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## International Solidarity and Revolutionary Communist Preparation Against Right-wing and Left-wing “sovereignism”

The contradictions of the capitalist economy are constantly eroding the foundations of the domination of the bourgeois class, which is forced to work tirelessly to contain the social effects of the crisis. While on the one hand it must act to intensify the economic exploitation of the proletariat, on the other hand it must prevent the working masses from regaining class independence and expressing effective defensive struggles.

This containment of the proletariat is carried out, to a great extent, through the material coercion intrinsic to the economic mechanism of the extraction of surplus value, but a further and far from secondary role is assigned to the ideological control over the whole proletariat. Our class science, which sees a determinism in the future of society, has never underestimated this aspect, given that in the “German Ideology”, a work by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels of 1846, it was already stated that the dominant ideology in every society is always that of the dominant class, which has not only a monopoly of the means of material production but also of the means of intellectual production. Hence the role that is entrusted to the gigantic apparatus of reproducing this ideology, which includes the press, television, radio, school, churches, publishing houses, etc.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the “politics” of the bourgeois world has for decades become the subject of a media show that is as trivial as it is noisy and redundant, in order to keep the proletariat confused and paralysed. Thus, the incessant political struggle between the different bourgeois sub-classes, consumed between manoeuvres and palace intrigues, today rebounds in the empty and senseless news mash-ups and in the exhausting parades of talk shows. Not that the bourgeoisie has ever offered a decent show of itself, not even in its youthful and revolutionary spring, a golden age on which the sun has forever set in the West, and whose return we will certainly not invoke – in contrast to the left wing of the bourgeoisie, with its vacuous talk of democratic renewal.

However, in recent times the “political” scene has offered a spectacle that is even more coarse and vulgar, and the phenomenon is clearly general, evident in many countries. The bourgeoisie hides its class dictatorship and its genuine remote centres of power under a shimmering efflorescence of parties, of ideologies made up only of catchphrases, of political “personalities”, which are as loudly trumpeted as they are increasingly and endlessly inept and wicked, both inside and outside parliaments.

Examples can be seen in Trump, Brexit, Germany's Alternative for Germany and the new Italian government led by the front man Giuseppe Conte: big news! They all shamelessly and unhesitatingly proclaim an aggressive, xenophobic, "sovereign" nationalism, the same one that previous governments had practiced, albeit in a badly concealed manner while feigning a certain embarrassment, which is echoed in the mainstream media. As a result, the populists can be more open. How often do we hear of these people, "they have the courage to say what people are thinking". But even the most philistine idealist could not possibly maintain that "what people are thinking" simply enters their heads from nowhere!

Since there is a risk that the working class may identify capital as its true enemy, what better than pointing the finger at immigrants, taking cowardly persecutory positions towards these proletarians and ethnic minorities, accusing them of all evils in the name of an alleged purity of national, racial and religious traditions. And how well does the inevitable, generically "humanitarian" reaction, whether Christian or secular, serve the status quo, such as "let's help them at home" and "let's help but let's put British/Italians/Germans/Americans first"?

The only real difference is in the verbiage of these political salesmen. "Sovereignism". First of all, it is nothing more than a euphemism for nationalism, a term which, especially in Germany and Italy, could not be used to frame a proletariat unwilling to kneel before the bloodthirsty idol of the "fatherland", permanently in the heat of military adventures. This was difficult if not impossible for many decades, after the tragic experience of the two world wars. In other countries that suffered relatively less in those wars (contrary to the self-serving national myths about sacrifice and "the greatest generation") such as the United Kingdom and the United States, sovereignism gained traction more readily as a way to misrepresent economic decline as a phenomenon imposed by "bad deals" (Trump) or European interference (Brexit). But despite such differences by country, there is a common thread in the revisiting and re-baptizing of ancient and stale categories whenever they are useful to disguise and repackage the purposes of the bourgeois reason of State, which of course cannot be confessed in its naked form.

In short, a new opiate, or hallucinogenic, is being experimented, with countries that have played the role of political laboratory several times in modern and contemporary history taking the lead: notably Britain, the USA and Italy.

Yet it was the work of previous left-wing or liberal governments that prepared the ground for the current right-wing populism of the current governments: for example, the slogan of "British jobs for British workers" touted by the Labour Party and Barack Obama's American Jobs Act, which he announced with the words, "we're

going to make sure the next generation of manufacturing takes root not in China or Europe, but right here, in the United States of America”.

The sovereign apparel currently donned by the Italian bourgeoisie, and most strongly flaunted in the “right-wing populism” of Conte and Salvini, is in turn the result of the “left-wing populism” of previous governments. It was the government of Paolo Gentiloni that supported the mystification of the “immigration emergency” to direct it in a reactionary direction and confuse the working masses, diverting them from the problems linked to their living conditions in times of economic crisis. It was the Gentiloni government that, working with the government in Tripoli, ensured that tens of thousands of migrants ended up in concentration camps to suffer, through horrendous torture, the “guilt” of having escaped war and hunger.

In the United Kingdom it was the conservative-liberal coalition government of David Cameron that set an artificial “target” on immigration in 2013, effectively clearing the ground for the sovereignty fanatics of the Tory right and UKIP.

The regime of capital needs the pastiche of fake contrasts between fictitious groups, which are an expression of interchangeable political forces; all of them however are confederated against the working class. Just as democracy in the imperialist phase of capitalism is complementary to and not opposed to fascism, so too antifascists side only in words against the fascists, wrapping themselves in the same cloak of totalitarianism, using fascism’s own “post-democratic” and authoritarian methods, and sharing the same rusty ideological arsenal made up of prejudices and trivial clichés. Similarly, the political forces that make the fight against populism their banner, steal the latter’s watchwords and choose the same themes of electoral propaganda and miseducation of the proletariat.

We discover nothing original in the bourgeoisie recruiting mainstream democratic parties of left and right to cooperate in controlling the proletarian masses with the most brutal repression. In Italy, this is termed “trasformismo” and goes all the way back to the period after unification, long before Mussolini. It already prefigured many elements of fascism: Giovanni Amendola, champion of “democratic irredentism” and interventionist in the First World War, an anti-fascist, was the notorious minister of the colonies in the Facta government up until Mussolini’s March on Rome to seize power in 1922. Stalinism in the Second World War, siding with one of the two imperialist fronts, subdued the partisan military organization under the allied commands, which in the meantime bombed the proletarian districts of the cities, just as the Allies bombed proletarian districts of German cities in the name of combating Nazism. After the war, the Stalinist party of the so-called “Italian way to socialism”, that of the governments of National Unity, sowed the

seed of chauvinism within the working class with a constant reminder of the “general interests of the Nation”.

In Britain, the Labour Party was from the very first keen to establish its reputation as a party of government; it gave its enthusiastic support for the First World War, disassociated itself from the General Strike of 1926 in the “national interest” and was unstinting in its prosecution of the Second World War behind the imperialist front under the banner of democracy. It was Ernest Bevin, co-founder of the Transport & General Workers’ Union, who mobilized organized labour behind the war effort and then, as Foreign Secretary in the post-war period, consolidated the Cold War alliance with America and made anti-communism a central ideological plank of the Labour Party. In America, it was the “left-wing” Democratic Party that was most assertive of US imperialism and prosecution of the Cold War on a global scale.

As Marxists we certainly do not deny the historical function of national sovereignty in the establishment of the revolutionary bourgeoisie and its states. But, unlike the idealistic and romantic conceptions with which the bourgeoisie represented and exalted the concept of the nation, we identify its essentially economic function aimed at the unification and protection of the markets.

But, as was pointed out in 1848 by the Manifesto of the Communist Party, the degree of interrelation between the different cultures and geographical areas of the world was already very high at that time, over and above national borders:

“The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world-market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption of all countries. To the great chagrin of Reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilised nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the productions of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature (…)

“Modern industry has established the world-market, for which the discovery of America paved the way. This market has given an immense development to commerce, to navigation, to communication by land. This development has, in its time, reacted on the extension of industry; and in proportion as industry, commerce, navigation, railways extended”.

On the eve of the great upheaval of 1848, which upset the old European balances, the Manifesto still recognized a progressive role to the nationalities that had to shake the yoke of foreign domination, like Poland, or had yet to conclude the process of state unification like Germany and Italy. The formation of new states by what were then considered “vital nations”, in reference to their economic potential, was an undoubted step forward in removing those feudal obstacles that prevented the full development of capitalism. Marx and Engels wrote that the proletariat had to fight against “the enemies of their enemies”, that is, in an alliance with the bourgeoisie against the decrepit nobility.

However, the two authors of The Communist Manifesto warned already at that time: the proletariat has no fatherland. Therefore, the support that the proletariat lent to the bourgeoisie in its revolutionary phase did not in the least imply identification with the destiny of the nation: once the objective of overthrowing the feudal classes had been reached, the process of “permanent revolution” would have placed the proletariat in armed collision with the bourgeoisie.

This happened in France already in June 1848 with the bloody armed clash in Paris, which Marx defined as “the first great battle between the two classes into which modern society is divided, in a struggle for the preservation or destruction of the bourgeois order”.

The massacres of defenceless workers in June 1848 were replicated on a much larger scale by mass shootings in the 1871 repression of the Paris Commune. In this case a decisive role was played by the collaboration between the Prussian and the Versailles governments, which were enemies until the day before. As Marx commented on that occasion, “The highest heroic effort of which old society is still capable is national war; and this is now proved to be a mere governmental humbug, intended to defer the struggle of classes, and to be thrown aside as soon as that class struggle bursts out into civil war. Class rule is no longer able to disguise itself in a national uniform; the national governments are one as against the proletariat!”

Today, just 150 years later, the phase of national revolutions must be considered

closed, not only in Europe but in the whole world. And in an economically and politically interconnected world such as the present one, the sovereignty of a State means only the following: war on the working class within its borders, and outside of these, war on the other States in every possible way.

Because not even the neologism of “globalization” convinces us, and even less that of “globalism”, meaning the attempt of the “elites” of international high finance to wrest any real economic and political power from the national States, to then subjugate them all together to a single control: When the supporters of sovereignty determine who is responsible for the failures of the capital regime, they do not blame the bourgeois class as a whole; instead they attack a few “big families” or individual tycoons, such as the Rothschilds or George Soros.

When speaking of “globalism” does not serve the task of denying the common interests of the working class, proletarian internationalism is deemed to be a “conspiracy”, perhaps a Jewish and/or Masonic one, designed to eradicate national cultural peculiarities. In the UK and Germany in particular, the talk is of an enforced “Islamization” under the direction of shadowy anti-national forces.

There is nothing new in this, but to come right up to date, the ideological category of sovereignism now stands in opposition to “multilateral cooperation”. This is the world-view that animates Trump’s “Make America Great Again” and the British supporters of a “no-deal” Brexit, who constantly invoke “democracy” and “the will of the people” against internationalist elites.

What is the truth behind this? That an immense and real tension is growing beneath the surface: imperialism reveals itself more and more, connects and crushes the planet; but there are limits to super-imperialism, which make it incompatible with capitalism and make it an illusion, a stage in human history that will never be reached. This permanent contradiction regulates the world cycle of peace and war, with the breaking of old alliances between states and the ephemeral formation of new ones. The gunboats of the inter-imperialist have already started to fire, and with large calibre missiles. For the time being this is confined to international trade, but the missiles are worth billions of dollars, and have already hit Volkswagen, with the prolonged spiel about emissions and Google, with the fiscal penalty in Europe.

The bourgeois class is indeed an international class, to which belong the national states that it uses to subjugate and divide the proletariat. But the proletariat is also a class that is by nature international, which will be able to deploy its extraordinary strength only through its united struggle in all countries, overthrowing

the rotten regime of capital and imposing its dictatorship. To the “sovereigns” of the right, left and centre, we leave the questionable delights of the “economic fatherland”, the false national cultural traditions and the fetishism of money; for the proletarians of every language and colour there is an entire world to be conquered.

## The Labor Movement in the United States of America (Part 7)

### The North American Working Class and the Civil War

General meeting January 2009

#### Another crisis

In 1857 another serious economic crisis occurred. The crisis unleashed demonstrations by the unemployed; for the first time the trade union movement put forward the demand for public works in a number of cases. The return of the crisis was accompanied by the establishment, in a large number of trades, of strike and trade union committees of a permanent nature, some of them even on a national scale.

The situation of discontent and the consequent struggles demonstrated the true nature of “free labor” for the working class. Not a single bourgeois apostle of “free labor” endorsed the demand for public works to increase employment, and in the winter of slump of 1857, those who supported private initiatives to help the unemployed were few and far between. The most eminent Republicans considered the two measures as unjustified interventions in free markets, which would have decreased proletarians’ “desire to work”: as can be seen, bourgeois rhetoric is always the same and does not sparkle with originality. Some tame journalists came to assert that a brief period “of hardship” was what was needed to bring “dissolute” workers back into line, workers who foolishly squandered their wages, keeping their families in poverty in the good times, and then, when things went bad, had the nerve to ask for public assistance. The same pen-pushers showed their disgust for the workers when, in the course of the upturn of 1858, they moved on from demonstrations of the unemployed to holding trade union meetings. One of them wrote that “the vast majority of the working class is a free, happy and independent class”.

No-one would have said this, judging by the agitation that was developing in the footwear-producing cities of New England. Apart from inadequate wages, the discontent arose from the speed-ups following the partial mechanization of the productive process. The stitching machines had to be concentrated in the factory, and this eliminated home workers from the process; added to which all of the upstream and downstream stitching operations had to be accelerated to keep pace with the machines. The workers in Lynn and its surroundings reacted, reviving the labor union and demanding wage increases; confronted with the bosses’ refusal, in

1860 a good 10,000 workers went on strike in eastern Massachusetts. As if by magic, ethnic differences disappeared; in one city, which had been a nativist stronghold, Irish workers marched side-by-side with protestant comrades for the entire winter.

As a result of the trade union discrimination with regard to women, both inside the factory and outside, and of the separation from home workers, the strike was defeated and in April the workers returned to work. In reality it was not a complete defeat: what the bosses resisted most was union recognition. Some recognized it, others only conceded wage increases, others still resisted more. Thus here and there the factories started to reopen, and in the end strike was fatally finished.

But the strike took on a significance that went beyond the single event, forming a link between the past and future of the class: the radical belief that had inspired the movement thirty years earlier was turned in orators' slogans with all its vehemence against "the oppressors of the workers" who "forged the chains of slavery and clasped them to proletarians' wrists". But it was also, for the first time, a strike by factory workers, not by apprentices or workers in artisan workshops, or by domestic employees and laborers, as in the past; it was the first major strike to mark the passage between artisan production and large-scale industrial production. The strikers did not only have to confront the bosses, but also the militia, who after just a week were mobilized to escort the wagons that carried raw materials for work by strikebreakers. Not a single shot was fired, and there were no victims this time. The workers showed extreme care in preventing intemperate behavior within their ranks, to the point of prohibiting the sale of alcohol in certain zones and quarters, something that was also recognized in the bourgeois press. But the military presence anticipated much harder times, which were ushered in for workers involved in mass strikes during the so-called "golden age".

For the time being, economic struggles attenuated in the great mobilization for the Civil War, which the workers took part in with enthusiasm, and often with the blessing of the bosses. The main motivation was not the thirst for justice for the slave, but more often the fear that slavery threatened free labor. The justifications for the war were shared by natives and Germans, less so among the Irish who, because of their lower social status, did not see how things could get any worse for them with the victory of the South. In the absence of a class party, proletarians fell prey to the preaching of evangelicals and "free labor" activists. Other themes designed to win the support of proletarians for the war were the promise of speeding up the process of gaining citizenship, and land for all in the West. Proletarians therefore enlisted and fought, also to the point of self-sacrifice in the

early days.

The war closed a period of infancy for the workers' movement, which left many problems open. Women, non-specialized workers, and, at least in the South the blacks, were still discriminated against from a union perspective. Moreover the class had not succeeded in setting up a political movement that could represent it outside the bipartisan system. However, doubts about the causes of oppression had at least been overcome: no longer did workers see one sole cause in particular, such as the master, the factory boss, the financier, or even alcohol. After 1835 it was clear that oppression resulted from the system of production, and that the only defense, if not the solution, was the class union.

A union which almost succeeded had been broken by the crisis of 1837 and by the penetration of bourgeois propaganda in the form of protestant evangelical preaching, utopianism, "free labor" ideology and ethnicity, the latter unleashed by the strong waves of immigration following the crisis. There was much left to do, but now it was the war that made its voice heard above all the others.

### **Volunteers for the front**

The antislavery attitude of the American proletariat was confirmed in taking a position on secession, first hidden and then openly realized, initially by South Carolina and then by the other Southern States. The workers who gathered in meetings and conventions of various sizes and importance proclaimed their wish to maintain the country in its entirety, and their disgust with the Southern slaveholders, at times expressing the same sentiments towards the northern profiteers. Delegates from the Southern States, such as Virginia, Maryland, Tennessee and Kentucky also participated in the workers' assemblies and spoke out against secession, declaring the world of labor's loyalty to the Union.

Therefore it is no surprise that the first to respond to Lincoln's appeal for the recruitment of volunteers were indeed workers of all trades. Workers from Lowell made up the first corps for the front, followed by Wisconsin lumberjacks. The De Kalb regiment, entirely comprising German employees, departed for the front on 8 July 1861, followed not far behind by the "Garibaldi Guard" comprising Italian workers from New York, the "Polish Legion" and an Irish company, also from New York. Workers represented nearly half of the Northern armies, while, as we have seen, at the time they were a numerical minority of the population of the 34 states; the Senate later calculated that between 500,000 and 750,000 workers had left the factories of the Northern States to become soldiers.

Since the total number of factory workers was less than a million, it was a drain on resources which put various productive sectors in difficulty, footwear in particular, with factories that actually had to close precisely when orders were increasing disproportionately. Therefore the participation of the working class in the war was fundamental for the North's victory, and remarkable when compared to the low numerical weight of the class compared to the total population; it repeated a phenomenon that had already occurred at the time of the War of Independence, although at the time the class was numerically insignificant.

The most conscious part of the class, the trade unionists (of the time!) and members of the Communist Club of New York were particularly active; William Sylvis, who had already distinguished himself as the leader of the iron molders' union, organized the regiment that was the first to hasten to the defense of Washington, threatened by the Southern counter-offensive. Eminent socialists such as Willich, close friend of Marx, Rosa, Jacobi and Weydemeyer achieved high rank in the hierarchy of the Union army. Apart from their enthusiasm these workers and socialists, who, despite often being born abroad were ready to give their lives for the ideals that the North was defending, boasted a considerable military experience acquired in 1848 or, as with many Italians, in Garibaldi's army; experience which was lacking in the rest of the population.

The abolitionist enthusiasm was not limited to American proletarians; also across the Atlantic the defeat of the South was regarded as an objective for workers' progress. "It was not the wisdom of the ruling classes," wrote Marx in the Inaugural Address of the International Working Men's Association (1864) "but the heroic resistance to their criminal folly by the working classes of England, that saved the west of Europe from plunging headlong into an infamous crusade for the perpetuation and propagation of slavery on the other side of the Atlantic".

And yet the blockade imposed by the Union navy on the Southern ports in 1862 started to be effective, and ever less cotton reached English spinning mills. This brought about a crisis in the sector and a consequent high level of unemployment (more than 30% in the large manufacturing centers); but contrary to the expectations of the slaveholders, no voice was raised by workers' representatives for an intervention in favor of the Confederacy. On the contrary, even if many workers in England did not have the vote, their meetings and rallies expressed themselves against intervention with such clarity that the government did not dare to interfere in the conflict.

Many historians are agreed in considering that this English non-intervention was the

main cause of Lincoln's change of course in the debates on slavery: in fact, during the first year of war he had not dared to take a single measure against the "property" of the slaveholders in the areas under Union army occupation; on the contrary, he had disowned those generals who had freed the slaves. In 1862, however, he approved a series of measures in favor of the slaves, culminating in the Proclamation of Emancipation of January 1, 1863; for a deeper analysis of these aspects and all others relating to the Civil War, see Capitalist development and the American Civil War, in "Comunismo", n. 56, July 2004.

### **Workers and Copperheads**

The workers, therefore, were not against the war, especially at the start, nor even against conscription, but rather against its class character, which meant that it was the poor who enlisted, while the rich could sit back in the rear and enrich themselves further. The law on conscription, adopted in 1863, was discriminatory: one could avoid enlistment by finding a substitute, or by paying a tax of \$300. This was a sum representing more than a year's wages for a proletarian, but acceptable to a bourgeois: and certainly there was no shortage of unemployed proletarians who accepted the exchange to guarantee their families' survival.

Discontent spread across large layers of the proletariat, but the revolt against conscription of July 13, 1863 in New York, a few days after the start of the compulsory draft, does not seem to have been purely a workers' movement, although in some cases the social boundaries were wearing thin. It was undoubtedly the result of "Copperhead" propaganda, the name given to the "Peace Democrats", a faction of the membership of the Democratic Party in the North, who were against the war, and who often acted as a Southern fifth column. The turmoil caused serious destruction of goods in the city, and the death of more than 400 people, many of them blacks. But after a careful investigation the Workingmen's Democratic Republican Association of New York, which included typographers, carpenters, woodworkers and hatmakers, rejected the reconstruction of the events that attributed responsibility for the turmoil to the workers. After having accused a section of the bourgeoisie as the instigator, a document concluded: "The workers of New York did not revolt. A few ruthless and dissolute men, who oscillate between the penitentiary and the dark dens of crime, are not the representatives of the workers of the metropolis".

