantages of the month-long campaign of recruitment have been exaggerated. As for organization at the level of the cell, evidently the leadership must put into effect the Comintern’s general resolutions, a matter we have already referred to elsewhere. However, it has been done in an irregular and uneven fashion involving a host of contradictions, and only after much pressure from the rank-and-file has a certain accommodation been reached.

It would be better if the system of inter-regional secretaries was substituted with a Corp of inspectors, thereby establishing direct links which were political rather than technical between the leadership and the traditional rank-and-file organizations of the party i.e., the provincial federations. The principal duty of the inspectors

should be to actively intervene when the fundamental party organization needs to be rebuilt, and then look after and assist it until normal functioning is established.

#### *10. – The leadership and the question of fractionism*

The campaign which culminated in the preparations for our Third Congress was deliberately launched after the Fifth World Congress not as a work of propaganda and elaboration of the directives of the International throughout the party, with the aim of creating a really collective and advanced consciousness, but as an agitation aiming to get comrades to renounce their adherence to the opinions of the Left as quickly as possible and with minimum effort. No thought was given to whether this would be useful or damaging to the party with regard to its effectiveness toward the external enemy, the only objective was to attain this internal objective by any means.

We have spoken elsewhere, from a historical and theoretical perspective, about the delusion of repressing fractionism from above. The Fifth Congress, in the case of Italy, accepted that the Left were refraining from working as an opposition although still participating in all aspects of party work, except within the political leadership, and it therefore agreed that pressure on them from above should be stopped. This agreement was however broken by the leadership in a campaign which consisted not of ideological postulates and tactics, but of disciplinary accusations towards individual comrades who were brought before federal congresses and focused on in a one-sided way.

On the announcement of the Congress, an “Entente Committee” was spontaneously constituted with the aim of preventing individuals and groups from reacting by leaving the party, and in order to channel the action of all the Left comrades into a common and responsible line, within the strict limits of discipline, with the proviso that the rights of all comrades to be involved in party consultations was guaranteed. This action was seized on by the leadership who launched a campaign which portrayed the comrades of the Left as fractionists and scissionists, whose right to defend themselves was withdrawn and against whom votes were obtained from the federal committees by exerting pressure from above.

This campaign continued with a fractionist revision of the party apparatus and of the local cadres, through the way in which written contributions to the discussion were presented, and by the refusal to allow representatives of the Left to participate in the federal congresses. Crowning it all there was the unheard of system of automatically attributing the votes of all those absent from conference to the theses of the leadership.

Whatever the effect of such measures may be in terms of producing a simple numerical majority, in fact rather than enhancing the ideological consciousness of

the party and its prestige amongst the masses they have damaged it. If the worst consequences have been avoided this is due to the moderation of the comrades of the Left; who have put up with such a hammering not because they believed it to be in the least bit justified, but solely because they are devoted to the party cause.

### *11. – Draft programme of party work*

The premises from which, in the Left's view, the general and particular duties of the party should spring, are defined in the preceding theses. It is evident, however, that the question can only be tackled on the basis of international decisions. The Left can therefore only outline a draft programme of action as a proposal to the International about how the tasks of its Italian section might best be realized.

The party must prepare the proletariat for a revival of its classist activity and for the struggle against fascism by drawing on the harsh experiences of recent times. At the same time, we need to disenchant the proletariat of the notion that there is anything to be gained from a change in bourgeois politics, or that any help will be forthcoming from the urban middle classes. The experiences of the liberal-democratic period can be used to prevent the re-emergence of these pacifistic illusions.

The party will address no proposals for joint actions to the parties of the anti-fascist opposition, neither will it engage in politics aimed at detaching a left-wing from this opposition, and nor will it attempt to push so-called left-wing parties "further to the left."