But in reality the Copperhead propaganda did not fail to take hold on just a small part of the class, which was rightly unhappy about the war. Indeed, everything showed that the poor were becoming even poorer, and the rich even richer. After a

brief period of crisis due to the loss of the Southern markets, and a good \$300 million in now unrecoverable credit, the situation changed for the bourgeoisie when the government started to issue orders for military supplies. A new class of millionaires was born, whose fortunes were in large measure the fruit of the terrible corruption of the entire history of America. We have spoken of “shoddy” cloth, which fell to pieces in the rain; but also rifles which exploded in the soldiers’ hands, sand in place of sugar, rye as substitute for coffee, shoes with cardboard soles are some of the grossest and rarely prosecuted examples of the love of country of a bourgeoisie which piled up wealth while it cynically sent the proletariat to the massacre. This is not the place to go into the details about this epic of unbridled profiteering, which also took advantage of the Homestead laws, with land that almost always ended up in the hands of speculators and railroad companies, and the speculation in paper money, which rapidly devalued.

At the same time the living conditions of the proletariat worsened quickly and drastically. Speculation and inflation drove up the prices of foodstuffs, clothing and rents at persistent rates, while salaries stayed the same or increased only imperceptibly. The prices of manufactured goods increased during the war years at an average of 100% per annum; but if you look at the basic necessities, these increased in price even more strongly: a liter of milk, which cost 1.5 cents in 1861, cost 10 cents in 1861, and the same applied to butter, meat, coal etc.

The bosses’ offensive also promoted the approval in 1864 of the Contract Labor Law, which legalized contracts made abroad for importing manpower; by virtue of this law imported workers could not be recruited into the army, and found themselves, once they arrived, in the condition of servants employed in colonial times. These workers were often used, before the law was repealed in 1868, as scabs to wear down strikes.

### **Wartime strikes**

As ever, the working class does not undertake struggles because it is impelled by a rebellious spirit, but because it is forced to do so to defend its living and working conditions. Even more so in a country at war where, while we have seen with how much unscrupulousness the bourgeoisie took every opportunity to make profits, by legal or illicit means, proletarians took up the cause of the war as their own, and were certainly not happy about interrupting production. But neither could they accept being literally reduced to hunger by a class, the bourgeoisie, which certainly did not set an example of patriotism (except of course being patriotic in words when they had to persuade hundreds of thousands to slaughter each other,

while paying a devalued soldier's wage, among other things). Thus, by and by, as prices increased without wages following them, and without the government doing anything to remedy the situation, recourse to economic struggles became inevitable.

When strikes occurred, the bosses, as one would expect, did not hesitate to dust down their hypocritical patriotic rhetoric, above all in sectors directly tied to military activity, which were especially numerous close to the front. How can we produce boots, coal, bullets or caps if the workers go on strike? The Union generals did not fail to reply to these heartfelt appeals in the states where their troops were operating, prohibiting workers' organization, forbidding pickets, protecting scabs, and drawing up blacklists. And for those who did not adapt and dared to go on strike, they were far from reluctant to make arrests without trial, deportations of entire families, or forced return to work at bayonet-point.

The Copperheads did not hesitate to fan the flames of discontent, but it is unclear to what extent they had lost their influence over the attitudes of open class dissatisfaction among groups of workers, which we would still support today. The Copperheads would have had greater success if it had not been for Lincoln himself, who seems to have intervened to prevent the most serious injustices. Thus Lincoln again had the support of the workers for the reelection of 1864, beating the Democrat McClellan.

The war came to an end in the spring of the next year with the defeat of the Southern armies. Strengthened by the knowledge that they had made a decisive contribution to victory, Northern workers did not fail to remind the dominant class what they expected for the future. Among the resolutions adopted on the occasion of a mass rally in Boston on November 2, 1865, one declaimed: "We rejoice that the rebel aristocracy of the South has been crushed, that... beneath the glorious shadow of our victorious flag men of every clime, lineage and color are recognized as free. But while we will bear with patient endurance the burden of the public debt, we yet want it to be known that the workingmen of America will demand in future a more equal share in the wealth their industry creates... and a more equal participation in the privileges and blessings of those free institutions, defended by their manhood on many a bloody field of battle."

The worst years were 1861 and 1862; already in 1863 it began to seem clear that the workers had bargaining power which could be exploited to take back from the bosses at least part of what had been taken away during the wartime emergency. Production was at full speed and it was not easy to find workers. Strikes began to multiply, with much higher levels of success; moreover, after victorious strikes it was normal for a union structure to remain in place, and this was especially true

for the sectors with a high female presence, like those of cigar and clothing manufacture. It is calculated that in 1864 around 200,000 workers joined unions, a little under 20% of the entire industrial workforce. At the same time there was a notable push for the creation of national unions, even if with very varied characteristics: alongside the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, which declined the strike weapon, there were very combative unions, like that of the National Union of Iron Molders, led by William H. Sylvis.

Sylvis was a great trade union organizer. The first problem to be confronted was funding, which was to be ensured with annual contributions made with the issuance of personal membership cards. This was needed to manage funds for strikes, strategically important in the long union struggles. He set up a record of members and centralized organization; among the principles that guided him were the alliance with the blacks, equal pay for men and women (to be admitted into the trade unions), the union's political autonomy and international workers' solidarity. He fought against spontaneous and unprepared strikes, which dissipated energy and were almost always defeated. Sylvis, practically always penniless, travelled across the length and breadth of the country to create the organization (ten thousand miles, using the means of the time), and was the founder and first president of the National Labor Union. His work inspired many national unions of the time, which followed his example to grow organizationally. He died in poverty in 1869 (the family did not even have enough money for his funeral) at the age of 41, having become the International's representative in America. He remains one of the great figures of the American workers' movement.

The bosses' counter-offensive was not late in coming. We have already spoken of blacklists, lockouts, "yellow dog" contracts, and the importation of European contract labor for strikebreaking; we have also recalled the use of the army, locally, to force workers to return to work. A further resource for the bosses was the employment of convicts, whom they paid at 10-15% of the union rate. In New York an entrepreneur moved a foundry to Sing Sing; he was defeated thanks to the struggles led by Sylvis, but in many other cases the unions did not manage to block the maneuver. Many states approved laws that limited the right to strike and unionization, and those who took part in pickets received six months in jail. Other laws conferred on railway companies, and subsequently also those in the minerals and iron and steel sectors, the right to create private police forces, thereby legally establishing territory outside of the laws of the State, despotic statelets within the largest democracy in the world. There were also states that passed more progressive laws, but the difference in this case was that the laws were all disregarded.

While the national unions, with few exceptions, were not very effective during the war years, the working class found its point of contact and organization in the struggles within the Trades Assemblies, which brought together all unions in a given locality. These did not have their own funds, but carried out various networking, political, propaganda, boycott and training activities. An example is the action that took place in the course of the iron molders' strike in San Francisco. Knowing that the bosses had enlisted strikebreakers in the East, the representatives of the city's Trades Assembly sent representatives to meet them to explain the reasons for their strike; when the ship docked in San Francisco the strikebreakers refused to work under these conditions and joined the union. The bosses acknowledged the defeat and conceded wage increases.

The dynamism of the Trades Assemblies is also demonstrated by the attempt that they themselves initiated to create a national organization: their position, which allowed the embrace of a wider scope than that of a single trade, clearly showed that this was the path to follow to strengthen the workers' movement. The initiative concluded with the founding of the Industrial Assembly of North America (1864), which was however very short-lived because of the weakness and inadequate penetration of the national trade unions within the class.

### **The National Labor Union**

The failure of the Industrial Assembly did not erase from the class the awareness that isolated efforts conducted locally could not in any way resolve the huge problems that afflicted the American proletariat. The idea of setting up a structure, an organizational tool, capable of conducting struggles in defense of the interests of the working class, also beyond the scope of pure demands, therefore began to make inroads among the most enlightened representatives of the proletariat: a Labor Party. We have seen how associations with political scope had been born in the 1830s (Working Men's Party) and 1840s (National Reform Association), but whose objectives were derived more from the imagination, often utopian, of the personalities who supported them, rather than being based on an analysis of the general situation of the working class, which by now also had a history spanning several decades and experience that it could refer back to.

In Europe the experience of parties was already advanced, and the many German immigrants, who were highly active in the country's proletarian organizations, certainly contributed to the development of the idea of a modern party in America. Moreover the International Working Men's Association, or First International, had come into existence in 1864, and started to make itself known outside of Europe.

In 1866 some leaders of large unions, including Sylvis, agreed to convene a national Convention to take place on August, 20 in Baltimore. On this day the 60 delegates, who represented local, national and international unions, Trades Assemblies and Eight Hours Leagues, were greeted with a huge banner that read, "Welcome Sons of Toil—From North and South, East and West". Around 60,000 workers were represented, for the most part from the east, but also from Chicago, St. Louis and Detroit. Louis, Detroit.

Most of the work was carried out by committees on various questions. The report of the Committee on Unions and Strikes was important: while it defined strikes as damaging for workers, and to be pursued only when all other methods showed themselves to be inadequate, it exhorted the most widespread unionization possible, of skilled as much as of unskilled workers, and the creation of unions and union sections wherever possible in all sectors, in addition to the wider internationalization of existing unions. Since, given their status, the unskilled would have had difficulty in joining many existing trade unions, the Committee proposed the creation of a Workingmen's Association that they could join, which would be represented in the national congresses.

Political activity was debated by the Commission on the Eight Hour Workday and Political Action: left the option of participating in the activity of political parties to local decision. The proposal was criticized by the delegates because its acceptance would have made the congress a political organization. At this point the representative of the German workers of Chicago intervened, who, while denying that the existing parties could advance workers' interests, asserted that a new party of labor had to be established. Amid applause from the audience, the proposal was included in the Commission's report.

Other resolutions were adopted, even if those of the two Commissions received more attention: in reality the Convention raised all of the substantial issues for the American workers' movement that would remain valid for many years to come.

It proclaimed the boycott of the products of prisoners' labor so long as they did not receive normal wages. It demanded the improvement of workers' living conditions and the clearance of slums. It wanted the creation of technical schools, libraries, high schools; the granting of land to individual settler communities; support for the workers' press; the creation of cooperatives; support for working women.

There is a letter about this from Marx to Kugelmann, dated October 9, 1866, which

reads: "I was exceedingly pleased at the American workers' congress, which took place at the same time in Baltimore. The watchword there was organization for the struggle against capital, and, remarkably enough, most of the demands I had put up for Geneva were put up there, too, by the correct instinct of the workers. In fact it was thanks to taking a position on the 8-hour workday by the Convention that the Geneva Congress of the International, which took place just two weeks later, transformed the demand into the "general platform of the workers of the whole world".

There were however shortcomings in the Convention's resolutions that would contribute towards shortening its life. The first error was really the lack of consideration for the strike weapon: even if the class had recently suffered a series of defeats, this had reinforced the solidarity which had brought about the Convention itself; while the class had little experience with arbitration, which was to substitute for the strike, the resolution hindered agreement on measures for mutual financial aid in the case of prolonged struggles. The other serious shortcoming lay in having carefully avoided the question of black proletarians, having addressed, however timidly, the question of women. Besides this, no organization capable of functioning came out of the meeting. Sylvis, who had not been able to participate owing to his poor health, was very critical on these last points.

The organizational aspects were improved at a subsequent Convention, in Chicago in 1867, but the National Labor Union as such really only saw the light of day in 1867, when Sylvis was elected its president. In just a few months the number of members ran into hundreds of thousands, thanks to a promotional tour by the president.

## The Working Class and Irish Nationalism

(Continued from last issue)

From the First International to the Irish Socialist Republican Party and the formation of the Labour Party

Report presented at the party general meeting in Turin, September 2015

In order to understand how the political and trade union organizations of the working class in Britain affected their parallel formation in Ireland, we will be looking at them in some detail in this second part, and interweaving the respective histories in order to reflect their actual mutual interactions and influence upon one another.

### 1. Utopianism and Chartism

An early socialist pioneer in Ireland was William Thompson, whose writings on economy were given a favourable mention by Marx in *Capital*. Although a supporter of Robert Owen's ideas, Thompson didn't support the latter's petitioning of the upper classes and he would eventually contest Owen's leadership of the movement, a bid that would be cut short by his untimely death in 1833.

In 1824 Thompson published *An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth*, an early critique of Ricardian socialism. In 1825, in collaboration with Anna Wheeler (one of the first female socialist militants) he wrote the *Appeal of one Half of the Human Race, Women, against the Pretensions of the other Half, Men*, arguably the first published statement linking feminism with socialism. In *Labor Rewarded*, he went on to make a critique of the English economist Hodgskin, upholding the importance of a firm link between socialism and trade-unionism.

In 1831, at a time many other utopian communities were being formed, the Ralahine community was formed in Ireland along Owenite lines. As in most similar experiments, its life was short, and the attempt to build the new society within the old would be doomed by the imperatives of the latter. What perhaps was distinctively 'Irish' about it, with the land question there so prominent, was the way it met its demise: its members would be evicted by the 'sympathiser' landlord (who had leased the land on which the community was based at extortionate rates so he

could pay off his gambling debts).

In the late 1830s and 1840s the Chartist movement established an outpost in Ireland with the Irish Universal Suffrage Association, founded in 1841. There was also a strong Irish presence among the Chartist leadership in Britain, with Bronterre O'Brien, a Dublin lawyer, and Feargus O'Connor notable examples, both of whom were to be found on the 'physical force' wing of Chartism and who directed their efforts towards creating a united agitation of Irish peasants and English industrial workers. O'Connor, elected as member of parliament for County Cork in 1832, sought to work with Daniel O'Connell, the leader of the movement for Catholic emancipation, but broke with him in 1836 due to the latter's anti-working class policies. A group of Chartists was still to be found in Dublin in 1841-3 but they disbanded following attacks from O'Connell's supporters.

## **2. Young Ireland and the Great Famine**

In 1845 a blight hit the Irish potato crop, the basic food of the peasants and workers, and provoked, as we saw in the first chapter, the 'Great Hunger' or 'Irish Potato Famine'. This great tragedy, which provided a stark demonstration of how capitalism puts the accumulation of profit before the most basic human considerations and is incapable of managing production and distribution in a humane way, still reverberates to this day.

To give an idea of the emotional and intellectual incapacity of the political and religious leaders of the bourgeoisie to come up with a solution, immersed as they were in a sense of Malthusian inevitability, we will quote two establishment figures of the time. The first, a West Cork bishop, would write in 1847: "The famine is spreading with fearful rapidity, and scores of persons are dying of starvation and fever, but the tenants are bravely paying their rents". The second is Daniel O'Connell's son, John O'Connell, M.P. "I thank God I live among a people who would rather die of hunger than defraud their landlords of rent!"

With this as the establishment view, blatantly and openly defending the superior necessity of the landed aristocracy, in the midst of an epic human tragedy, to continue to collect rent at the expense of their starving tenants, it was no wonder that the nationalist movement received a boost; and in 1846, against this background of suffering, the Young Ireland movement was born, leading to a failed uprising in 1848. The left wing of this movement would attempt to draw the lessons of their defeat and would remain firmly anchored on the themes of socialism, land reform and nationalism. James Stephens in particular, who was

wounded in the uprising but managed to escape, would learn his socialism in revolutionary France, and later become leader of the Fenian movement, to which the founders of Marxism would lend their albeit critical support.

At this time there could also be heard the proto-socialist voice of the agrarian reformer Fintan Lalor, who denounced the fact that the abstract nationalism of Young Ireland blurred the class issue: “They wanted an alliance with the landowners. They chose to consider them Irishmen, and imagined they would induce them to hoist the green flag. They wished to preserve an aristocracy”. Lalor had instead drawn more profound lessons from the Famine: “The corn crops were sufficient to feed the island. But the landlords would have their rent in spite of famine and in defiance of fever. They took the whole harvest and left hunger to those who raised it. Had the people of Ireland been landlords of Ireland not a human creature would have died of hunger, nor the failure of the potato crop been considered a matter of any consequence”. The solution, according to him, was to nationalise the land, which would be controlled by the people of Ireland, defined as separate from and opposed to the landowners.

### **3. The International Workingmen’s Association in Ireland**

The real advent of socialism in Ireland dates from the formation of sections of the International Working Men’s Association.

Marx originally thought that the ‘Irish Question’ would only be resolved in the wake of a socialist revolution in England, but he would later change his mind. “Previously I thought Ireland’s separation from England impossible. Now I think it is inevitable, although after separation there may come federation” (Marx to Engels, 2 November 1867). Both men would pay close attention to the Fenian movement, interested in its apparent anti-clericalism, and because “characterised by a socialistic tendency (in a negative sense, directed against the appropriation of the soil) and by being a lower orders movement” (Marx to Engels, 30 November 1867).

After the arrest and mistreatment of the Fenian activists, the IWMA general council actively supported and campaigned on behalf of the prisoners and in November 1867 organized a public debate on the Irish question.

In a letter to Dr Kugelman, dated December 21, 1871, Jenny Marx commented that: “The Irish in London are entering the ranks of the International. Irish sections are being formed in various parts of the East End”.

One new member was Joseph Patrick McDonnell, a former leading Dublin Fenian who had been inspired to join the IWMA out of enthusiasm for the Paris Commune. This move had set him apart from the Fenian movement, whose leader, O'Donovan Rossa, condemned the Commune following the death of the Archbishop of Paris (who had been executed along with 5 other hostages during the final battle to defend the Commune, as a retaliatory measure for the summary execution of captured communard soldiers by the other side). A few days after meeting him on June 18, 1871, Marx would nominate McDonnell to be a member of the General Council. He would go on to become one of Marx's most consistent supporters and was appointed the International's corresponding secretary for Ireland in August of that year.

By early 1872, four sections of the IWMA were established in Ireland: in Dublin, Belfast, Cork, and Cootehill. Little is known of the Belfast or Cootehill sections, but a Catholic cleric would note with relish in March 1872 that 'those wretched people had been expelled from Belfast'.

In a Declaration of the General Council entitled 'Police Terrorism in Ireland' issued in April 1872 we read: "The national antagonism between English and Irish working men in England has hitherto been one of the main impediments in the way of every attempted movement for the emancipation of the working class, and therefore one of the main stays of class domination in England as well as in Ireland. The spread of the International in Ireland and the formation of the Irish branches in England threatened to put an end to this state of things".

Almost two years before, in a circular letter dated January 1, 1870, sent to the Federal Council of Romance Switzerland, the General Council had already clarified its position by addressing a number of attacks made by Bakunin and his supporters, including the accusation that the Council's statements on the Irish question (which included demands for an amnesty of the imprisoned Fenians) were diverting the attention of the international workers' organisation from the solution of social problems.

The International in Ireland continued to grow in Dublin and Cork. In the latter section, J. De Morgan, a language teacher popular among the Cork workers, was elected as local secretary. The Police were quick to repress the activities of the Cork section and it was in response to this that the 'Declaration on Police Terrorism', quoted above, was drawn up by a commission including Marx and MacDonnell and subsequently issued by the General Council.

In 1872 a strike of coachbuilders in Cork for a minimum 54-hour week was

supported by the Cork section. The Catholic Church, alarmed by the anti-religious actions of the Paris communards, and quick to forget the centuries of oppression it had itself suffered under the heel of the British colonial power, denounced the International for the support it was giving to the strike. On 22 March notices were posted throughout Cork city addressed to the 'working men of Cork': "The apologist of the Communists of Paris is amongst you. The apologist of those who murdered the Archbishop and priests of Paris is amongst you!! Beware of those who ask you to connect yourselves with the International Society". The notices advertised a public meeting on 24 March to denounce the International. The Cork internationalists responded by attending in force and surrounding the speakers' platform. A full-scale riot ensued and the IWMA contingent, despite being very much in the minority, acquitted themselves well and carried the day. But this was a very temporary victory. The 'red scare' would continue and after a concentrated victimisation campaign the Cork branch would disperse.

The International, in its original, highly federal form, was by this time being undermined by the activities of opportunist trade union leaders in England and the opposition of the anarchists, who disguised their essential absence of principle under the populist slogan of 'anti-authoritarianism', the prime culprits being, in their eyes, precisely the group gathered around Marx and Engels. But for all their much vaunted support of 'freedom', the Bakuninists were strongly critical of Marx's support for Irish independence.

At a certain point, Marx, rather than let the International fall into the hands of these people, proposed the transfer of the General Council to New York. Here McDonnell, who had parted for the United States in late 1872, would link up with the International's General Secretary Friedrich Sorge and other Marxists to continue to fight for workers' internationalism and the formation of a class party.

#### **4. Counter-revolution**

After the annihilation of the Paris Commune, and the international triumph of the counter-revolution, the worker's movement suffered a severe setback. The International Association itself would be put on hold, to arise again later, even stronger, as the Second International. Under these conditions, given the balance of forces between Ireland and England, it became a lot more difficult to struggle for independence, although the objective of exiting the union was maintained, or at least the aim of greater autonomy.

In an article dated 4 March 1874 entitled The English Elections, Engels wrote:

“The ice has been broken and two workers now have seats in the most fashionable debating club of Europe, among those who have declared themselves the first gentlemen of Europe.

“Alongside of them sit at least fifty Irish Home Rulers. When the Fenian (Irish-republican) rebellion of 1867 had been quelled and the military leaders of the Fenians had either gradually been caught or driven to emigrate to America, the remnants of the Fenian conspiracy soon lost all importance. Violent insurrection had no prospect of success for many years, at least until such time as England would again be involved in serious difficulties abroad. Hence a legal movement remained the only possibility, and such a movement was undertaken under the banner of the Home Rulers, who wanted the Irish to be “masters in their own house”. They made the definite demand that the Imperial Parliament in London should cede to a special Irish Parliament in Dublin the right to legislate on all purely Irish questions; very wisely nothing was said meanwhile about what was to be understood as a purely Irish question.

“This movement, at first scoffed at by the English press, has become so powerful that Irish MPs of the most diverse party complexions – Conservatives and Liberals, Protestants and Catholics (Butt, who leads the movement, is himself a Protestant) and even a native-born Englishman sitting for Galway – have had to join it. For the first time since the days of O’Connell, whose repeal movement collapsed – in the general reaction about the same time as the Chartist movement, as a result of the events of 1848 – he had died in 1847 – a well-knit Irish party once again has entered Parliament, but under circumstances that hardly permit it constantly to compromise à la O’Connell with the Liberals or to have individual members of it sell themselves retail to Liberal governments, as after him had become the fashion.

“Thus both motive forces of English political development have now entered Parliament: on the one side the workers, on the other the Irish as a compact national party. And even if they may hardly be expected to play a big role in this Parliament – the workers will certainly not – the elections of 1874 have indisputably ushered in a new phase in English political development”.

Engels would make the following analysis of the Irish situation eight years later (June 26, 1882) in a letter to Edouard Bernstein. In it he gives a historical summary of the various resistance movements in this counter-revolutionary period. He refers to how:

“The controversies between America and England after the [Civil] war became the

main lever of the Fenians. Had it come to a war, Ireland would in a few months have been part of the United States or at least a republic under its protection. The sum which England so willingly undertook to pay and did indeed pay in accordance with Geneva arbitrators' decision on the Alabama affair was the price she paid to buy off American intervention in Ireland.

“From this moment the main danger had been removed. The police was strong enough to deal with the Fenians. The treachery inevitable in any conspiracy also helped, and yet it was only leaders who were traitors and then became downright spies and false witnesses. The leaders who got away to America engaged there in emigrant revolution and most of them were reduced to beggary, like O'Donovan Rossa. For those who saw the European emigration of 1849-52 here, everything seems very familiar – only naturally on the exaggerated American scale.

“Many Fenians have doubtless now returned and restored the old armed organization. They form an important element in the movement and force the Liberals to more decisive action. But, apart from that, they cannot do anything but scare John Bull. Though he grows noticeably weaker on the outskirts of his Empire, he can still easily suppress any Irish rebellion so close to home. In the first place, in Ireland there are 14,000 men of the “Constabulary”, gendarmes, who are armed with rifles and bayonets and have undergone military training. Besides, there are about 30,000 regulars, who can easily be reinforced with an equal number of regulars and English militia. In addition, the Navy. And John Bull is known for his matchless brutality in suppressing rebellions.

“Without war or the threat of war from without, an Irish rebellion has not the slightest chance; and only two powers can become dangerous in this respect: France and, still far more, the United States. France is out of the question. In America the parties flirt with the Irish electorate, make promises but do not keep them. They have no intention of getting involved in a war because of Ireland. They are even interested in having conditions in Ireland that promote a massive Irish emigration to America. And it is understandable that a land which in twenty years will be the most populated, richest and most powerful in the world has no special desire to rush headlong into adventures which could and would hamper its enormous internal development. In twenty years it will speak in a very different way.

“However, if there should be a danger of war with America, England would grant the Irish open-handedly everything they asked for – only not complete independence, which is not at all desirable owing to the geographical position.

“Therefore all that is left to Ireland is the constitutional way of gradually conquering one position after the other; and here the mysterious background of a Fenian armed conspiracy can remain a very effective element. But these Fenians are themselves increasingly being pushed into a sort of Bakuninism: the assassination of Burke and Cavendish could only serve the purpose of making a compromise between the Land League and Gladstone impossible. However, that compromise was the best thing that could have happened to Ireland under the circumstances. The landlords are evicting tens of thousands of tenants from their houses and their homes because of rent arrears, and that under military protection. The primary need at the moment is to stop this systematic depopulation of Ireland (the evicted starve to death or have to emigrate to America). Gladstone is ready to table a bill according to which arrears would be paid in the same way as feudal taxes were settled in Austria in 1848: a third by the peasant and a third by the state, and the other third forfeited by the landlord. That suggestion was made by the Land League itself. Thus the “heroic deed” in Phoenix Park appears if not as pure stupidity, then at least as pure Bakuninist, bragging, purposeless “propaganda par le fait”. If it has not had the same consequences as the similar silly actions of Hödel and Nobiling, it is only because Ireland lies not quite in Prussia. It should therefore be left to the Bakuninists and Mostians to attach equal importance to this childishness and to the assassination of Alexander II, and to threaten with an “Irish revolution” which never comes”.

As one can see, the possibilities of success for an Irish revolution in the 1880s were remote. The best circumstances for a successful insurrection would be those created by a war between England and a foreign power such as the United States, France, or... Germany.

That is to say the question of independence remained open, although support from the worker’s movement was momentarily lacking.

It remained to be established how independence would come about. The Irish bourgeoisie sought to use constitutional methods to achieve broad autonomy with an independent parliament that would manage Irish affairs, leaving foreign policy on the diplomatic and military plane to London. Engels considered that under the prevailing conditions it was the only possible outcome. But that didn’t mean the aim of achieving full independence should be abandoned.

Here is what Engels wrote to Kautsky in a letter dated 7 February 1882:

“One of the real tasks of the 1848 Revolution (and the real, not illusory tasks of a revolution are always solved as a result of that revolution) was the restoration of

the oppressed and dispersed nationalities of Central Europe, insofar as these were at all viable and, especially, ripe for independence. This task was solved for Italy, Hungary and Germany, according to the then prevailing conditions, by the executors of the revolution's will, Bonaparte, Cavour and Bismarck. Ireland and Poland remained. Ireland can be disregarded here, she affects the conditions of the Continent only very indirectly. But Poland lies in the middle of the Continent and the conservation of her division is precisely the link that has constantly held the Holy Alliance together, and therefore, Poland is of great interest to us...

"I therefore hold the view that two nations in Europe have not only the right but even the duty to be nationalistic before they become internationalistic: the Irish and the Poles. They are most internationalistic when they are genuinely nationalistic".

## **5. The Land War**

Meanwhile, between 1878-1882, the Land War or People's War" would take the political centre stage under the leadership of the Irish National Land League. In this struggle the notion of land nationalisation, as advocated by Henry George (and more tentatively by the League's leader, Michael Davitt) would capture the imagination particularly of the landless labourers. Marx viewed George's book *Progress and Poverty* as "significant because it is a first though abortive effort at emancipation from orthodox political economy" (Marx to Sorge, 20 June 1881), but in the same letter he also described the land nationalisation project as "simply a socialistically decked-out attempt to save capitalist rule and actually re-establish it on an even wider basis than its present one". A contemporary commentator would write: "certainly no man can assert more strenuously that Mr George the rights of property in everything but land". George can thus be seen as the ultimate expression of the industrial bourgeoisie's battle with the landed interests, proposing to abolish them altogether, and demanding uncompensated land nationalisation (while Davitt argued landlords should be compensated during the initial nationalisation process).

But to Irish nationalists, of course, their support for such a measure very much depended on whether the government doing the nationalising was an Irish or a British one. In general, nationalisation of land was anathema to petty bourgeois Irish nationalists who sought a property-owning Irish democracy.

The violent actions resorted to by the Irish activists in the Land War, albeit mainly defensive ones and employed to resist evictions, would be treated in the usual draconian way by the English authorities and the government would pass the

repressive Coercion Bill in 1881, allowing internment without trial of Land League activists and the suspension of habeas corpus.

But the fact that this law was passed by a Liberal government would have important repercussions. It was both a slap in the face to the Irish Party, who had supported Gladstone in the 1880 elections to get Disraeli and the Conservatives out; and to the working class, who saw Gladstone enacting Tory policy.

## **6. The Social Democratic Federation**

In England two workers from the London Trades Council launched a paper, the Labour Standard, to which Engels contributed leading articles between May and August 1881. It would call for an independent working men's party. In Scotland, Robert Banner, acquainted with Marx and Engels, would turn his energies to founding the Scottish Labour party.

In June 1881, under the impetus of the Coercion Bill, the Democratic Federation (DF) would convene its founding conference in Britain. To begin with it was an alliance of radicals and "some representative working men" specifically formed to oppose the Bill. An investigative delegation of the DF was invited to Ireland by the Land League in July 1881 and strong bonds were established, with members of both organisations speaking to large audiences, one, in Phoenix Park, Dublin, attracting 100,000 people. Branches of the Land League would subsequently be formed in England and Scotland as a result. Engels had his own preferred candidate for the leadership of the Democratic Federation, the old Chartist and 'half-communist' Joseph Cowen, but in the end, much to Engels' and Marx's chagrin, it would be H.M. Hyndman who would prevail.

Hyndman supported Home Rule and the land agitation movement but he specified that the Irish demand for home rule must be 'fairly' met, 'without actual disruption for the Empire'. This underlying current of chauvinism in his thinking would continue to colour the politics of the Democratic Federation, and its later successors, for as long as Hyndman controlled the levers of the organisation and its press. (Over thirty years later he would support Edward Carson and the Ulster Volunteers, despite the opposition of the British Socialist Party Executive to which he belonged).

Marx had written to Sorge: "In the beginning of June, there was published by a certain Hyndman (who had before intruded himself into my house) a little book: England for All. It pretends to be written as an exposé of the programme of the

“Democratic Federation” – a recently formed association of different English and Scottish radical societies, half bourgeois, half proletaires. The chapters on Labour and Capital are only literal extracts from, or circumlocutions of, Capital, but the fellow does neither quote the book, nor its author, but to shield himself from exposure remarks at the end of his preface: “For the ideas and much of the matter contained in Chapters II and III, I am indebted to the work of a great thinker and original writer, etc., etc.”. Vis-à-vis myself, the fellow wrote stupid letters of excuse, for instance that “the English don’t like to be taught by foreigners,” that “my name was so much detested, etc.”. With all that, his little book – so far as it pilfers from Capital – makes good propaganda, although the man is a “weak” vessel, and very far from having even the patience – the first condition of learning anything – of studying a matter thoroughly” (15 December, 1881).

In a letter to Bebel (30 August, 1883) Engels wrote: “Do not on any account whatever let yourself be deluded into thinking there is a real proletarian movement going on here (···) The elements at present active may become important since they have accepted our theoretical programme and so acquired a basis, but only if a spontaneous movement breaks out here among the workers and they succeed in getting control of it. Till then they will remain individual minds, with a hotch-potch of confused sects, remnants of the great movement of the ‘forties, standing behind them and nothing more. And – apart from the unexpected – a really general workers’ movement will only come into existence here when the workers are made to feel the fact that England’s world monopoly is broken“.

“Participation in the domination of the world market was and is the basis of the political nullity of the English workers. The tail of the bourgeoisie in the economic exploitation of this monopoly but nevertheless sharing in its advantages, politically they are naturally the tail of the “great Liberal Party,” which for its part pays them small attentions, recognises trade unions and strikes as legitimate factors, has relinquished the fight for an unlimited working day and has given the mass of better placed workers the vote. But once America and the united competition of the other industrial countries have made decent breach in this monopoly (and in iron this is coming rapidly, in cotton unfortunately not yet) you will see something here”.

The Democratic Federation would seal its alliance with the Land League by supporting one of its candidates in a by-election in county Tyrone against the Liberal candidate. This would lose it the support of the London Radical clubs. In March Hyndman would write “the leaders of existing Radical organisations (···) as well [as] trade unions are, to a large extent, absolutely in the hands of the capitalist class, who control their actions to a very large extent”. By 1882

Hyndman was publicly acknowledging his debt to Marx as “one of the greatest thinkers of modern times”.

In August 1883 the Democratic federation acknowledged its developing adhesion to socialism and the organisation was renamed the Social Democratic Federation. Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling would take up a leadership role in the twenty-strong executive council at the SDF annual conference.

Although the organization represented a variety of different approaches all were agreed on the principal aims of the new SDF: universal suffrage, an eight-hour day for industrial workers, and the introduction of salaries for British MPs to enable representation of working-class people in parliament.

In the letter to Bebel cited above Engels also wrote: “The Manifesto of the Democratic Federation in London has been issued by about twenty or thirty little societies (···) All that is important is that now at last they are obliged openly to proclaim our theory, which during the period of the International seemed to them to be dictated from outside, as their own, and that a crowd of young bourgeois intellectuals are emerging who, to the disgrace of the English workers it must be said, understand things better and take them up more passionately than the workers. For even in the Democratic Federation the workers for the most part only accept the new programme unwillingly and as a matter of form. The chief of the Democratic Federation, Hyndman, is an arch-conservative and an extremely chauvinistic but not stupid careerist, who behaved pretty shabbily to Marx (···) and for this reason was dropped by us personally”.

## **7. The Socialist League**

In the Social Democratic Federation a 'Marx-Aveling' Party, and a 'Hyndman' party, soon differentiated themselves. In a letter to Wilhelm Liebknecht (January 1, 1885) Eleanor would explain that “One of our chief points of conflict with Hyndman is that whereas we wish to make this a really international movement (···) Mr Hyndman (···) has endeavoured to set English workmen against 'foreigners'. Now it is absolutely necessary we show the enemy a united front - and that we may do this our German friends must lend us a helping hand. If you want to help on the really Socialist, as distinct from the Soc Democrat - jingo - Possibilist - Party now is the time to do it”.

This letter was written three days after the internationalists had defeated Hyndman's 'jingo' faction, but due to the narrow margin of their victory on the

December 29th 1884, they decided to secede and form a new party, the Socialist League.

The morning before, William Morris and Edward Aveling had visited Engels to seek his advice. Engels wrote about the split to Bernstein on 29 December 84: "Those who resigned were Aveling, Bax, and Morris, the only honest men among the intellectuals – but men as unpractical (two poets and one philosopher) as you could possibly find. In addition, the better of the known workers... They want to act in the London branches; they hope to win the majority and then let Hyndman carry on with his non-existent provincial branches. Their organ [Commonweal. ed] will be a little monthly journal. Finally, they will work on a modest scale, in proportion to their forces, and no longer act as though the English proletariat were bound to act as soon as a few intellectuals become converted to Socialism and sounded the call".

A draft manifesto entitled To Socialists (see our Archive section) was issued on 13th January signed by ten signatories, including Eleanor, William Morris and Edward Aveling, and it bore the marks of the previous consultations with Engels which took place a few days before. It denounced the tendency in the Social-Democratic Federation "to political opportunism, which if developed would have involved us in alliances, however temporarily, with one or other of the political factions, and would have weakened our propagandist force by driving us into electioneering, and possibly would have deprived us of the due services of some of our most energetic men by sending them to our sham parliament, there to become nonentities, or perhaps our masters, and it may be our betrayers. We say also that among those who favoured these views of political adventure there was a tendency towards national assertion, the persistent foe of Socialism: and it is easy to see how dangerous this might become in times like the present".

An interesting passage declared how the new organization differed from the SDF as regards the aims and tactics of Socialist propaganda, stating that a Socialist body "in the present state of things has no function but to educate the people in the principles of Socialism, and to organize such as it can get hold of to take their due places, when the crisis shall come which will force action on us".

Justice, the paper of the Social Democratic Federation, had first appeared in January 1884 and quickly come under the sole control of Hyndman, who refused to be answerable in any way to the Executive. Indeed this had been one of the reasons for the split. The first edition of Commonweal was published in February 1885, and in contrast was clearly subtitled 'The Official Organ of the Socialist League'. In his 'introductory' to the first edition Morris stated that the editor

(himself) and the sub-editor (Edward Aveling) were 'acting as delegates of the Socialist League, and under its direct control: any slip in principles, therefore, any mis-statement of the aims or tactics of the League, are liable to corrections from the representatives of that body.'

In a letter dated 28 October, 1885 to Bebel, Engels would write of his hostility towards the leaders of the craft unions, who failed to respond to the challenges that the colossal growth of industry had presented to the trade union movement. It was a growth which had resulted in the employment of a huge mass of unskilled workers, outnumbering the "skilled" workers ("and who can do all that the 'skilled' workers do and more"), but the leaders of the trade union movement continued to prevent them from joining the already existing trade unions, preferring instead to concentrate on issues of concern to skilled workers, such as the restriction of admission to the various trades. "The fools want to reform society to suit themselves and not to reform themselves to suit the development of society".

"It is important to break up the Social Democratic Federation as quickly as possible, its leaders being nothing but careerists, adventurers and literary people. Hyndman, their head, is doing his very best in this way (···) He is a wretched caricature of Lassalle".

## **8. The Parliamentary Question**

Engels, along with all communist Marxists, in contrast to the anarchists and their rejection of the party instrument and any kind of political program or battle directed towards establishing a dictatorial class state, maintained that the proletarian movement of the time needed to take advantage of universal suffrage and impose its presence in Parliament alongside the landowners' and bourgeois parties, on order to demonstrate its coming of age and its class pride, but only for propaganda purposes, it being taken for granted that the representatives elected by the workers to that place and by those methods would be impotent in a revolutionary sense.

In fact Engels had stated in 1886 that he considered Morris himself to be influenced by anarchism, no doubt due to Morris's excessive preoccupation with the corrupting effect that participating in Parliament could have on workers' representatives. On 23 May 1887, Morris wrote to John Glasse, shortly after the League's third annual conference: "I believe that the Socialists will certainly send members to Parliament when they are strong enough to do so: in itself I see no harm in this, so long as it is understood that they go there as rebels, and not as

members of the governing body, prepared by passing palliative measures to keep 'Society' alive. But I fear many of them will be drawn into that error by the corrupting influence of a body professedly hostile to Socialism: & therefore I dread the parliamentary period (clearly a long way ahead at present) of the progress of the party, and I think it will be necessary always to keep alive a body of Socialists of principle who will refuse responsibility for the actions of the parliamentary portion of the party".

It is pertinent to mention here that the Italian Left declared itself "abstentionist" not because it was "difficult" to prevent the socialist deputies from becoming traitors, they were in agreement with Lenin on this point, but due to the evident practical incompatibility, in the West where a thoroughly putrid Parliamentarism reigned supreme, between preparing for the revolution and preparing for elections, and this both in the class and in the ranks of the party.

Later that year Morris would formulate his abstentionist tactic (see in the archive section his article "Anti parliamentarism" from an 1889 edition of *Commonweal*) and also start advocating the workers' management of industry.

In London the League's anti-parliamentary stance attracted many anarchists and by the late 1880s they had taken over, challenging William Morris's control of the party paper *Commonweal*. In 1890 Morris, who had objected to the participation of socialists in parliament on different grounds to the anarchists, finally also abandoned the organisation; along with his substantial £500 per annum subsidy.

The apostles of 'Propaganda by the deed' now held sway, and the columns of *Commonweal* were given over to the celebration of incendiary acts, including the promoting of bomb-making classes organized by a member later revealed to be a police spy. At a conference in November 1890, the only issue actually decided on by the conference was that there should be no chairperson or "any quasi-constitutional official".

## **9. The Socialist League in Ireland**

Within Ireland, socialism remained a largely Dublin affair until the early 1890s. The Social Democratic Federation did not manage to set up a branch before or after the 1884 split, and what appeared in Dublin in the end was a loose alliance of radicals and socialists, which by naming itself the Dublin Democratic Association carefully avoided mentioning socialism, so as not to offend the Catholic Church or appear to be taking sides in the recent split within the SDF. The association would include

among its members land nationalizers, radicals and socialists, with the latter in fact numbering only about a quarter of the membership, although including a former member of the Dublin branch of the First International, Adam O'Toole, and the German-Danish Marxist Fritz Schumann, who called on members to support trade unionism and 'to connect themselves with their toiling brethren in England and upon the continent'.

The DDA would peter out in 1885 and many of its members would join the Dublin branch of the Socialist League, formed by an English member who had moved to Dublin in the same year.

The Socialist League at a national level clearly had a more resolute perspective on the national question than the SDF, and Bax would insist on the need to "break up those hideous race monopolies called empires, beginning in each case at home. Hence everything which makes for the disruption and disintegration of the empire to which he belongs must be welcomed by the socialist as an ally".

Membership was small, with only 17 members in April 1886, but this now included three ex-members of the Dublin branch of the First International, whose influence was perhaps behind the League's direct and deep involvement in the Dublin Bottle-makers lock-out of 1886.

Participation in this economic struggle would win the League much credibility amongst the workers and trade unionists of Dublin. And it was a struggle which would take on international dimensions when the employers brought in Swedish blacklegs. Schumann, as a fellow Scandinavian, was requested by the bottle-makers to approach the Swedes and inform them of the dispute. The Swedes stopped work and were supported by Schumann to obtain legal advice and compensation. With the very survival of the Swedes and their families at stake and without funds to return home, Schumann and the Dublin Trades Council rallied round to assist. Schumann would comment that "The necessity for international communication and action between the workers in the glass bottle trade was strongly felt during the late strike here, and I was asked to draw up Rules etc. for an International Society of that trade". The League would make its hall available and the inaugural congress of the International Union of Glass Bottle-makers was held in October.

Clearly the League was keen to practice two at least of the key requirements of a working-class political party: internationalism, and the need to connect directly with workers in their economic struggles.