In order to mobilize the masses around its programme, the party will subscribe to the tactic of the united front from below and will keep an attentive eye on the economic situation in order to formulate immediate demands. The party will refrain from advocating as a central political demand the accession of a government that concedes guarantees of liberty; it will not put forward "liberty for all" as an objective of class conquest, but will emphasize on the contrary that freedom for the workers will entail infringing the liberties of the exploiters and the bourgeoisie.

Faced today with the grave problem of a weakening of the class unions and of the other immediate organs of the proletariat, the party will call for the defense of the traditional red unions and for the necessity of their rebirth. In its work in the factories, it will avoid creating organs if they tend to undermine this rebuilding of the trade unions. Taking the present situation into account, the party will work towards getting the unions to operate within the framework of "union factory sections"; which representing a strong union tradition, are the appropriate bodies for leading workers' struggles insofar as today it is precisely in the factories where opportunities for struggle exist. We will attempt to get the illegal internal commissions elected through the union factory section, with the reservation that, as soon as it is possible (it isn't at present) the committees be elected by an assembly of the



factory personnel.

As regards the question of organization in the countryside, reference can be made to what we have said regarding the agrarian situation.

Once all the possibilities for proletarian groups to organize have been utilized to the maximum, we may resort to the watchword “workers’ and peasants’ committees” observing the following criteria:

- a) The watchword of constituting workers’ and peasants’ committees must not be launched in a casual and intermittent way, but set forth in an energetic campaign when a changing situation has made the need for a new framework clear to the masses, that is: when the watchword can be identified not just as a call to organize, but as a definite call to action;
- b) The nucleus of the committees will have to be constituted by representatives from the traditional mass organizations, such as the unions and analogous organisms, despite these having been mutilated by reaction. It must not include convocations of political delegates;
- c) At a later date we’ll be able to call on the committees to have elections, but we will have to clarify beforehand that these are not Soviets i.e. organs of proletarian government, but expressions of a local and national alliance of all the exploited for their joint defense.

Regarding relations with fascist unions: inasmuch as today the latter don’t present themselves even in a formal sense as voluntary associations of the masses, there must be an overall rejection of the call to penetrate these unions in order to break them up. The watchword of the rebuilding the Red unions must be issued in conjunction with the denunciation of the fascist unions.

The organizational measures that should be adopted inside the party have been indicated in part. Under present conditions, it is necessary to co-ordinate such measures with requirements that we can’t go into here (clandestinely). It is nevertheless an urgent necessity that they are systematized and formulated as clear statutory norms binding on all in order to avoid confusing healthy centralism with blind obedience to arbitrary and conflicting instructions; a method which puts genuine party unity in jeopardy.

## *12. – On Party’s Internal Situation*

The internal political and organizational problems which our party faces cannot be resolved in a definitive way within the national framework, as the solution depends on the working out of the internal situation and on the politics of the International as a whole. It would be a serious and shameful mistake if the national and international leaders continue to deploy the stupid method of exerting pressure from

above against the Left and the reduction of complex problems of Party politics and ideology to cases of personal conduct.

Since the Left is going to stick to its opinions, those comrades who have no intention of renouncing them should be allowed, in an atmosphere free of scheming and mutual recriminations, to carry out the loyal commitment they have given, that is; to abide by the decisions of the party organs and to renounce all oppositional work, whilst being exempted from the requirement of participating in the leadership. Evidently this proposal shows that the situation is far from perfect, but it would be dangerous to delude the party that these internal difficulties can be eliminated by simply applying mechanical measures to organizational problems, or by taking up personal positions. To spread such an illusion would be tantamount to making a severe attack on the party.

Only by abandoning this small-minded approach, appreciating the true magnitude of the problem, and placing it before the party and the international, will we truly achieve the aim of avoiding a poisoning of the party atmosphere and move on to tackle all the difficulties which the party is called on to face today.

*(Part One of the Lyon Theses, the "General Questions," appeared in "L'Unità" on the 12, 14, 23 & 26 January; the complete text as a pamphlet with the title "Theses for the Third Congress," Rome 1926).*

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