On 8 April 1886, Gladstone would introduce the Government of Ireland Bill to the

House of Commons. Nationalists in Ireland became convinced that home rule was imminent. The bill however would be defeated and the Liberal party would split, 93 MPs defecting to form the Liberal Unionist Party under Joseph Chamberlain. The subsequent general election would be dominated by the issue of home rule and Fritz Schumann would admit to the problems it created for the Socialist League branch in Dublin: "it is extremely difficult just now to get people to think of anything but Home Rule". Evidently the issue of how to connect up the national struggle with the demands of the international workers' movement was still a problematic one.

In Dublin the League's branch would more or less go out of existence by March 1887. Its ex-members and some members of the SDF would regroup themselves and other local socialists in an organization called the National Labour League, and continue addressing meetings and organising the debates which had very much become a feature of the local scene. In December of 1887 the organization became defunct and many members gravitated into the Dublin Socialist Club.

But Dublin socialists were still unsure of their role in relation to the home rule agitation, and O'Gorman, a veteran of the First International and Socialist League and now a member of the Dublin Socialist Club, would state: "Under any scheme of home rule that I have yet seen there would dominate in Ireland two of the most reactionary forces in human society – an impecunious peasant proprietary and a well-organized priesthood". The tendency of the time was still to see the fight for socialism in Ireland as opposed to the independence movement, rather than fighting for its dialectical necessary accomplishment and then moving beyond it: as a fight for an independent Ireland in which the proletariat seeks to ultimately prevail over the nationalist bourgeoisie and take up arms against it.

Back in Dublin, the Dublin Socialist Club gave way to another organization, the Irish Socialist Union, an organization that set itself the goal of amalgamating other socialist organizations, establishing a socialist library, propagating socialist ideas, circulating socialist literature and organizing open-air meetings.

Two members of this group, Adolphus Shields and William Graham, were also organizers of the National Federation of Labour, a trade-union of unskilled workers, but they would soon shift their allegiance to Will Thorne's National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers. Their decision to concentrate their activities in the Gas Workers' union marked a shift of focus within the workers' political movement, away from small socialist propaganda societies in which attempts were made to settle key tenets of socialist theory through public meetings and discussion, to the testing of these theories at the heart of mass economic

movements, along with consequent attempts to form clearly defined workers' parties. And all the while against the background of the rising struggle for national independence.

## 10. The Great Dock Strike

The great movement of unskilled workers in 1889 would soon bring the question of the relationship of the workers' economic organisations to their various political expressions to the fore.

Writing about this to Sorge on 7 December of the same year Engels stated: "The movement has now got going at last and I believe for good. But it is not directly Socialist, and those English who have understood our theory best remain outside it: Hyndman because he is incurably jealous and intriguing, Bax because he is only a bookworm. Formally the movement is at the moment a trade union movement, but utterly different from that of the old trade unions, the skilled labourers, the aristocracy of labour.

"The people are throwing themselves into the job in quite a different way, are leading far more colossal masses into the fight, are shaking society much more deeply, are putting forward much more far-reaching demands: eight-hour day, general federation of all organisations, complete solidarity. Thanks to Tussy [Eleanor Marx] women's branches have been formed for the first time in the Gas Workers and General Labourers' Union. Moreover, the people only regard their immediate demands themselves as provisional, although they themselves do not know as yet what final aim they are working for. But this dim idea is strongly enough rooted to make them choose only openly declared Socialists as their leaders. Like everyone else they will have to learn by their own experiences and the consequences of their own mistakes. But as, unlike the old trade unions, they greet every suggestion of an identity of interest between capital and labour with scorn and ridicule this will not take very long..."

In the middle of the following year, in a letter to Sorge dated 19 April 1890, Engel's balance sheet was:

"In a country with such an old political and labour movement there is always a colossal heap of traditionally inherited rubbish which has to be got rid of by degrees. There are the prejudices of the skilled unions - Engineers, Bricklayers, Carpenters and Joiners, Type Compositors, etc. - which have all to be broken down; the petty jealousies of the particular trades, which become intensified in the

hands and heads of the leaders to direct hostility and secret struggle; there are the mutually obstructive ambitions and intrigues of the leaders: one wants to get into parliament and so does somebody else, another wants to get on to the County Council or School Board, another wants to organise a general centralisation of all the workers, another to start a paper, another a club, etc., etc. In short, there is friction upon friction. And among them all the Socialist League, which looks down on everything which is not directly revolutionary (which means here in England, as with you [in America], everything which does not limit itself to making phrases and otherwise doing nothing) and the [Social Democratic] Federation, who still behave as if everyone except themselves were asses and bunglers, although it is only due to the new force of the movement that they have succeeded in getting some following again. In short, anyone who only looks at the surface would say it was all confusion and personal quarrels. But under the surface the movement is going on, it is seizing ever wider sections of the workers and mostly just among the hitherto stagnant lowest masses”.

A fortnight after this letter was written, the first International May Day celebrations to be held in London took place. The fact that mass demonstrations (a procession to Hyde park of over 100,000, etc) were held in support of the eight-hour day, in accordance with the resolution passed by the Foundation Congress of the Second International (Paris, 1889), constituted a triumph of the “new unionism” over the old craft unions (which supported a eight-hour day by “free agreement” and not by legislation). The London Trades Council, the representative of the “old” unions, and the S.D.F., which had boycotted the Paris Congress and allied itself with the French Possibilists (reformist wing of French socialism which maintained one should only fight for what was “possible”), tried both to prevent and to sabotage the demonstration, but were eventually forced by the strength of the movement to take part in it – though with separate platforms. In his article The Fourth of May in London, Engels would comment “And I consider this the grandest and most important part of the whole May Day festival, that on 4 May, 1890, the English proletariat, newly awakened from its forty years’ winter sleep, again entered the movement of its class...”

This initial wave of trade union organisation among the unskilled of the British Isles would soon recede, but things would never be the same again, and memories of it would help spark that second wave of organisation which would culminate in the Dublin Lock Out of 1913. Meanwhile the employers were organising their fight-back, and against this the need for independent working class organisation to defend the interests of the trade union movement in Parliament would be declared with increasing urgency.

## 11. The Unions and the Second International

In March 1890 the Gas Workers' Union, the first to win the eight-hour day early in 1889, appointed an Irish organiser Michael Canty, who achieved considerable success with the striking bricklayers' labourers, and later began to recruit coal porters and quay labourers. The union was particularly active in Dublin and Belfast. In the same year, in line with a directive issued by the Second International, the union organised the first Dublin May Day, with thousands attending a meeting in Phoenix Park to support the campaign for the 8 hour day and the election of working people to parliament.

At this meeting Adolphus Shields set out a programme of political and industrial action that, although ambiguous in some of its phrasing, considered: "Firstly, that it was the duty of the Irish workers to take hold of the political machinery in order that it might not be used against their brothers the world over; secondly, because by it they might secure economic liberty – freedom to live, freedom to labour, and freedom to enjoy the fruits of their labour; and thirdly, because it was only by a practically united demand a Home Rule measure worth having could be obtained, and", he considered, "such unity could best be secured by a Home Rule party run in the interests of the wealth producers".

In a letter to Sorge dated 11 August 1891, Engels wrote: "The gasworkers now have the most powerful organisation in Ireland (...). That Parnell is now so friendly with the workers, he owes to encounters with these same gasworkers, who had no compunction about telling him the truth. Michael Davitt, too, who had at first wanted independent Irish Trades Unions, has learned from them: their constitution secures them perfectly free home rule. To them the credit for giving impetus to the labour movement in Ireland. Many of their branches consist of agricultural workers". In the same letter Engels wrote that the gasworkers were putting up candidates in the elections, but it appears he was misinformed on this point. Instead a more generalised campaign took place, with Dublin socialist and labour activists asking candidates from existing parties to pledge themselves to support the interests of labour.

The Second Congress of what had now become the National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers of Great Britain and Ireland, would be held in Dublin in May of that year. Eleanor Marx was elected Minutes Secretary and Edward Aveling to the chair. The Congress adopted a decision on the participation of the Union in the forthcoming International Socialist Workers' Congress in Brussels, and Eleanor, and William Thorne, were elected as its delegates.

In her speech to that Congress, in August 1891, Eleanor would stress the importance of the Socialist-inspired New Unionism, and quoted from her Address to the Gasworkers' Rules, wherein the Union: "clearly recognises that today there are only two classes, the producing working class, and the possessing master class. The interests of these two classes are opposed to each other. The masters have known this a long time; the workers are beginning to see it (...) They are beginning to understand that their only hope lies in themselves, and that from their masters, as a class, they can expect no help".

She would make special reference to the 25,000 members of the union in Ireland, and report that: "no words were more enthusiastically cheered (...) at a huge demonstration in Phoenix Park (...) than (...) 'Let Ireland be free, but let it be an Ireland of free workers; it matters little to the men and women of Ireland if they are exploited by Nationalist or Orangemen; the agricultural labourers sees his enemy in the landlord, as the industrial worker sees his in the capitalist' ".

In her summing up, she would describe the political situation: "What has been done in Great Britain and Ireland within the last two years may seem little when compared with what has been done abroad". In contrast to the situation in Germany and France, in Great Britain there was just one socialist MP and no working class press to speak of, no "organs belonging to a definitely constituted working class party. Such papers as we have are either private property, run more or less as speculation (...) or (...) newspapers, giving very valuable information, no doubt, but absolutely no theoretical teaching; or, as in the case of the Social Democratic Federation organ, Justice, they belong to sects, and do not reach the mass of the workers (...) But still there is, at last, a genuine working class movement in England, and its success since 1889 augurs well for the formation of a Labour party, distinct from other political parties. Above all, the feeling of the working class consciousness and the understanding of the class struggle have grown beyond all expectations and with them the knowledge of the solidarity of labour the world over. Each nation has, and must have, its own special means and methods of work. But whatever those means and methods, the end is one all the world over – the emancipation of the working class, the abolition of all class rule".

The Gasworkers' Union, a trade union with a clear socialist perspective embodied in its rules, spread rapidly in Ireland and by the end of 1891 there were forty-five branches, including those in Cork, Belfast and Limerick, and it could boast significant wage increases for over 14,000 of its members.

During this rising tide of trade union organisation in Ireland, the National Union of Dock Labourers would play a major role. In the early months of 1890 its Glasgow

headquarters were fully occupied with events in Liverpool, but once organisation in that city was secure, it turned its attention to Belfast, where an Irish organiser was engaged. The Belfast Dock Strike began in July. Organisation spread to Drogheda and Newry, then to Dublin, and Ships diverted from one port to another were 'blacked'. The NUDL established branches in Limerick, Cork, and in Galway, where there was a stoppage. The great struggles on the docks in the south of Ireland merged with strikes by seamen, with in some cases dockers coming out in sympathy.

The early 1890s also saw the organisation of the railwaymen, actively supported by Michael Davitt. This resulted in the greatest railway strike ever in Ireland. A number of defeats would follow which would hit the railwaymen's organisation very severely, but it would survive in Dublin, where its organiser set up the Tramway Servants' Union (TSU).

Michael Davitt was also involved in setting up the short-lived Irish Democratic Trade and Labour Federation in Munster in 1891. This had the great merit of attempting to forge a common front of wage earners and peasants, many of its members in fact incarnating both roles in their own person, and it was thus not a trade-union in the classical sense of the word, concerning itself also with issues of benefits in kind, housing, potato plots, etc.

Another organisation, the United Labourers, meanwhile pushed their organisation through the small towns of Co. Dublin and Co. Kildare.

Meanwhile, the Belfast Trades Council drew up a scheme for organising women workers which ultimately saw fruit in the Textile Operatives' Union, founded in 1893.

In 1891 there were serious defeats under the impact of an employers' offensive favoured by a decline in business activity and an increase in unemployment.

From the increasing level of trade-union organisation over the preceding couple of years there would emerge the awareness of the need for a more political expression, whose initial manifestation was the project of a 'labour parliament' rather than a party, much less a Marxist one. This would eventually transform into the Irish Labour League at a meeting in March 1891, adopting the name of an earlier front organisation for the Land League. Convened by Adolphus Shields and other members of the Gasworkers Union it was supported by Edward Aveling, Jenny Marx and many local socialists.

This meeting was famously addressed by an embattled Parnell who had recently been sidelined by the Home Rule Party after a successful campaign by the English establishment to blacken his name. As a result the League was immediately caught up in battle between the Parnellites and the anti-Parnellites. In October 1891 Parnell died, but the divisions in the nationalist movement would continue for the rest of the decade and the Irish nationalist MPs would not reunite in a single political party until 1900 under John Redmond. The impetus for workers' organisation now drifted back to economic organisation.

## **12. The Irish Trade Union Congress**

The need for a Trade Union Congress for Ireland, given the spread of the first territorial organizations in the country, had been felt since the 1860s. In 1868, with the formation of the Trade Union Congress in Britain, this aspiration seemed possible, but it would soon become obvious, as the Congress in Dublin in 1880 would clearly show, that the British TUC was not much interested in Irish affairs. At that meeting those English delegates who spoke revealed they knew little about the political and industrial problems of Ireland and nothing about the history and traditions of Irish trade unionism. They did not know, for instance, that thousands of Irishmen had pioneered trade unionism and socialism in England.

Although Davitt was impressed by the clear sensitivity to Irish issues of the British based Gas Workers Union, which had incorporated Home Rule in its constitution, he saw no evidence of such an attitude in the British TUC and continued to press for an independent Irish trade union movement. A meeting of trade union leaders in Dublin was therefore called and the first Irish Trade Union Congress was convened in 1894.

The composition of the Congress would however reflect the harsh defeats suffered by the unskilled and infrastructure workers over the previous two years: Of the delegates, 48 represented skilled tradesmen, six the infrastructure workers and four rural 'Land and Labour' associations. The Gasworkers Union had fallen apart in Dublin although the coal labourers were represented. The Dockers' and Tramwaymen's unions and the United Labourers of Ireland had survived, but not for long. By the end of the century the National Union of Dock Workers (NUDL), the Tramway Servants' Union (TSU), and the four Land and labour Associations were no longer to be found in the Congress lists. The evidence is that the NUDL was defunct, while the TSU may have preserved a tenuous existence.

If Michael Davitt had hoped the Irish TUC would come out clearly in favour of Irish

independence, the presence of delegates from both North and South meant that the hostility between loyalism and home rule, Protestant and Catholic, would continue to find expression in that body.

### **13. Towards an Independent Workers' Party**

In Britain, there was mounting disgust at the policies of the so-called 'Lib-Lab' MPs, that is, the worker MPs who were sponsored by the Liberal Party. In early 1887 a Coal Mines Bill was going through parliament which sought to restrict the working hours of boys to eight hours per day. Many of the 'Lib-Lab' MPs would actually oppose this measure. A miners' delegation, which included the leader of the small Ayrshire Miners' Union, Keir Hardie, would then arrive in the Capital and press for an amendment to the Bill: to extend the 8 hour day to adults as well. This amendment was also opposed by many Lib-Lab MPs. Hardie would subsequently make several interventions regarding the Bill at the Trade Union Congress later on in the year. Speaking for the first time outside his native west of Scotland, Hardie would engage in an epic David and Goliath fight with Henry Broadhurst, a prominent Lib-Lab who was secretary of the T.U.C.

In early 1893 there took place the founding conference of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in Bradford. 120 delegates attended, holding very different views. The new party was characterised by Engels as "extremely indefinite in its tactics". The indefiniteness of its tactics can certainly be attributed to the many different currents of thought that were represented at the conference. There was Tom Mann, first President of the Dockers Union (and soon to be secretary of the party, from 1894-96); Robert Blatchford, author of *Merric England*, who believed the solution to the problems of industrial pollution and unemployment was for Britain to turn her back on world trade and become a self-sufficient agrarian country; Bernard Shaw, whose credentials as a delegate from the Fabian society were furiously contested; and there were delegates from the Scottish Labour Party and the SDF, both organisations objecting to the adoption of the name 'Independent' as opposed to 'Socialist' Labour Party.

Keir Hardie himself had a highly eccentric take on socialism, and from the pages of the *Labour Leader*, the party organ which from 1894 onwards he owned and edited, he would recommend the works of Thomas Carlyle, Ruskin ... and Mazzini, as a sufficient basis on which "to develop a system of socialistic thought". Henry George, the apostle of land nationalisation, was another major influence; and Marx and Engels as well, although, as we have seen in Hyndman's case, such a connection was clearly something most English 'socialists' of the time were loathe

to admit.

Nevertheless, it was proposed at the conference that the statement of the party's objectives should include that of securing 'the collective and communal ownership of all the means of production, distribution, and exchange.' Thus a significant section of the British labour movement took up for the first time the "socialist" goal of public, that is, State ownership.

These inspired words would later appear in the famous Clause IV of the Labour Party's 1918 constitution, drafted by the Fabian Webb and championed by Henderson as a conscious means of staving off revolution, and it was precisely fear of mass action which had forced them to take this step. Four years later the 1922 manifesto, still with Clause IV in its constitution, finished with the headline 'AGAINST REVOLUTION', and claimed that 'Labour's programme is the best bulwark against violent upheaval and class wars'. And the rest, as they say, is history: Clause IV would only be abandoned, a century later, under 'New Labour' (although there is currently talk of re-including it in an attempt to reinvigorate moribund labourism).

But we have got ahead of ourselves. Engels writing to Sorge on 18 January 1893, around the time of the founding conference, would comment: "The S.D.F. on the one hand and the Fabians on the other have not been able, with their sectarian attitude, to absorb the mass pressure for socialism in the provinces, so the foundation of a third party was quite good. But the pressure has now become so great, especially in the industrial districts of the North, that the new party came out already at this first Congress stronger than the S.D.F. or the Fabians, if not stronger than both put together. And as the mass of the membership is certainly very good, as the centre of gravity lies in the provinces and not in London, the home of cliques, and as the main point of the programme is ours [presumably referring to Clause IV] Aveling was right to join and to accept a seat on the Executive. If the petty private ambitions and intrigues of the London would-be-greats are slightly held in check here and the tactics do not turn out too wrong-headed, the Independent Labour Party may succeed in detaching the masses from the Social-Democratic Federation and in the provinces from the Fabians too, and thus forcing unity".

The conferences of 1896, 97 and 98 would be taken up with debates about fusion with the SDP, but a sufficient basis would not be found. The ILP's stance on the colonial question was however important in that it would never waver from a policy of outright opposition to the Boer War; as opposed to some of the Fabians, for instance, who approved of the war on the grounds it would improve national

strength and efficiency!

And yet if the Labour Party would eventually go over to the enemy at the time of the First World War, along with most of the other parties of the Second International, in its early years it nevertheless expressed a pressing necessity for the working classes of the British Isles: the need for an independent party to give a higher, political expression to its economic demands. But the recognition of Marxism as the class's sole doctrine was still a long way off.

#### **14. The Independent Labour Party in Ireland**

William Walker, a joiner at the Harland and Wolff shipyards, and delegate of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners had been elected to the Belfast Trades Council in 1893, where he played a key role in the New Unionism, organising manual workers in the shipyards and also female linen workers.

As founder member of the ILP he was also instrumental in gaining a hearing for socialism in Belfast. In 1904 he was elected to the Belfast Corporation, and in the same year served as president of the Irish TUC. The crushing pressure of protestant reaction in that city would however eventually see him succumbing to it. To counter opposition from the Belfast Protestant Association, and perhaps to adjust to his role in the city government, he opposed Home Rule and took up a completely sectarian attitude, even declaring that Catholics should not be allowed to hold office as "Protestantism means protesting against superstition, hence true Protestantism is synonymous with labour". As a member of the Executive Committee of the British Labour Party and their candidate on a number of occasions, he would later attempt to disguise his declared opposition to Irish Home Rule as 'internationalism'.

The new party would try to win the support of the Irish in Britain away from the Liberal Party, and in this it would come up against the opposition of the Fabians, who believed in permeating the existing political parties, and in particular the Liberal Party, with socialism.

Formed in 1884 the Fabians represented the last ditch attempt of the radicals to head off political working class independence and keep it under the thumb of the Liberal Party. Without any overall programme, their idea of introducing socialism, bit by bit, reform by reform, meant that they placed great emphasis on legislative reforms, and they accepted the support of politicians from any party prepared to back them. In Ireland, however, their avoidance of any definite stance on home

rule, and their sometimes open support of imperialism, meant they found a receptive ear among the unionists of the North. In Belfast a Fabian Society was formed in 1891 which has been heralded as the city's first socialist organization, although it collapsed in early 1892.

Later in that year Keir Hardie was voted in as MP for the Scottish constituency of Mid-Lanark and over the ensuing year 44 Independent Labour Party branches were created throughout Great Britain, without the support of official organizers. By the time of the official inaugural conference the following year many local branches were already in place.

Confronted with this success, many Fabians now jumped ship; some of the rank and file members leaving because they realised they were better served by an independent party; others leaving because they believed that the Fabian ideological objectives of containing workers' struggles within the bounds of democracy could still be pursued, and perhaps with even more urgency, within the new party. And the Labour Party's eventual conversion into a kind of radical Liberal party would confirm this opinion! Thus many Fabians moved easily into the ILP, bringing their Fabian baggage with them.

Belfast was the first city in Ireland where an ILP branch was established. But to advocate for any kind of socialism in Belfast was no mean feat, and it met with considerable opposition. In September 1893 the new section was given a considerable boost when it took advantage of Belfast's hosting of the annual conference of the British Trade Union Congress. On Sunday 3 September, the day before the Congress, the Belfast ILP organized a conference to which adherents of the ILP, SDF, Fabian Society and other labour organizations were invited with many well known socialists, including Keir Hardie, Ben Tillet, founder and secretary of the Dockers' Union, and Edward Aveling, attending. The ILP conducted fringe meetings throughout the course of the Congress and there they would have heard the party's founder, Keir Hardie, moving a motion that effectively asked the TUC to support the ILP. It read: "That in the opinion of this Congress the claims of labour in Parliament should be asserted irrespective of the convenience of any political party; and to secure this it is necessary that Labour members in the House of Commons should be unconnected with either the Liberal or Tory Party and should sit in opposition to any Government until such times as they are strong enough to form a Labour Cabinet". It was defeated by 119 votes to 96 but the narrowness of the margin would have served as a great encouragement to the new party.

On 9 September there was a demonstration through the city to Ormeau Park to mark the end of the TUC proceedings. Thousands attended the event but it would

be marred by violent loyalist protests against the labour leaders, known to support home rule. A counter-demonstration of loyalists attracted a substantial crowd of 5,000. The historian Fintan Lane writes "Anti-socialism was an important component of the loyalist/unionist political perspective and its conservative adherents were to be a perennial source of trouble for Belfast socialists. Indeed, the Orange orators presented a decidedly more physical challenge than catholic social conservatism presented in the rest of the country".

Lane describes similar violent actions by the loyalists at meetings over the ensuing weeks, including one occasion when a socialist trying to distribute socialist leaflets was only saved after a police baton charge.

In 1895 the ILP made a new drive to gain a hearing for Belfast by addressing public meetings at the Belfast Customs House, sometimes attracting crowds of as many as 10,000 people. Again they were confronted by violent mobs of loyalists. On one occasion Walker and his comrades attempted to hold their meeting and were carried off the steps "at least a dozen times, only to be dragged back by willing hands". At one stage, the loyalists grabbed Walker, a fellow Protestant, and attempted to throw him into the harbour amid shouts of "Three cheers for King William" and "To hell with the Pope". Other meetings would be drowned out by rowdy renditions of "God Save the Queen" and "Rule Britannia" and cries of "No Socialism here!". One can only imagine what other hidden layers of intimidation were brought to bear on socialists in the North if the forces of law and order were prepared to allow such public attacks.

In 1896 the ILP in Belfast held other meetings but it never really regained momentum, lapsing in early 1897.

In Dublin a branch of the ILP was not established until late 1894. This was to a certain extent precipitated by James Connolly, then a leading Edinburgh socialist and member of the ILP, who had encouraged Hardie to speak in Dublin due to there being a nucleus of a labour movement in Dublin which "only needs judicious handling". He agreed with Hardie that both the Parnellites and the anti-Parnellites were simply "middle class parties interested in the progress of Ireland from a middle class point of view".

In November 1894 Tom Mann announced in an article in the Labour Leader that: "The Irish question is the English, Scotch and Welsh question too, i.e., How to completely dislodge and effectually get rid of the monopolists of the essentials of life, that the people, as a people, may come by their own. Let us hope our Irish brothers will make common cause with us, and so allow in their and our struggle

against Landlordism and Capitalism”.

A visit by Hardie to Ireland to bolster the organization in the country would be very successful and in November he would officially launch the party's Dublin branch. In his speech he accentuated his support for home rule and stated that the ILP supported this policy as a principle not as an expediency. However only a week later, when branches of the Irish National League passed resolutions not to support ILP candidates under any circumstances, Hardie rather contradicted this view in the pages of the Labour Leader, hinting that the ILP's 'enthusiasm' for the Irish cause could be considerably dampened. When it came to Irish independence, the fact was the ILP simply didn't offer a robust alternative to the bourgeois home rule party. For voters it was therefore difficult to choose between a small recently formed workers' party, the Irish parliamentary party, and the Liberal Party, which the Irish party had, and could, seriously hope to influence or do deals with.

The ubiquitous Adolphus Shields, who had earlier joined the Fabians, would reappear now as the branch secretary of the Dublin branch, and he and fellow Fabian Robert Dorman would provide the driving force. Shields would speak at an open lecture on 'Home Rule and the ILP' but would not go to the heart of the question: "The Independent Labour Party thought Home Rule desirable but if it gave the Irish worker no better conditions than his English brother sweltered under, it was not the kind of Home Rule to emancipate the wage slaves of Ireland".

Members of the Dublin branch thought maybe the solution to their dilemma was to allow joint membership of the ILP and the Irish Parliamentary party but this would be ruled out by the majority, and the branch would split.

Lane comments: "The ILP rapidly became the largest socialist organization in Britain but its success in Ireland was fleeting, although it did manage to establish itself in Belfast at the beginning of the twentieth century. Its image as a British party caused it some problems in Dublin and Waterford, while Hardie's open support for home rule did not help it in Belfast. There seems to have been little unity between the Belfast branch and those in Waterford and Dublin, and the three branches at no stage co-ordinated their activity in Ireland. This was a serious organizational failure and accentuated their role in Ireland as merely provincial branches of a British organization. Had they operated together as an Irish ILP they may have provided the country with the beginnings of a significant socialist party".

## **15. The Irish Socialist Republican Party**

At this time, when the distinctions between the different socialist groups, leagues, clubs, societies, federations and parties were less distinct, socialists would often join whichever group had a branch closest to them, or join several.

By the end of 1895 the ILP branch had dissolved and at the beginning of 1896 a Dublin Socialist Society was formed. This organization was in the tradition of the earlier Dublin Socialist Club and Dublin Socialist Union, and was open to socialists of all shades. Shields and Gorman would join the new body, with Shields as secretary.

It was this group which offered James Connolly, a Scot born of Irish parents, the job of socialist organiser at the rate of £1 per week, inviting him to Dublin in the Spring of 1896.

This arrangement had come about as a result of the socialist John Leslie (writer of an influential pamphlet expressing Irish history from a working class point of view) placing an appeal on Connolly's behalf in the Social Democratic Federation newspaper Justice. The appeal described Connolly as: 'the most able propagandist, in every sense of the word, Scotland has yet turned out'.

Former secretary of the Scottish Socialist Federation, Connolly at this time admired and supported Keir Hardie and was an ILP member, but his thinking was more solidly rooted in the Marxism as propounded by the SDF. Indeed in 1894 and 1895 Connolly had chosen to stand in local elections in Edinburgh as a socialist rather than as an Independent Labour candidate. Writing of his candidature he stated: "The return of a Socialist candidate does not mean the immediate realisation of even the programme of palliatives commonly set before the electors. Nay, such programmes are in themselves a mere secondary consideration of little weight (...) The election of a socialist to any public body is only valuable in so far as it is the return of a disturber of the political peace".

According to Thomas Lyng, a member of the Dublin Socialist Society, within a short time of arriving in Ireland in early May 1896, Connolly confronted its leaders, "pulverised them in debate, preached socialism unblushingly to them, shattered their little organization, and from the fragments he founded a small Irish Socialist Republican party". This new party would arise simultaneously socialist and anti-imperialist, and would contest elections in opposition to both the Home Rule factions.

The formation of the ISRP was greeted enthusiastically by Edward Aveling, the first member outside Ireland to join, and by Eleanor Marx who declared that "It is

certain that the hope of “Ireland a Nation’ lies not in her middle-class O’Connells but in her generous devoted working men and women!”

By 1899 the ISRP had become a force in politics and had branches in Dublin and Cork, and groups of supporters in Belfast, Limerick, Dundalk, Waterford and Portadown. It had a newspaper, the Workers’ Republic, and an appreciable pamphlet literature based on Irish conditions and needs.

## **16. The Party Programme**

Although evidently the time was ripe, this was something entirely new. A socialist group had finally arisen which, instead of taking up a position towards Irish independence which was tepid, opportunistic or agnostic; which supported merely Home Rule, or which actually opposed it, had finally established a clear position on the role the working class should take towards the rising Irish anti-colonial struggle: Irish workers needed to fight for Ireland’s independence from Britain, but they needed to organize separately in order to defend their own class interests and the prospect of a “socialist Ireland”.

“The struggle for Irish freedom has two aspects: it is national and it is social. Its national ideal can never be realised until Ireland stands forth before the world a nation free and independent. It is social and economic, because no matter what the form of government may be, as long as one class owns as their private property the land and the instruments of labour, from which all mankind derive their substance, that class will always have it in their power to plunder and enslave the remainder of their fellow creatures”.

But, for time being at least, it wasn’t spelled out what the reciprocal relation between the national struggle and the struggle for socialism, and between the working class and the various bourgeois subclasses, would be. Its programme, as the historian Greaves puts it, “lacked the sharp analysis of tasks and tactics characterising Lenin’s draft for the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, which was drawn up almost simultaneously”.

The ISRP’s inaugural manifesto – also republished in our Archive section – was published in September 1896 and was clearly based on the Social Democratic Federation’s 1884 Platform, and yet it went considerably beyond any position ever taken by the SDF as regards the Irish independence struggle. In 1892 Justice had gone so far as to advocate partition on sectarian grounds, arguing that Ulster “with all its history and traditions” shouldn’t be “placed under the control of Catholic

Ireland of the South and the West”. It was a view which clearly failed to take into account the existence of the substantial Catholic population in the North, and also the fact that the “history and traditions” of the Protestant population, apart from purely doctrinal differences, consists largely of celebrating triumphant British imperialism.

The new party’s stated object went well beyond the purely legislative independence envisaged by the Home Rule party and declared for the “Establishment of an Irish Socialist Republic based upon the public ownership of the Irish people of the land and instruments of production, distribution and exchange”. As a means of organising “the forces of democracy in preparation for any struggle which may precede the realisation of our ideal” it set out a number of demands as means “of palliating the evils of our present social system” which would be worked for by political means. These included the nationalisation of the railways and canals, the establishment of a state bank, free education, universal suffrage, a 48 hour week and a minimum wage.

For the ISRP State ownership and control were not necessarily Socialism, but the “ownership by the State of all the land and materials for labour, combined with the co-operative control by the workers of such land and materials would be socialism (….) To the cry of the middle-class reformers, “Make this or that property of the government,” we reply, “Yes, in proportion as the workers are ready to make the government their property”.

Workers certainly need to be in control of the State for nationalisation to be deemed a socialist policy. But there was still room for misinterpretation: how would the working class wrench the government, or more accurately the State, from the hands of the bourgeoisie: through the ballot box or by force? These questions were still unresolved within the labour movement at the time, and the lack of clarity on tactics confirms the ISRP as a party of the Second International type.

In 1899 the Internationalism of the ISRP would be put to the test in the party’s campaign against the Boer War. Connolly would quickly identify the purpose of the war as that of “enabling an unscrupulous gang of capitalists to get into their hands the immense riches of the diamond fields”. For Connolly, there was “No better corroboration of the truth of the socialist maxim that the modern state is but a committee of rich men administering affairs in the interest of the upper class (….) There is no pretence that the war will benefit the English people”. With English troops being transferred from Ireland to the Transvaal, he could also see the potential this gave for the Irish working class to advance their demands, resorting to violent means if necessary because the capitalist class was a “beast of prey” not

to be “moralised, converted or conciliated”. But Connolly rejected the notion of making “physical force” a political principle. The alternate failure of “constitutionalism” and “insurrectionism” in Irish history, he argued, arose from the fact that “neither method is ever likely to be successful until a perfect agreement on the end to be attained” is arrived at.

## **17. The Electoral Trap Set Once Again**

In January 1899 there were the first elections to be held under the new Irish Local Government Act, which had included democratisation of the system of elections along with the newly created County, Urban and Rural councils: “The new local government system was the administrative counterpart of the new land system. It aimed at creating a vested interest in the connection with England by securing a share of government patronage for the middle classes” (Greaves). The working class saw in it an opportunity to redress some of their grievances and Labour Electoral Associations sprang up throughout Ireland. These registered almost universal success and some “labour” councils and “labour” mayors were elected, but disillusionment was quick to set in.

A few months later, commenting on the situation in Dublin, Connolly would state: “From the entry of the Labour Party into the Municipal Council to the present day their course has been marked by dissension, squabbling and recrimination. No single important move in the interest of the worker was even mooted, the most solemn pledges were incontinently broken, and where the workers looked for inspiration and leadership, they have received nothing but discouragement and disgust (···) The labour Lord mayor of the Dublin Labour Party declared that he would represent no class or section and thus announced beforehand that those responsible for his nomination only sought to use the name of Labour as a cover for the intrigues of a clique (···) We did not expect that the splendid class spirit shown by the Dublin workers at the late election would through the arrogance and weakness of their elected representatives be of no practical advantage to them as a class”.

At the subsequent election, the Labour Electoral Associations would suffer total defeat. The effect of this would be felt outside Ireland and see Fabian campaigners making an appearance, seeking to provide a theoretical justification for working class participation within the electoral process under the banner of “municipal socialism”.

Characterised by Eleanor Marx-Aveling at the Brussels Congress of the Second International as “middle-class folk too honest to be contented with the present

conditions of society; too educated to throw in their lot with the Salvation Army; too superior to identify themselves with the profane vulgar,” Connolly would see rather more cunning, opportunist goals in the Fabian agenda:

“Ireland has not until last year received much attention from the Fabian gentry. The Irish worker had not the municipal franchise, therefore Fabian gas and water schemes would have been lost on him. But as soon as he obtained the franchise and manifested the desire to use it in a true class spirit, the cry went up for the Fabian missionaries. In order to prevent the Irish Working class from breaking off entirely from the bourgeois parties and from developing a revolutionary tendency, the Fabians sent their lecturer to Ireland, to induce the Irish working class to confine themselves to the work of municipalising, and to fritter away their energies and break their hearts on the petty squabbles of local administration, to the entire neglect of the essential work of capturing political power necessary for social reconstruction”.

## **18. Early Communism in Ireland**

Another innovative element in the ISRP’s politics lay in the object agreed, at the foundation meeting on 29 May, of the ‘restoration’ of social democracy. What this slightly ambiguous term referred to was a theme that Connolly continued to develop over the following years, and it involved the assertion that what the ISRP required was, in substance, nothing more than a return to the social system that prevailed before the victory of colonialism, albeit integrated with the benefits of modern life. Connolly’s argument, which he presented in *Erin’s Hope: the End and the Means* was that a Celtic communism had existed in Ireland as late as the seventeenth century and only disappeared as a direct result of colonial oppression. He claimed that the ‘democratic organisation of the Irish clan’ foreshadowed the ‘more perfect organisation of the free society of the future’.

Connolly’s opinion on the survivals of primitive communism into the seventeenth century was based on the researches of the scholar P.W. Joyce, author of the weighty *Social History of Ancient Ireland* (1903) and an acknowledged expert and translator of the ancient Brehon Laws, a legal code supposedly first written down in the 5th century A.D. and only finally abolished at the beginning of the 17th. Joyce maintains that “it would appear that originally – in prehistoric times – the land was all common property” but he is nevertheless careful to point out that “as far back as our records go, there was some private ownership in land; and it is plainly recognised all through the Brehon laws”.

Much has been made ever since of whether Connolly was justified in claiming this near historical proximity of primitive communism in Ireland, but one thing is for sure, his overall aim was the same as that of Marx and Engels: to point to the historical precedents that exist for classless societies in the past. In a word, he wanted to use the precedent of primitive communism as an argument for the possibility of realizing that communism on a higher basis in the future. Connolly was right to confront bourgeois cultural nationalism, as articulated in the Gaelic League, with a different communist, tradition, as Irish as it is international, but with certain interesting characteristics of its own nevertheless. On the other hand the expectation that nationalist capitalist society in Ireland could have somehow managed to incorporate some 'national' communistic traits or elements, when in fact it would if anything constitute its definitive, progressive overcoming and negation, is something that has to be categorically denied.

### **19. The ISRP on the International Stage**

By taking up the cudgels against Fabianism, Connolly was extending his critique onto the international level. As workers within the developed capitalist countries began to secure certain advantages at the expense of the labouring population in the colonies, divisions opened up in the socialist parties between those prepared to accept that situation, and contain their programme within imperialism, and those who saw their duty as fighting for socialism alongside the oppressed working population in the colonies, leaving no room for reform in their programmes: hence a broad split between the alternatives of Revolution and Reform.

In September 1900 the International Socialist Congress would assemble in Paris. By admitting two delegates from the ISRP, it would be the first international congress to recognise Ireland as a separate national entity.

In France the Socialist deputy Millerand had entered a government which included General Galliffet, the "butcher of the Commune". Naturally enough, the main item on the Congress's agenda was Millerand's participation in a capitalist government. In the end, with a split in the French party a real possibility, a centrist resolution was framed by Kautsky, which avoided pronouncing on the theoretical question of whether participation of socialists in a capitalist government was wrong per se, and merely criticised Millerand for not obtaining the sanction of his party first. Only Ireland and Bulgaria voted against, thus taking up a position firmly on the left of the International.

One of the most resolute opponents of Kautsky and Millerand was Rosa Luxemburg.

But her call to take up non-committal stance towards the annexation and the partition of Poland between Russia, Germany and Austria, in order to enable international socialists to “walk hand in hand with their brothers of all countries”, clearly sat uncomfortably with the Irish socialists, who were keenly aware that it was not sufficient to make an aprioristic condemnation of national independence struggles.

## **20. The Birth of the Labour Party**

In 1871 the Trade Union Act had conferred legal status on trade unions, and favoured the surge of trade union activity in the years that followed. In 1901 there was a bosses offensive on both sides of the Irish Sea to undermine the Act through legal precedents. In Ireland the Quinn v. Leatham case established that “if two or more persons combine together, without legal justification, to injure another and by doing so cause him damage, they are liable in an action for conspiracy”. In England, in July of the same year, the famous Taff Vale decision of July 1901, awarded a total of £40,000 damages and costs against the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants after the latter had called a strike and attempted to prevent non-union labour being employed.

This was a huge blow and the Webbs estimated the decision to cost the trade union movement as much as £200,000 during the period of its application. The number of strikes fell by half and there was general reduction in wages.

The year before the Labour Representation Committee had been formed at a special conference called by the British TUC with a view to influencing legislation. The Committee was a federation of trade unions and trades councils, co-operative societies and socialist organisations, and at its initial conference an executive was elected which included representatives of the Independent Labour Party, the Social Democratic Federation and the Fabian Society. Ramsay MacDonald, who had recently exchanged Liberalism for the ILP, was appointed as its secretary. At the general election in 1900 it put forward 15 candidates and two were elected.

The ILP participated in the formation of the Labour Representation Committee with the specific aim of ‘devising ways and means for securing a increased number of labour representatives in the next parliament’.

The Committee, whilst not having much success in the ensuing election, would return twenty nine M.P.s in the 1906 General Election (many of them thanks to an undercover deal struck with the Liberal Party election agent, a fact which would

only emerge fifty years later). The successful LRC candidates would take their seats alongside a number of declared Lib-lab MPs, taking the total up to 53. From this point on the LRC would refer to itself as the Labour Party, although it was still very much a coalition of disparate organizations.

The Party's first major victory – with liberal support – was the passing of the 1906 Trade Disputes Act; a victory which in reality owed more to the struggles of the labour movement outside parliament. The Act would allow more room for manoeuvre in the next wave of workers' struggles, by: 1/ giving the trade unions immunity from actions arising out of the activities of their officers, and 2/ stipulating that it was not an offence for trade unionists to encourage other workers to break their contracts of employment, that is, it authorised peaceful picketing. Sidney Webb, the Fabian whose authoritative History of Trade Unionism Lenin had painstakingly translated during his Siberian exile, would actually oppose these measures; which would be another nail in the coffin of Fabian credibility.

The time seemed propitious for recovering lost ground, and in 1907 the National Union of Dock Labourers, its headquarters now in Liverpool, dispatched to Belfast a trade union officer who had been cutting his teeth organising for the union in the Scottish ports. This was James Larkin, the son of Irish immigrants whose name, along with Connolly's, would later become inextricably linked to the superimposed wars for independence and for socialism.

(to be continued)

## The National and Colonial Question at the First Congress of Eastern Peoples

Bakù, September 1920

### The Marxist Analysis of the National and Colonial Question

Marxist methodology in the 19th century had acknowledged the participation of the workers' parties of western Europe in alliances with revolutionary nationalist parties over a period which came to a close with the crushing of the Paris Commune in 1871: "Class rule is now no longer able to disguise itself in a national uniform; the national governments are as one against the proletariat!" wrote Marx in the 1871 Address of the General Council of the International Workers' Association. "The support given to the democratic and independence movements was logical in the first half of the 19th century, on the terrain of insurrection. In the article "Pressione 'razziale' del contadiname, pressione classista dei popoli colorati" ("Racial' Pressure of the Peasantry, Classist pressure of the Coloured Peoples") published in *Il Programma Comunista*, no.14, 1953, we wrote: "This fundamental Marxist position still holds good in the East today, as it did in Russia before 1917".

The revolutionary period of 1905-17 would open the national and anti-colonial cycle in the East and pose the question of what assistance should be given to these bourgeois movements by the communist proletariat.

The Russian Revolution of 1905 had had profound repercussions throughout the East, from Turkey to Persia, from China to India, since it had become possible afterwards for the peoples violently oppressed by the Western imperialist bourgeoisies to rebel and cast off the yoke of brutal exploitation they had been subjected to. After it had engulfed Germany, Hungary, Finland and Italy, the powerful revolutionary wave that began in 1917, following the massacres of the First World War, needed to spread beyond the Muslim regions of the ex-Russian empire and the Middle East to the peoples of Eastern Asia. The question was, would the latter, composed for the most part of peasants crushed under the weight of mainly English imperialism, also make moves to link up with the Third International and the World Revolution?

In his Report on the International Situation and the Fundamental Tasks of the Communist International, delivered at the Second Congress of the Communist International, held in revolutionary Moscow in the month of July 1920, Lenin declared, "The imperialist war has helped the revolution: the bourgeoisie has levied soldiers from the colonies, from the backward countries, from the most distant

regions and made them participate in this imperialist war. The British bourgeoisie impressed on the soldiers from India that it was the duty of the Indian peasants to defend Great Britain against Germany; the French bourgeoisie impressed on soldiers from its African colonies that it was their duty to defend France (...) The imperialist war has drawn the dependent peoples into world history. And one of the most important tasks now confronting us is to consider how the foundation-stone of the organisation of the Soviet movement can be laid in the non-capitalist countries”.

The question was still on the agenda after the Second World War. In the *Filo del Tempo* article from 1953 cited above, it was stated that the time had come – with war in Indochina since 1946 and the ending of the Korean War – to focus our attention on two questions which were intimately connected, namely the agrarian, and the national and colonial questions, basing ourselves on the results established by Marx and Engels and revived by Lenin, and on the fundamental texts written in the years 1920-1926 by the left opposition in the International and by the Communist Party of Italy.

That article pointed out that “What must be understood is this: in given geographical areas and historical phases, precisely identified in the general theory of historical development (...) it often happens that an attack by a mass of poor peasant farmers against the landed proprietors accelerates the bourgeois revolution and frees modern productive forces from historical chains, the sole precondition for subsequent workers’ struggle and demands”. The main thing is to define these movements as having a democratic, capitalist aim and therefore bourgeois and not proletarian in form. It is a matter of grasping the historical significance of events: “Although it is difficult, looking to give a hand to the bourgeoisie, without seeing things through their eyes”.

### **The International Situation**

In January 1918, with the First World War still underway, the white armies supported by the Germans ferociously suppressed the revolution in Finland, leaving thousands dead. The Entente organized an embargo against the new Russian state and some British detachments of the Army of the East started to march on the oilfields of Bakù, which had been proving so profitable for Shell, the Anglo-Dutch oil company. In March 1918 the Bolsheviks signed a separate peace with Germany, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which restored to the Ottoman Empire territories that Russia had occupied in 1878, namely the Russian part of Armenia, and abandoned the Ukraine to German troops, who starved the peasantry and deprived Russia of its grain supplies. From April 1918 the British and French intervened in the North

and South of the country to counter the German occupation. Austrian troops occupied Odessa and the Black Sea, and the Japanese disembarked at Vladivostok. Ottoman troops penetrated the Caucasus to attack Armenian forces, which had been joined by those of Georgia and Azerbaijan, using the pretext of defending the Azeri (ethnic Turks) against the Armenians. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, which had called for German protection, proclaimed their independence in May 1918. The Russian Civil War would continue until 1922, at the cost of millions of deaths.

Polish troops would also harass the new Soviet State

The part of the Caucasus that had been within tsarist Russia became the new zone of conflict. This mountainous region, whose highest peaks reach over 5,000 metres, is roughly 1,200 km long and around 600 km wide. It separates the Black Sea from the Caspian Sea, and Europe from Asia and the Middle East. Over the course of history it had always been a busy intersection and also a place of refuge for many peoples put to flight by invasions. In prehistory the peoples moving out of Africa into Europe and into the rest of the world crossed through it. The territory is composed of a mosaic of peoples grouped into three main families (the Caucasian, which is the oldest; the indo-European; the Turco-Tartar, originally from the Asiatic Steppes). A great variety of languages (43) and religions are to be found there. Given its strategic position to the south of Russia, along with its substantial gas and oil resources, the region is unable to escape the disputes between the imperialist states. The Allies therefore tried to get their hands on it.

The Middle East, as it is currently structured, came into being after the First World War and the arbitrary carving up of the Ottoman Empire by the two main imperialist powers in the area, Great Britain and France. Immediately after the new states were founded rebellions broke out. By July 1919 the Syrian National Congress was already demanding a unitary state. Strikes by railwaymen took place and hotbeds of nationalist discontent flared up in various countries in the region between 1919 and 1924: Egypt, Syria and Libya. Arab revolts against the British, often led by Shiite clerics, were repeated in 1922 and 1924 in Syria and Palestine, and there were anti-Zionist revolts, such as in Jaffa in 1921 in response to the artificial divisions imposed by the so-called Mandates. All these movements were influenced by the Russian Revolution and the nationalist movement of Mustafa Kemal in Turkey.

Indeed, Turkey only avoided the dismemberment foreseen by the infamous Treaty of Sèvres thanks to the energy and resolve of the Turkish nationalists, backed by the predominantly peasant population, which rallied behind the hero of Gallipoli in prosecuting a ferocious civil war to secure the country's independence. To begin

with Mustafa Kemal ruthlessly pushed the Armenians back over the border. The Bolshevik troops helped him because the Armenian Republic, founded by the Entente, was serving as a base for dangerous counter-revolutionary and anti-Bolshevik forces. The Kemalist formations then turned on the Kurds, inflicting heavy losses. Then they liberated Cilicia in the south from French troops and central Anatolia from the Italians. Finally, they attacked the troops occupying Constantinople, by now reduced to a few thousand men.

In 1920 the situation began to deteriorate for the new communist state. In a speech at the 9th Conference of the RCP on 22 September 1920, as the Red Army approached Warsaw, Lenin declared: “ Poland, the last anti-Bolshevik stronghold fully controlled by the Entente, is such an important element in this system that when the Red Army threatened that stronghold the entire structure was shaken. The Soviet Republic has become a major factor in world politics. The new situation which has arisen has, in the first place, revealed the tremendously significant fact that the bourgeoisie of the Entente-oppressed countries is in the main for us, and these countries contain seventy per cent of the world’s population. During 1919-20 the entire English and French news services and colonial press evoked the “Communist Peril”.

### **1920, Apogee of the Bolshevik Revolutionary Movement**

In March 1920 Lenin took stock of the Revolutionary movement in the West. In the Speech at a Meeting of the Moscow Soviet in Celebration of the First Anniversary of the Third International (March 6, 1920) we read:

“A year has passed since the founding of the Communist International. During that year the International has been successful beyond all expectations (...) In the early days of the revolution many hoped the socialist revolution would break out in Western Europe immediately after the imperialist war; at the time when the masses were armed there could have been a successful revolution in some of the Western countries as well. It could have taken place, had it not been for the split within the proletariat of Western Europe being deeper and the treachery of the former socialist leaders greater than had been imagined (...) Had the [Second] International not been in the hands of traitors who worked to save the bourgeoisie at the critical moment, there would have been many chances of a speedy revolution in many belligerent countries as soon as the war ended and also in some neutral countries, where the people were armed; then the outcome would have been different.

“Things did not turn out that way, revolution did not succeed so quickly, and it

now has to follow the whole path of development that we began even before the first revolution, before 1905; for it was only due to more than ten years having passed before 1917 that we were capable of leading the proletariat.

“What happened in 1905 was, so to speak, a rehearsal for the revolution, and it was partly because of this that we in Russia succeeded in using the moment of the collapse of the imperialist war for the proletariat to seize power. Owing to historical developments, owing to the utter rottenness of the autocracy, we were able to begin the revolution with ease; but the easier it was to begin it the harder it has been for this solitary country to continue it, and with the experience of this year behind us we can say to ourselves that in other countries, where the workers are more developed, where there is more industry, where the workers are far more numerous, the revolution has developed more slowly. It has taken our path, but at a much slower pace. The workers are continuing this slow development, paving the way for the proletarian victory which is advancing with undoubtedly greater speed than was the case with us”.

1920-21 were the years in which the communist parties adhering to the 3rd International were formed, and one of the fundamental duties of the C.I. was to define clearly the conditions of admission, in such a way as to eliminate the parties, groups and fractions that wanted to join the International for reasons of social-opportunism, or for electoral ends (as in the case of the French and German right). And the Asian world, where tensions were running high, certainly wasn't being left behind.

### **The Theses of the Second Congress**

“This was revolutionary Russia's broad outlook from the very beginning: alliance, with the Soviet State, on the one hand of the working class in the western countries, on the other of the oppressed peoples of colour, to overthrow capitalist imperialism (...) In September 1920, therefore between the Second and Third Congresses of the 3rd International, firmly anchored in the directives of revolutionary Marxism, a congress of the peoples of the East took place at Bakù. Almost two thousand delegates attended, ranging from China to Egypt, from Persia to Libya” (Oriente, “Prometeo”, no.2, 1951).

It was abundantly clear to the Bolsheviks that the western bourgeoisie's capacity to resist was based on the blatant exploitation of the colonial peoples, allowing them to extort the enormous riches which they could use to buy off the European workers' aristocracy. From the military point of view the movements in the colonies

could engage the imperial powers and contribute to loosening their vice-like grip on the revolutionary citadel. A question which presented itself to revolutionaries was, therefore, what tactical stance should the proletariat in the colonies adopt towards its nationalist bourgeoisie?

(To be continued)

## From the Archive of the Left

### The Economic and Social Structure of Russia Today

#### 2018 Presentation

The extended study entitled *The Economic and Social Structure of Russia Today* first appeared in the columns of *Il Programma Comunista*, an organ of our party at that time, in 15 instalments from number 10, 1955 to number 4, 1956. Here we are publishing the introduction to that work, recently translated by our English comrades, and it gives a good idea of the vast panorama of complex material covered.

The important question of the class nature of the self-proclaimed 'soviet state', of the complex and turbulent way it came into being, and of its subsequent history was already back then a central preoccupation of the many movements which in all countries, of both new and long entrenched capitalisms, although wavering in their loyalty and entertaining major doubts, declared themselves followers of the October Revolution. Equally it stimulated the misleading propaganda of the opposing camps, the Atlantic and Eastern bloc ones, which were nevertheless in agreement in describing the 'soviet state' as communist and proletarian; characteristics these which supposedly referred not only to the political nature of the state but also the prevailing economic relations in Russia and to all aspects of its society.

It was therefore evident that a revival of the communist movement, similar to what came after the dispersion of the Paris Commune and the First International, the betrayal of 1914 and of the Second International, and the degeneration of the Third International, required the party of communism to derive definitive historical lessons from these serious defeats of ours, and make a clear reaffirmation of orthodox doctrine and of our consequent separation from the degenerate schools and parties of anarchism, of reformism, and of that national-communism which would be named after Stalin. Only on acquiring the balance sheet of the Russian tragedy, complete, coherent and agreed upon, was it, and will it be, possible for the refoundation of the international communist movement of the working class to take place.

1956 and "The Structure" mark for our party the culmination and the completion of that difficult task, and in a certain sense it was definitive.

Stalin had died in 1952. Already by 1956 the XXth Congress of the CPUS had given its official sanction to what was called "destalinization". And forty years later, on 26 December 1991, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR would declare itself

“dissolved”, giving birth to a declaredly capitalist nation on the ruins of the “death of communism”. “Communism is dead – Long Live Communism” we would write, meaning that we considered the inglorious, horrible death of false socialism a good thing and the necessary precondition for the rebirth of genuine communism, which would arise on its own distinctive bases of class and historical programme.

All of the transitions that have taken place in the sixty odd years since the drafting of “The Structure” have been carefully monitored by the Party, and their causes and effects analysed. They cannot be characterised, we wrote, as either revolutions or counter-revolutions.

As far as the Russian economy is concerned, there has never been a return to capitalism, a historical backwards step. History never goes backwards. And it wasn't possible to return to capitalism because Russia never emerged from it in the first place. The task of the revolution in isolated and semi-feudal Russia in the early 1920s was just to resist in the expectation of the revolution breaking out in the West. And in order to resist it had to build capitalism, even if under the communist dictatorship, in other words, electrification, large scale industry, a modern agriculture. And subsequently the accumulation of capital in Russia took the form of State Capitalism, but only in large-scale industry.

As regards the political situation, the overturning by the class which through its party held on to the dictatorial power of the State, in Russia would come to an end with the degeneration of the glorious Russian Communist Party, in a lethal struggle which saw the fractions which remained faithful to communism and Marxism defeated; a process which by 1956 had been fully completed and sanctioned by the participation of the Russian State in the Second Imperialist War.

To be sure, Stalinism, destalinization, and openly declared capitalism are different, indeed conflicting, phases, but all are part of the tumultuous process of the formation of a national capitalism. The different guises in which the latter appears and the ideologies behind which it hides, whether democratic, fascist, or “communist”, correspond to the changing necessities of the defence of the relations of production, always and without fail based on wage labour and the accumulation of capital. Whether the owner of the capital is a private individual or the State doesn't change by one jot the underlying relations of production and distribution.

It is therefore gratifying to have confirmed our prediction that the centralized “Soviet planning” of the productive forces would be unable to contain the disruptive energy of those forces which they assume in the shape of capital, resistant as it is to any kind of containment or rationality and with an inherent tendency towards

overproduction and self-destruction. This phenomenon, which propels the capitalisms of both East and West into crisis; into their common, fatal crisis of the senile phase of capitalism, will not be avoided by constantly altering the colour of their flags.

What the global working class and the revolution needs is a party which, as in Russia, knows how to recognise and fight for its revolution, and without getting distracted, deceived or deviated by the various so-called “revolutions” on offer from the rotten bourgeois world, each of them as grandiloquent and pretentious as they are inconsistent.

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## **1955 Introduction**

### **1 – Reference to Previous Treatments of the Subject**

The current essay may be considered a direct continuation of the study presented at our party’s general meeting in Bologna held between 31 October and 1 November 1954, and fully developed in a set of articles, ranging over eleven numbers, which appeared in our fortnightly publication *Il Programma Comunista* (issue no.21, 1954 to issue no. 8, 1955).

Its title, *Russia and Revolution in the Marxist Theory*, corresponded to the objective of giving a systematic exposition of what the Marxist communist movement has asserted as regards the historical development of Russian society and its international relations.

Remaining faithful to the method of presenting the task of Marxist revolutionaries not as a generic more or less sceptical waiting for events to unfold, the unanticipated novel features and the twists and turns of which are supposed to indicate to the movement the new path it should take; but rather as one of a constant comparison of historical occurrences with earlier “expectations” and “forecasts” which the party, as a living organisation participating in historical events, has the capacity to make (although it remains a constant challenge) by drawing on the theory which shaped its platform and its general character; we set out to present what Marxists had established as regards the course of social history of Russia, and to compare it with the historical data we have on past and present European and global development.

The exposition was divided into three periods. An Introduction of course reconnected the theme to the many previous elaborations that this important topic had already received in our meetings and writings since the immediate post Second World War period, and it set out the problem: to obliterate all the assertions made by our enemies, both overt and latent, regarding the incapacity of Marxism to arrive at an overall picture of what happened in Russia, and the so-called necessity to revise our general theory in order to encompass Russian “peculiarities”.

The first part was entitled: “European Revolution and ‘Greater Slavia’”. In it was sketched out a developmental time-field of the forms of production that typify the Russian zone today, as distinguished from the Mediterranean-classical and German-feudal forms. It set out to trace the main lines of these three processes, placing the Russian one in relation to historical data on how the first communities settled and organized themselves on the land; their arrangement into social classes and their forms of production; and the major and minor centralization of political formations and of the State. Having thus arrived in modern times, an account was given of what Marxism asserted in its early years regarding the role of Russia in the European revolutionary movement after the French Revolution, and then as regards social questions within Russia. This from the contributions of Marx and Engels in the last century.

Having paused to consider the dual Marxist interest in the impending revolutions in Russia, which would fatally intertwine the bourgeois and the proletarian ones, the second part gave an account of the particularly rich and complex views about this future-historical question which were expressed by the mainly Marxist, but also pre-Marxist, movements inside Russia, with particular attention paid to the debates and the solutions put forward in the various congresses of the Bolshevik Party before the 1914 war. Here also we set out to demolish the extremely persistent idea that in Russia one is obliged to use a special historical yardstick.

## **2 – Plan of the Present Report**

On the basis of the material set out and elaborated in suchlike manner we move directly to our current topic: study of the momentous way in which the great revolution which is the subject of our study occurred, and an evaluation of the events and the situation that followed.

So we come on to the fundamental question, one which not only caused our group to differentiate itself from so many others, but which when all is said and done

stands at the centre of every struggle and is at the heart of every political dispute in the contemporary world: what is Russia today? Indeed since 1917, how one judges the Russian situation, whether condemning or praising what happens on the Russian stage and the coups de theatre it has presented to an astonished world, form the touchstone for conflicting movements and the parties, even in countries far removed from what goes on there, in their battles amongst themselves.

Today's political horizon is entirely occupied, or rather suffocated, by an interpretation which is essentially the same for the two bitterly opposed sectors, between which stands an almost physical wall marking the division of today's troubled world between them; a forbidding sight to all. Russia, with its powerful leading state and a bunch of satellites and hangers-on, is supposedly on the side of the global proletariat and a socialist form of social organization – while the other countries, at whose head stands a number of other gigantic state powers comparable to Russia, represent the defence, preservation and interests of the present capitalist economic form of society, and of the bourgeois class which manages it under the banner of democratic liberty.

Since its very first appearance we have fought, alone or with a few others, against this interpretation of modern history, and only we have shown the best way of fighting it, in rigorous consistency with the way Marxism interpreted the whole of the social struggle in the century which precedes us. Since our very first meetings, and the first publication of our bimonthly journal and our review *Prometeo* (in the years up to 1951) we rejected the idea that Russia means socialism; we rolled out our line at our earliest assemblies in Rome, Naples, Florence, Milan, Trieste and so on. We showed, moreover, how it is to be distinguished from the Trotskyist line, which defends the notion that Russia is proletarian and socialist today, and that of a banal leftism which lacks the dialectical force to go beyond a merely verbal identification of each historical process and of each imperialism. We also considered it important to dismantle a strange construct which sees the social structure in Russia today as representing an alternative explanation of the bloody dialogue between capitalism and communism; a third way involving an alleged rule of the bureaucratic classes. And all of this we developed by demonstrating how it is derived from the umbilical cord of orthodox unitary Marxism, first and foremost, and subsequently, following the Russian Revolution – when faced with the initial symptoms of the gigantic degenerative wave which would later sweep everything away and be named after Stalin – from the battle put up by the left-wing of the Italian Marxist Communists and a few other international groups to defend genuine Marxism.

It is a matter now of giving an improved account of all this, which, after having

chronicled the events of the much-anticipated double revolution of 1917 – let it be understood in a critical way, not simply listing facts that are already generally well-known – will arrive at its goal of clarifying what the relations of production that currently exist in Russia are and the economic laws to which they respond, and will demonstrate that such a society is still enclosed within the bounds of capitalism. And in the end it establishes that the outcome of it all, certainly nothing to looked down on, is a colossal bourgeois revolution, which is proceeding with epic developments from old Europe across the whole of the planet.

### **3 – More on “Tactics”**

Another topic that will be omitted from the present report, although we need to recall it now and again as its is closely connected to it, is one which our movement has worked on for years and has written about extensively: the debate on methodology and tactics which came before our separation from official communism, which little by little, as its positions became increasingly unacceptable and heterodox, descended into a systematic repudiation of the positions that we shared, derived, to put it simply, from Marx, Lenin and the Third International. This debate on tactics would take place between 1920 and 1926 and the positions adopted, as we intend to prove, were genuinely Marxist, in the honest and direct way that they developed a very complex issue, and later on they would receive the least welcome, but the most resounding, of confirmations.

Nevertheless it is important to specify exactly what our positions on this realigning of the delicate matter of tactics are, indispensable if we are to see a return, desirable though not expected any time soon, of those periods in which action and struggle take precedence over the never to be neglected and ever decisive factor of party doctrine.

Without a doubt our fight is make sure the movement’s “obligatory” rules as regards action are applied by the party in practice; rules which are binding not only on individuals and peripheral groups, but on the party centre itself, to which is owed total executive discipline to the extent it remains strictly committed (without the right to improvise bogus ‘new courses” when new situations are discerned) to the set of precise rules adopted by the party as its guide to action.

However, we need to avoid any misunderstanding regarding the universality of these rules, which are not original, immutable rules, but derivative ones. The firm principles to which the movement is forever bound, since they arose – according to our thesis of the revolutionary programme forming all at once – at given, rare

turning points in history, are not tactical rules, but laws of historical interpretation which constitute our doctrinal baggage. The development of these principles leads to the recognition, across vast zones and over historical periods calculable in centuries, of the party's great road ahead, from which it cannot diverge without leading to its collapse and historical liquidation. Tactical norms, which no-one is entitled to leave as a blank sheet, or to revise in order to adapt to immediate circumstances, are rules derived from this theorization of the major historical developments, and they are rules which are in a practical sense set, and in a theoretical sense flexible, because they are rules derived from the laws of the 'major courses', and, like them – on the historical scale not that of manoeuvre and intrigue – declaredly transitory.

We remind the reader of often-repeated examples, like the famous transition in Western Europe from fighting defensive wars and wars of national independence, to the method of defeatism in any war that is conducted by the bourgeois state. Comrades need to understand that no problem will ever be resolved by resorting to a party tactical code.

The latter does need to exist, but in itself it reveals nothing and it doesn't resolve any questions; the answers are to be sought amongst the baggage of general doctrine and by keeping the historic cycles/zones derived from that doctrine clearly in mind.

It will therefore have to be left to a subsequent exposition, using as its historical material the polemical dialogue between the Italian left and Moscow, to cast light on the question of tactics and put right the serious errors that are still doing the rounds. For example, as regards the question of the relationship between the international proletarian movement, and the movements of the colonial peoples directed against antiquated domestic regimes and white imperialism – the best example of a historical rather than a tactical problem – it is not a question of providing support, because first of all it is necessary to fully explain why the purely classist movement of the metropolitan proletariat has totally collapsed, and only then will we know what kind of relations this post-capitalist level revolutionary force will be able to establish with the pre-capitalist level revolutionary forces that are so powerfully alive in the East today.

To respond by citing some rigid tactical formula or, worse still, by inventing a new one, is in such cases banal. To support the right to re-invent elastic tactical rules whenever convenient, certainly that is opportunism and betrayal, which we will always oppose without mercy, and with much harsher and less innocuous condemnations of its infamy than that.

#### 4 – Established Outcomes

These outcomes being the result of our previous treatment of the subject, on the basis of which we will now move forward, we need only record the main points.

The doctrine of historical materialism confirms we are entirely right, as opposed to that superficial notion which claims that Russian history is somehow exceptional. The diverse processes by which free nomadic tribes were transformed into an organized stable people is set against the physical nature of the territory; the climate; the poor fertility of the soil; the immense expanse of land far from the coastal regions; the different rhythm of evolution as compared to that of the peoples of the hot Mediterranean shores; and related to the different manifestation of slavery, and the formation of a unitary state. Populations arriving from the East had a different destiny. There were those which reached the borders of the collapsing Roman Empire and exploited the accumulated wealth and endowment of an advanced production, allowing them to form a civilization based on landed property, a decentralized order akin to that of the feudal lords; and there were those who remained closer to the vast Asian heartland, exposed to fresh waves of nomadic hordes in search of prey and a base, whose stability would remain precarious for as long as it was entrusted to local chieftains, only becoming more permanent with the formation of a large, centralized state organization, powerful enough to organize not only wars but also peace-time production.

From the earliest times the State is therefore a key component of Russian society, and thanks to it, and the military and administrative organizations centred around it, it is able to overcome the continuous attacks from Asia and Europe and become ever more powerful. But its function is not merely political but also directly economic: to the Crown belongs around half the land and the rural serf communities, and therefore the class of nobles controls only half the territory and population and is subordinate to the central dynastic power: the king is not, as in the decentralized Germanic system, elected by the nobles, who remain the effective holders of the real economic and legal control of society.

This typical “State Feudalism” survives into modern times and Marx sees it as the lynchpin of the “Holy Alliances” and the power which, from the time of Napoleon onwards, is most committed to subjugating the bourgeois revolutions in Europe, as well as remaining available to support monarchies and bourgeoisies against the first proletarian movements.

We recorded Marx’s keen interest in each of the Tsar’s military defeats, from which there could emerge the collapse of the Slavic bulwark of reaction, whoever

the enemy happened to be.

We then set out the data from the first analyses of the social forces inside Russia, and the responses, for which Engels had laid the basis, regarding the famous question of the possible 'leap over capitalism' to which Marx had also made dialectical allusions, eventually discarding such a possibility. Engels follows the early formulations of the Russian revolutionaries which underestimate the importance of emerging industry and rely on the peasant movement, and he engages them in discussion, concluding he as well in his final days that the Slavic agricultural community would not be able to develop into general socialism, before a complete capitalist and mercantile form had previously emerged.

In the second part, as we mentioned earlier, we followed the extremely important work of the nascent Russian Marxist movement, based on the industrial proletariat, and recorded the successive historic theses it elaborated, which may be summed up as follows:

- Progressive development of capitalism in Russia and formation of a large urban proletariat.
- Negative conclusion as regards the revolutionary competence of the Russian bourgeoisie to direct the overthrow of Tsarism.
- Analogous conclusion as regards the capacity of the movements based on the peasantry, the populists, the Trudoviks, the socialist revolutionaries.
- Condemnation of the position taken by some right-wing Marxists, later termed Mensheviks, which, based on the false claim that the bourgeois revolution was of no interest to proletarians and socialists, proposed leaving its direction to the democratic and popular parties, thus, to all intents and purposes, abandoning the political struggle against the tsarist power.
- Further unmasking of this counter-revolutionary thesis, by rejecting the notion that one could support a development of the democratic revolution based on constitutions bestowed by the tsar and even on the preservation of the dynasty, that is an insurrectional and republican slogan of bourgeois revolution.
- Participation of the urban proletariat in the front line of every struggle, as occurred in 1905; the revolutionary power which emerged from the armed struggle to exclude all the bourgeois constitutional parties and based on the management of the democratic revolution by workers and peasants (democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants).
- Transition to the subsequent revolutionary struggle for the socialist program only subsequent to the breaking out – as always envisaged by Marxism – of the proletarian socialist revolution in Europe after the collapse of Tsarism.

## 5 – Lenin's Formula

Before the revolution, therefore, and after it for that matter, Lenin never expected a different process of international proletarian revolution to be discovered within the evolving revolutionary crisis in Russia. As a Marxist of the radical left he never doubted that in the capitalist countries socialism would emerge from a revolutionary insurrection of proletarians and from the installation of the Marxist dictatorship of the proletariat. Since, however, he was obliged to deal with the question in a country in which the bourgeois revolution was yet to be completed, he predicted not only that the proletariat and its revolutionary party would have to invest all their efforts toward that end, but, given how long it was taking to bring about the fall of the reactionary and feudal Tsarist regime state, he issued the forecast and explicit program that the working class would have to take this historic task off the bourgeoisie's hands, and conduct it in its stead, also taking over from it the no less characteristic task of leading the peasant masses.

If, for example, the formula of the bourgeois revolution was: leadership provided by the bourgeois class (although, even back then, more by its ideologues and politicians than its industrialists, merchants and bankers) drawing the proletarians of the cities and the peasant serfs of the countryside along behind the democratic revolution; the Russian formula for revolution (still bourgeois, i.e., democratic) was different: leadership provided by the proletariat, struggle also against the bourgeoisie which was inclined to reach an understanding with tsarism based on parliamentary compromises, drawing the popular and rural masses behind the proletariat; which, during this historical phase, raised the poor peasants during the insurrection and in the dictatorial government to the rank of its allies.

The tasks of such a revolution, not yet socialism, are nevertheless clear: civil war to defeat the tsarist army and police, overthrowing of the dynasty and proclamation of the republic, elected constituent assembly struggling against all opportunist and bourgeois parties, drawing on the support of the Councils of workers and peasants which had arisen in 1905.

The objection that the latter was not a socialist revolution did not stop Lenin for one instant, the matter being clear from a theoretical point of view. It was a bourgeois revolution, in the only form in which the defeat of the tsarist and medieval counter-revolution could be assured: and to this result alone (at the time and later clearly important and decisive) the power of the proletarian dictatorship was consecrated: dictatorship because violent and illegal means were used, just as they had been used by the great bourgeoisies in Europe at the head of the masses, but democratic because the task was to destroy feudalism and not capitalism, with

the peasants allied for this very reason and because, while ultimately destined to eventually become allies of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat, they are also the sworn enemies of feudalism.

Lenin (to us it seems indispensable to continue our summary of what was said at the Bologna meeting, referring doubters to the mass of documents and evidence contained in the extended report) wasn't therefore, during this phase, setting his sights on the socialist revolution, that is, one which rather than leading to a bourgeois democracy pushed to its maximum radical extreme would lead to the dictatorship expropriating capital, because he was leaving this subsequent task to a later struggle; one no longer contained within the national context, as would be the case for the impending Russian Revolution, but which would take place on an international scale.

He believed that in the aftermath of a European war, which Marx and Engels had always believed would be between the Slavs and the Germans, the collapse of Tsarism would be sure to set the working masses of the west in motion, and that only after they had taken political power, and control over the huge means of production, concentrated by a fully developed capitalism, would the revolution in Russia also be able to acquire socialistic content. The beginning of the war had been confirmed by the disastrous one with Japan, but the counter-revolution had easily crushed the forces of 1905, and as a consequence the decisive toppling of tsarism, for as long as the struggle was not resolved by using terror (also substantially "bourgeois" like Robespierre's use of it) to crush the forces of reaction, was always a preliminary outcome with respect to the advent of socialism. Along with Trotsky we showed that first and foremost Lenin invoked the strength of the international proletariat to support the revolutionary power in Russia against a tsarist revival, not so much to aid collectivist social development. And in fact a revival of Tsarism would have meant the same thing to the Russian peasants and proletarians if they had got into power by democratic means, and to Western workers in revolt against the capitalist bourgeoisie.

In fact as far back as 1917 and the series of events after it, Tsarism's attempts to regain power, flanked by western forces, were far from negligible, and it would take a long time to stamp them out. Lenin's powerful vision of a scale or gradation of historical phases was therefore correct; and it would be an exercise in extremist stupidity to portray him as the confident prognosticator of socialism in Russia.

This seemingly left explanation of Lenin's work would end up as a handy tool in the treacherous game of showing that historically you arrive at socialism by way of forms that include democratic ingredients; and socially side by side with

peasant-populist elements, which is the principal form the degeneration and the present ignominious situation takes.

## **6 – Comparison with the event**

The present issue is to establish if Russia has gone or not further in comparison with the contents of such a perspective. If we made a bridge between those disquisitions, between 1903 to 1917, which seemed far removed from any practical effect, and the situation as it is today in 1955, in which we find the capitalist form completely established, deeply-rooted and spread throughout Russia, and find alongside it, based on it and intermingled with it, a veritable orgy of democratic, populist and coalitionist “values”, we are entitled to conclude that Lenin’s forecast was accurate, and that history indeed headed in the direction he said it would, thanks to a gigantic effort on the part of the Russian proletariat, whose balance sheet today is: “the building of capitalism”.

And it proves all the points we have been making: that by using the Marxist key it was possible to bring clarity to Russian history, distant and recent; that Marx and Engels correctly predicted to it the indescribable horrors of the capitalist inferno; that Lenin produced an impeccable Marxist analysis of how to cast off the yoke of a formidable pre-capitalist regime, along with a very apt theory about the bourgeoisie’s incapacity to accomplish it and the role of the proletariat as the latter’s historical surrogate. And we are also fully entitled to say that Lenin achieved all of this without adding anything new to classical Marxist theory: the birth of proletarian communism is dialectically a national and international fact: it could only arise and take shape where the form of modern production had already triumphed and this had only happened within a national framework (England, France, etc) but, emerging from such national outlets, as theory, as organization and as working party, proletarian communism had to, from the very start, take into account not only the binomial capitalism-proletariat, but also the real, living global picture which includes all of the classes and movements within human society at all their various stages of development.

In the Manifesto this principle is applied on a universal scale, and since then the communists, after all other vestal virgins have allowed themselves to be seduced, have continued to tend the flame of every genuinely incandescent revolution.

This is the true way of seeing and only genuinely Marxist formulation of the complex problems of every society not yet arrived at the stage of the great duel between bosses and workers, for all the marginal and mongrel classes of those

societies which nevertheless have by now as their actual framework the capitalist “model” of the economy.

## 7 – The Past Half Century

If all this is very true at the extremes of this fifty year time span, between the theory sketched out in 1905 and the actual physical reality as it appeared in 1955, we also need to see what happened in-between. This historical bridge in fact is best conceived of as having several arches rather than a single span; this is because it covers the most concentrated 50 years in all of known history, including two world wars and, as far as Russia is concerned, at least three great revolutions, and a half-revolutionary, half counter-revolutionary course which, even if not unique in the history of the modes of production, must certainly be described in much more detail.

Not providing a theory in the Marxist sense for each of the ‘intermediary arches’, that together define the difficult cycle as a whole, a bit of over-simplification can help out here.

Yes, the Russian party of revolutionary workers and communist socialists set itself the historical aim of bringing about mercantile and democratic capitalism, on condition that in delivering it (and committing its own class forces to it, despite its other great historical task) it would ensure the bloody obliteration from Europe, by fire and the sword, of the monstrous construction of the Tsarist State, leaving it forever a grim memory of the distant past.

And yes, the outcome of that momentous struggle, and its later changing fortunes, was that alone, and one has to deny that in Russia today there are dominant forces at work whose aim is to achieve transcapitalist (can you accept this? The meaning is, as you say, beyond capitalism) forms, or, using the same criteria, that there are any in the countries of the capitalist West either, the difference between the two consisting in the distinction between a capitalism in florid growth and one in an inflationary phase foretelling decline.

But it would be wrong to dryly conclude from this, given the collimation between what the party mapped out, and what history presents us with, that there was ‘just’ a bourgeois revolution in Russia, since as we say Kerensky’s was bourgeois and Lenin’s was bourgeois, they stand in relation to one another (so to speak) as Mirabeau’s revolution to Robespierre’s.

As we develop this point, setting it in the context of economic and social factors, classes, parties and political power relations, we will assert that whilst the form of production in Russia is bourgeois, October was not bourgeois, but proletarian and socialist.

Such an outline is only achievable by placing it within the international framework of recent history, and at the end of this introduction we will recall the three historical characteristics which October in itself contains and which elevate it far above having 'just' destroyed Tsarism forever; which with only the outcome of the February revolution to contend with would probably have regained power, as it desperately attempted to do, and as a large part of the global bourgeoisie would encourage them to do – and encourage in a practical sense it did, until it got the worst of it at the hands of Bolshevik's integral dictatorship.

## **8 – Destruction of War**

The strict relationship established between defeat of the Tsarist army and political revolution, which Marx and Lenin were keen to identify in all the wars that European history records, (regarding the purely indicative use we make of personal names from the time of the coalitions of the early eighteenth hundreds to the First World War, certainly more could be said) this was proven in the policy pursued, without recoiling before its more tragic consequences, by the October power: promoting the breaking up of the military units, dismantling of the front, and predominating over any infatuation within the party – unfortunately expressed by some of its best members, even on the left – for a national and patriotic version of the war, which would instead, in a truly major victory, be ruthlessly crushed.

This revolutionary policy with no limits, leaving any hypocrisy in tatters, pushed to its most extreme consequences, inspired by the call for unreserved defeatism, advocating the conversion of the war to defend the country into a civil war, was magnificently vindicated by the collapse of the German military power, which was brought low not by an offensive from the West but by a capitulation and fraternization to the East.

It wouldn't be possible for a bourgeois revolution to have such content because it is intrinsically linked to the promotion of values and institutions of a national and patriotic character. This we have explained at length (for example in the treatise at the Trieste Meeting of 29-30 August 1953, the account of which, entitled "Factors of Race and Nation in the Marxist Theory", appeared in issues 16-20/1953 of *Il Programma Comunista*). We once showed that Robespierre, from the Parliamentary

Tribune, reproached his sworn enemies, the English, for their action against French influence across the Atlantic, conducted against Louis XIV and XVI. The bourgeois revolution doesn't break the thread of national history, only a proletarian revolution can dare to do that. Today yes, now that the Russian power is taking a patriotic line and glorifies the defeated of Port Arthur and Tsushima who Lenin had worked to hamstring, and no less the defenders of Sebastopol who so sickened Marx, and even the feats of conquest of Peter the Great.

## **9 – Liquidation of Allies**

Another distinguishing feature of Bolshevik revolutionary policy is their progressive struggle against the transitory allies of the prior phase, who one after the other are put out of action until finally an undiluted one party government is attained. It is not enough here to draw an analogy with the various bourgeois revolutions in the struggles between the various parties between 1789 and 1793 in France, because the analogy holds only as regards methods of action. We would not say, for example, that a distinguishing proletarian feature of the Russian Revolution was political terrorism. The revolutions of the bourgeoisie in England, in France, and in many other countries involved terror, and such a method was decisively invoked also by non-Marxists, such as the left populists and the social revolutionaries, inasmuch as it was a question of destroying the parties which supported the Tsar.

But throughout the process the dialectical position taken by the Bolsheviks – beginning as a subrogation of the tasks of the bourgeoisie in order to arrive at the point it could disperse their parties, and carried out by way of a transitory march alongside semi-bourgeois and peasant allies, who in the end would be expelled from government and denied any direct participation in running the State – responds to the original Marxist position, which from 1848 onwards clearly proposes that the initial struggle be fought alongside bourgeois, liberal and democratic allies, followed by a decisive attack against them and against petty-bourgeois factions. And such a forecast is firmly anchored in an unrelenting, advance critique of the distinctive ideologies of these strata, which make them implacable enemies of the proletariat.

These characteristic developments, which occur in all struggles between the classes, have led on numerous occasions to the defeat of the proletariat and ruthless destruction of its forces and organizations, as in the classic events in France. For the first time, in the final phase of the civil war, the proletarian party in Russia achieved victory, clearing the decks of all its soon-to-be ex-allies, who bit by bit passed over to the side of open counter-revolution, leaving the victory achieved in the last battles in the party's hands. Whatever happened afterwards,

which saw no setback in the Civil War, but another process entirely, it is a historical experience that is truly original and which remains a permanent patrimony of revolutionary potential, later dispersed in other ways, and by the shameless use of alliances and cliques, devoid of any of the original dialectical autonomy possessed by the class party and its exclusive positions.

On many occasions we have reeled out the Marxist concept that counter-revolutionary experiences are precious nourishment for the tough road ahead, the Paris Commune, so fundamentally invoked by Lenin, being a case in point.

These results then, even if later wasted or thrown away, have value for us in showing that after October – and before it had time to set itself those tasks, which we will examine later, of an economic, productive and social nature – political power was effectively in the hands of the proletariat, which due to the international situation was clearly, if not yet definitively, driven beyond the limitations of the democratic dictatorship, beyond the limitations of the alliance with the populist-peasant parties, and from thence into the historical sphere of the socialist political revolution, which would then find lacking the essential contribution which only the revolution of the workers in the West could bring to it.

## **10 – Demolition of the State**

The transition from the purely democratic revolution, even though with various socialist parties in its front ranks, to the Bolshevik October, was only possible because emphasis was placed on the taking of power by the workers' party in the advanced countries, and on the comprehensive Marxist theory of the role of violence in history and of the nature of the political state. This great battle was not just theoretical, as in the pages of *State and Revolution* and in the controversies that engaged the entire world in the period after the First World War, and it was not just organizational, insofar as a radical split between the revolutionaries of the Third International and the revisionists and traitors of the Second was achieved. It was a real political battle with weapons used during its worst episodes, when we would see social-democrats transformed into capitalism's executioners stab the revolution and the red dictatorship in Germany and Hungary in the back, and the same confrontation develop and spread throughout Europe.

Let us suppose that we got as far as implementing the insurrectional – and terrorist – democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants, which was the only possible historical inheritor of power in Russia, and that that was as far as it went. It would

have left just one experience, just one inheritance to revolutionary history, namely: that insurrections, civil war and terror are necessary, but only in order to emerge from the mediaeval form; not necessarily in order to successfully emerge from the capitalist and bourgeois form.

But during the subsequent advance of the Bolshevik proletarian power in Russia it was able to unite its struggle with that of the advanced forces of proletarian communists in Europe who, no longer confronted with a distantly remembered Middle Ages but with the modern democracy of capital, had learnt (in line with the comrades who in Russia had had to 'jugulate' the so-called socialists as well, imbued as they were with bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideas and notions of class democratic pacifism, and who were maintaining, following the collapse of the feudal regimes, that the struggle had to be conducted within the bounds of legality, and who showed themselves to be completely counter-revolutionary, some indeed with barely concealed links to Tsarism, still hatching its plots) that in a historical phase much further on with respect to the conquest of bourgeois liberty, violence and the dictatorship of the class oppressed by capital was a necessary requirement.

Although the classic bourgeois revolution necessarily involved the dismantling of the previous State structure, since founded on the old orders, on the privileges of those orders, and on the different juridical powers of society's various components, only the Russian revolutionary struggle in its October phase could provide the positive, historical basis for the stipulation that even the modern, constitutional juridical State, proclaiming equality and freedom for all and based on universal representation without distinction of orders, even such a state, as Marx and the Manifesto established from the very beginning, was still an organ of class rule, and one day would be smashed to pieces by history.

Nobody is therefore allowed to say that the October Revolution stayed strictly within the limits of a bourgeois revolution. Social development within Russia had to stay within the limitations set by capitalist forms and modes of production, and it is a historical fact that the proletariat fought to install the bourgeois form – and that it had to do it. However its political struggle was not restricted to that.

As an inseparable part of the political struggle of the international proletariat, which in order to organize itself as a ruling class must first organize itself as the party of its own exclusive and distinctive revolution, the forces and weapons which indisputably won the battle of October won for world socialism and the global proletariat, and their victory will in the historical and material sense help bring about the global victory of communism, on the ruins of capitalism of whatever degree in every country, today's Russia included.

## From the Left's Archives Documents concerning the Irish question

The five archive texts republished here refer to two different contexts.

Four were issued by the Socialist League, formed in Great Britain from a split in the Social Democratic Federation: we have its two founding manifestos from 1895, and two articles from its organ, the *Commonweal*, from 1888 and 1890.

The setting within which those documents arose and subsequent developments in Britain and Ireland, are covered in greater detail in the preceding report, and these documents should be read in conjunction with it.

Socialists in Great Britain at the time were few and far between, and only a small number of them were organized. This did not prevent Engels, after Marx's death, from following the position taken by the class, in its immediate struggles and defensive organization, with close attention, or from contributing, through his writings and advice, to the progressive advance of the principals of Marxism amongst its vanguard and intellectuals.

This assertion of Marxism in the last decade of the nineteenth century, in the British Isles as elsewhere, was far from uniform and total. It would find itself squeezed on the one side by reformism and social pacifism, which emanated from an already far from negligible strata of the labour aristocracy, and which proposed the method of alliances with the parties of the bourgeois left in parliament, and on the other by the shortcuts, both ideological and practical, of a tenacious and anarchism constantly stoked by the 'rebellionism' of the petty bourgeoisie.

Conducting a polemical and programmatic battle against these two fronts, considerably in the majority with respect to the forces of the Marxist socialists, was never easy, and we need to bear this in mind when we read now what they wrote then. We can see in their writings that there were certain concessions to utopianism, educationism, workers' self-management, but, on the other hand, we can also detect formulations which anticipate positions which the Left fought for within the Second International, some of which were only taken up by our Italian Left. We therefore cannot ignore that some comrades were placed in an environment, that of Victorian England, where democracy was over two hundred years old, and its machinery of deception had been thoroughly honed. We refer in particular to the parliamentary question and to the preoccupation with correct procedures for internal party functioning.

The final document we are republishing here, clearly of relevance to our current study, is the inaugural and programmatic manifesto of the Irish Socialist Republican Party, drawn up in Dublin in 1896. Already in its very name is indicated the necessity of having to simultaneously confront both the bourgeois task of national emancipation from the English Crown, and those of the working class for socialism. Our ongoing study will go on to elaborate this far from simple problem.

## Manifesto of S.D.F. Council members who resigned (Jan. 1885) to form Socialist League

To Socialists

We, the members of the Council of the Social Democratic Federation, who, although a majority, resigned on December 27th, wish to explain our reasons for that retirement, and for our forming a body independent of the Social Democratic federation.

It is admitted by those who remain on the Council, as well as by ourselves, that here has been for some time past a want of harmony in the Council; we believe that this has been caused by a real difference in opinion as to what should be the aims and tactics of a Socialist propaganda.

Our view is that such a body in the present state of things has no function but to educate the people in the principles of Socialism, and to organize such as it can get hold of to take their due places, when the crisis will come which will force action on us. We believe that to hold out as baits hopes of amelioration of the condition of the workers, to be wrung out of the necessities of the rival factions of our privileged rulers is delusive and mischievous. For carrying out our aims of education and organization no over-shadowing and indispensable leader is required, but only a band of instructed men, each of whom can learn to fulfil, as occasion requires it, the simple functions of the leader of the party of a party of principle.

We say, that on the other hand there has been in the ranks of the Social Democratic Federation a tendency to political opportunism, which if developed would have involved us in alliances, however temporary, with one or other of the political factions, and would have weakened our propagandist force by driving us into electioneering, and possibly would have deprived us of the due services of some of our most energetic men by sending them to our sham parliament, there to become either non-entities, or perhaps our masters, and it may be our betrayers. We say also that among those who favoured these views of political adventure there was a tendency towards national assertion, the persistent foe of Socialism: and it is easy to see how dangerous this might become in times like the present.

Furthermore, these views have led, as they were sure to lead, to attempts at arbitrary rule inside the Federation; for such a policy as the above demands a skilful and shifty leader, to whom all persons and opinions must be subordinated, and who must be supported (if necessary) at the expense of fairness and fraternal openness.

Accordingly, attempts have been made to crush out local freedom in affiliated bodies, and to expel or render unpopular those individual members who have asserted their independence. The organ of the party, also, has been in the hands of an irresponsible editor, who has declared himself determined to resign rather than allow the Federation to have any control over the conduct of the paper.

All this we have found intolerable. It may be asked of us why we did not remain in the body and try to enforce our views by steady opposition in it. We answer, as long as we thought reconciliation possible, we did do so; but the tendencies above mentioned were necessarily aggressive, and at least two distinct attacks on individuals showed us the rent could not be mended.

We felt that thenceforth there must be two opposed parties in the Social Democratic Federation. We did not believe that a propagandist body could do useful work so divided, and we thought that it would not be in the interests of Socialism to carry on the contest further in the Federation; because, however it might end, it would leave a discontented minority, ruled by a majority, whose position would have been both precarious and tyrannical.

On the other hand, our view of our duty to the cause of Socialism forbids us to cease spreading its principles or to work as mere individuals. We have therefore set on foot an independent organization, the Socialist League, with no intention of acting in hostility to the Social Democratic federation, but determined to spread the principles of Socialism, by the only means we deem effectual.

13th January, 1885

Edward Aveling, Eleanour Marx Aveling, Robert Banner, E.Belfort Bax, J.Cooper, W.W.Clark, Joseph Lane, S.Mainwaring, J.L.Mahon, William Morris

Issued from the offices of "The Socialist League", 27, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.

# **The Manifesto of the Socialist League**

William Morris and E.Belfort Bax

Second Edition

## **Prefatory Note**

The spread of Socialism since the first edition of this manifesto makes a new edition necessary; all the more, as the word Socialism is now freely used by Ministers and ex-Ministers, who cannot be expected to understand it, and who nevertheless take credit to themselves for their audacity in patronising it before vast popular audiences, so that the word has got to be used loosely and in a misleading manner.

It is hoped that this new issue may be a corrective against misunderstandings that may arise from all this.

The Notes appended to this edition will at any rate, we hope, clear up any possible ambiguities in the text as well as we the undersigned can clear them up.

E.Belfort Bax and William Morris, October, 1885.

## **The Manifesto of the Socialist League**

Fellow Citizens,

We come before you as a body advocating the principles of Revolutionary International Socialism; that is, we seek a change in the basis of Society – a change which would destroy the distinctions of classes and nationalities.

As the civilised world is at present constituted, there are two classes of Society – the one possessing wealth and the instruments of its production, the other producing wealth by means of those instruments but only by the leave and for the use of the possessing classes.

These two classes are necessarily in antagonism to one another. The possessing class, or non-producers, can only live as a class on the unpaid labour of the producers – the more unpaid labour they can wring out of them, the richer they will be; therefore the producing class – the workers – are driven to strive to better themselves at the expense of the possessing class, and the conflict between the two is ceaseless. Sometimes it takes the form of open rebellion, sometimes of strikes, sometimes of mere widespread mendicancy and crime; but it is always going on in one form or other, though it may not always be obvious to the

thoughtless looker-on (see Note A).

We have spoken of unpaid labour: it is necessary to explain what that means. The sole possession of the producing class is the power of labour inherent in their bodies; but since, as we have already said, the richer classes possess all the instruments of labour, that is, the land, capital, and machinery, the producers or workers are forced to sell their sole possession, the power of labour, on such terms as the possessing class will grant them.

These terms are, that after they have produced enough to keep them in working order, and enable them to beget children to take their places when they are worn out, the surplus of their products shall belong to the possessors of property, which bargain is based on the fact that every man working in a civilised community can produce more than he needs for his own sustenance (Note B).

This relation of the possessing class to the working class is the essential basis of the system of producing for a profit, on which our modern Society is founded. The way in which it works is as follows. The manufacturer produces to sell at a profit to the broker or factor, who in his turn makes a profit out of his dealings with the merchant, who again sells for a profit to the retailer, who must make his profit out of the general public, aided by various degrees of fraud and adulteration and the ignorance of the value and quality of goods to which this system has reduced the consumer.

The profit-grinding system is maintained by competition, or veiled war, not only between the conflicting classes, but also within the classes themselves: there is always war among the workers for bare subsistence, and among their masters, the employers and middle-men, for the share of the profit wrung out of the workers; lastly, there is competition always, and sometimes open war, among the nations of the civilised world for their share of the world-market. For now, indeed, all the rivalries of nations have been reduced to this one – a degraded struggle for their share of the spoils of barbarous countries to be used at home for the purpose of increasing the riches of the rich and the poverty of the poor.

For, owing to the fact that goods are made primarily to sell, and only secondarily for use, labour is wasted on all hands; since the pursuit of profit compels the manufacturer competing with his fellows to force his wares on the markets by means of their cheapness, whether there is any real demand for them or not. In the words of the Communist manifesto of 1847:-

"Cheap goods are the artillery for battering down Chinese walls and for overcoming

the obstinate hatred entertained against foreigners by semi-civilised nations: under penalty of ruin the Bourgeoisie compel by competition the universal adoption of their system of production; they force all nations to accept what is called civilisation – to become Bourgeois – and thus the middle-class shapes the world after its own image."

Moreover, the whole method of distribution under this system is full of waste; for it employs whole armies of clerks, travellers, shopmen, advertisers, and what not, merely for the sake of shifting money from one person's pocket to another's; and this waste in production and waste in distribution, added to the maintenance of the useless lives of the possessing and non-producing class, must all be paid for out of the products of the workers, and is a ceaseless burden on their lives.

Therefore the necessary results of this so-called civilisation are only too obvious in the lives of its slaves, the working-class – in the anxiety and want of leisure amidst which they toil, in the squalor and wretchedness of those parts of our great towns where they dwell; in the degradation of their bodies, their wretched health, and the shortness of their lives; in the terrible brutality so common among them, and which is indeed but the reflection of the cynical selfishness found among the well-to-do classes, a brutality as hideous as the other; and lastly, in the crowd of criminals who are as much manufactures of our commercial system as the cheap and nasty wares which are made at once for the consumption and the enslavement of the poor.

What remedy, then, do we propose for this failure of our civilisation, which is now admitted by almost all thoughtful people?

We have already shown that the workers, although they produce all the wealth of society, have no control over its production or distribution: the people, who are the only really organic part of society, are treated as a mere appendage to capital – as a part of its machinery. This must be altered from the foundation: the land, the capital, the machinery, factories, workshops, stores, means of transit, mines, banking, all means of production and distribution of wealth, must be declared and treated as the common property of all. Every man will then receive the full value of his labour, without deduction for the profit of a master, and as all will have to work, and the waste now incurred by the pursuit of profit will be at an end, the amount of labour necessary for every individual to perform in order to carry on the essential work of the world will be reduced to something like two or three hours daily; so that every one will have abundant leisure for following intellectual or other pursuits congenial to his nature (Note C).

This change in the method of production and distribution would enable every one to live decently, and free from the sordid anxieties for daily livelihood which at present weigh so heavily on the greatest part of mankind (Note D).

But, moreover, men's social and moral relations would be seriously modified by this gain of economical freedom, and by the collapse of the superstitions, moral and other, which necessarily accompany a state of economical slavery: the test of duty would now rest on the fulfilment of clear and well-defined obligations to the community rather than on the moulding of the individual character and actions to some preconceived standard outside social responsibilities (Note E).

Our modern bourgeois property-marriage, maintained as it is by its necessary complement, universal venal prostitution, would give place to kindly and human relations between the sexes (Note F).

Education freed from the trammels of commercialism on the one hand and superstition on the other, would become a reasonable drawing out of men's varied faculties in order to fit them for a life of social intercourse and happiness; for mere work would no longer be proposed as the end of life, but happiness for each and all.

Only by such fundamental changes in the life of man, only by the transformation of Civilisation into Socialism, can those miseries of the world before mentioned be amended (Note G).

As to mere politics, Absolutism, Constitutionalism, Republicanism, have all been tried in our day and under our present social system, and all have alike failed in dealing with the real evils of life.

Nor, on the other hand, will certain incomplete schemes of social reform now before the public solve the question.

Co-operation so-called – that is, competitive co-operation for profit – would merely increase the number of small joint-stock capitalists, under the mask of creating an aristocracy of labour, while it would intensify the severity of labour by its temptations to overwork (Note H).

Nationalisation of the land alone, which many earnest and sincere persons are now preaching, would be useless so long as labour was subject to the fleecing of surplus value inevitable under the Capitalist system (Note I).

No better solution would be that of State Socialism, by whatever name it may be called, whose aim it would be to make concessions to the working class while leaving the present system of capital and wages still in operation: no number of merely administrative changes, until the workers are in possession of all political power, would make any real approach to Socialism (Note J).

The Socialist League therefore aims at the realisation of complete Revolutionary Socialism, and well knows that this can never happen in any one country without the help of the workers of all civilisations. For us neither geographical boundaries, political history, race, nor creed makes rivals or enemies; for us there are no nations, but only varied masses of workers and friends, whose mutual sympathies are checked or perverted by groups of masters and fleecers whose interest it is to stir up rivalries and hatreds between the dwellers in different lands.

It is clear that for all these oppressed and cheated masses of workers and their masters a great change is preparing: the dominant classes are uneasy, anxious, touched in conscience even, as to the condition of those they govern; the markets of the world are being competed for with an eagerness never before known; everything points to the fact that the great commercial system is becoming unmanageable, and is slipping from the grasp of its present rulers.

The one change possible out of all this is Socialism. As chattel-slavery passed into serfdom, and serfdom into the so-called free-labour system, so most surely will this latter pass into social order.

To the realisation of this change the Socialist League addresses itself with all earnestness. As a means thereto it will do all in its power towards the education of the people in the principles of this great cause, and will strive to organise those who will accept this education, so that when the crisis comes, which the march of events is preparing, there may be a body of men ready to step into their due places and deal with and direct the irresistible movement.

Close fellowship with each other, and steady purpose for the advancement of the Cause, will naturally bring about the organisation and discipline amongst ourselves absolutely necessary to success; but we shall look to it that there shall be no distinctions of rank or dignity amongst us to give opportunities for the selfish ambition of leadership which has so often injured the cause of the workers. We are working for equality and brotherhood for all the world, and it is only through equality and brotherhood that we can make our work effective.

Let us all strive, then, towards this end of realising the change towards social

order, the only cause worthy of the attention of the workers of all that are proffered to them: let us work in that cause patiently, yet hopefully, and not shrink from making sacrifices to it. Industry in learning its principles, industry in teaching them, are most necessary to our progress; but to these we must add, if we wish to avoid speedy failure, frankness and fraternal trust in each other, and single-hearted devotion to the religion of Socialism, the only religion which the Socialist League professes.

### **Notes on the Manifesto**

A. The distribution of wares is as necessary in a community as their production; the necessary distributors therefore belong really to the class of the producers, so long as they are genuinely fulfilling this function, are not over-paid, are spending their earnings on their own livelihood, and are not living on the interest of invested money; the same thing may be said of those who follow such professions as medicine and teaching. It may be added as to the medical men, that the competition which runs through all life at the present day keeps most of them poor enough – for their position in the middle-class – some of them not earning more than an average skilled workman. Such men have nothing to lose and everything to gain from a social revolution; they, along with the poorer of the literary men, may be said to belong to the intellectual proletariat; and are slaves to Capital in their way just as the mechanics are in theirs.

A word or two on those of the working-class, who by dint of the much-praised "thrift and industry" have raised themselves into the position of small capitalists, who have, for example, money in savings banks or building-societies. These "aristocrats of labour" have in fact a double quality, and are both slave-drivers and slave-driven: living in comparative comfort, yet without aspirations for a life of true refinement, they offer good material for the schemes of reactionaries; it is accordingly on the widespread creation of such a sub-class that the more foreseeing of the dominant classes base their hopes of the continuance of the present system, with its necessary foundation of mere hewers of wood and drawers of water.

B. The standard of livelihood varies at different times and in different countries: it has always been a subject of bitter contention between employers and employed, sometimes leading to actual war between them, and continually to strikes and other bickering; but the whole result of this haggling has always been to leave at least a lowest class of labour existing only a little above actual starvation. On the other hand no group of the workers can properly be said to have even a

subsistence-wage if their standard falls below that of the healthy middle-class; they live, it is true, but the statistics of the average of life in the various classes show that they do not live as long as the better fed and less worked classes do (if indeed statistics be necessary to support such an obvious fact). They die before their time.

C. The end which true Socialism sets before us is the realisation of absolute equality of condition helped by the development of variety of capacity, according to the motto, from each one according to his capacity, to each one according to his needs; but it may be necessary, and probably will be, to go through a transitional period, during which currency will still be used as a medium of exchange, though of course it will not bear with it the impress of surplus value. Various suggestions have been made as to the payment of labour during this period. The community must compel a certain amount of labour from every person not in nonage, or physically or mentally incapable, such compulsion being in fact but the compulsion of nature, who gives us nothing for nothing. 1st. This labour may be arranged on the understanding that each person does an amount of work calculated on the average that an ordinary healthy person can turn out in a given time, the standard being the time necessary for the production of a definite quantity of bread-stuff. It is clear that under this system, owing to the difference of capacity one man may have to work a longer and another a shorter time than the estimated average, and thus the result would fall short of the Communistic ideal of absolute equality; but it is probable that these differences would not have much practical effect on social life; because the advantages gained by the better workers could not be transmuted into the power of compelling unpaid labour from others, since rent, profit, and interest would have ceased to exist. Those who obtained the extra goods would have to consume them themselves, otherwise they would be of no use to them. It should also be remembered that the tendency of modern production is to equalise the capacities of labour by means of machinery, so that the unskilled, the weak man, the woman, or even the child, are reduced to something like an equality of capacity. Of course it will be understood that this is an illustration drawn from our present state of industrial production, which for this reason employs woman or child-labour in preference to that of adults.

But 2ndly, labour might be so arranged that an estimated necessary average of time should be its basis, so that no one would have to work longer than another, and the community would have to put up with the differences between various capacities, and the necessary short-comings of some which would be compensated by the superiority of others. The bourgeois will of course cry out that this would be offering a premium to idleness and stupidity; but once more we must not forget that the use of machinery would much reduce the difficulty; and further, that as

each would be encouraged to develop his special capacity; a position of usefulness could be found for everyone; and this fact would almost entirely get rid of the above difficulty. Whatever residuum of disadvantages was left would be met by the revolutionised ethics of a Socialist epoch, which would make all feel their first duty to be the energetic performance of social functions: shirking work would be felt to be as much of a disgrace then to an ordinary man as cowardice in the face of an enemy is now to an officer in the army, and would be avoided accordingly.

Finally, we look forward to the time when any definite exchange will have entirely ceased to exist; just as it never existed in that primitive Communism which preceded Civilisation.

The enemy will say, "This is retrogression not progress"; to which we answer, All progress, every distinctive stage of progress, involves a backward as well as a forward movement; the new development returns to a point which represents the older principle elevated to a higher plane; the old principle reappears transformed, purified, made stronger, and ready to advance on the fuller life it has gained through its seeming death. As an illustration (imperfect as all illustrations must be) take the case of advance on a straight line and on a spiral – the progress of all life must be not on the straight line, but on the spiral.

D. The freedom from these sordid anxieties offers the only chance to escape from the insipidity or the bitterness, into one of which the lives of most men fall at present. Then would real variety and healthy excitement be introduced into human life. Then would come to an end that "dull level of mediocrity" which is a necessary characteristic of an epoch of Capitalist production, which forces all but a very small minority to become mere machines. Individuality of character is the real child of communal production; it is the reckless scramble for individual gain which reduces all character to a level by giving it one object in life, an object sordid in itself, and to which all other objects and aspirations, however noble, must bend and be subsidiary.

E. A new system of industrial production must necessarily bear with it its own morality. Morality, which in a due state of Society should mean nothing more than the responsibility of the individual man to the social whole of which he forms a part, has come to mean his responsibility to a supernatural being who arbitrarily creates and directs his conscience and the laws which are to govern it; although the attributes of this being are but the reflex of some passing phase of man's existence, and change more or less with that phase. A purely theological morality, therefore, means simply a survival from a past condition of Society; it may be added that, however sacred it may be deemed conventionally, it is set aside with

little scruple when it clashes with the necessities (unforeseen at its birth) which belong to the then existing state of things.

The economical change which we advocate, therefore, would not be stable unless accompanied by a corresponding revolution in ethics, which, however, is certain to accompany it, since the two things are inseparable elements of one whole, to wit social evolution.

F. Under a Socialistic system contracts between individuals would be voluntary and unenforced by the community. This would apply to the marriage contract as well as others, and it would become a matter of simple inclination. Women also would share in the certainty of livelihood which would be the lot of all; and children would be treated from their birth as members of the community entitled to share in all its advantages; so that economical compulsion could be no more brought to bear on the contract than legal compulsion could be. Nor would a truly enlightened public opinion, freed from mere theological views as to chastity, insist on its permanently binding nature in the face of any discomfort or suffering that might come of it.

G. The first discoverable stage of human society was founded on a Communistic basis. Religious, ethical, political, economic, artistic activities were not developed into separate existence, but were merely latent. Civilisation, which at bottom meant the development of the great antagonism between individualism and Society, in the course of its evolution brought these distinctions in the several departments of human life into relief at the cost of all the miseries which that antagonism necessarily produced. Historical progress (i.e. the Historical Period of human evolution) simply means the disentanglement of these various departments with the antagonisms involved in them; "Happy," says the proverb, "is the people which has no history." Socialism closes [this] era of antagonisms, and, whatever may be the case as time goes on, and though we cannot accept finality, at present we can see nothing beyond it.

H. The so-called co-operative bodies, whatever might be their arrangements within themselves, would, as far as their external dealings were concerned, have to act as bodies just like other capitalists; also their individual members outside their own bodies would be each of them a capitalist. It is to be understood that this is said of the Co-operative societies if they came up to their own standard, and divided all their profits equitably among their workers; but we believe none of them reaches this standard, and most of those existing are mere joint-stock companies worked on improved business principles.

I. Now that the feudal system with the consequent public duties of the landowner is abolished, land is but one of the forms of capital. The land that a factory stands upon is part of the constant capital of the manufacturer, just as much as the building is, or the machinery within it. A landowner's rent for his land is exactly analogous to a money-lender's interest on his money; it is one of the many forms of squeezing surplus value from labour.

J. By political power we do not mean the exercise of the franchise, or even the fullest development of the representative system, but the direct control by the people of the whole administration of the community, whatever the ultimate destiny of that administration is to be. We venture to suggest that the first step in the state of transition into Communism might probably be the enactment of a law of a minimum of wages and a maximum of price applied to all industrial production, including the distribution of goods; it seems to us that this, coupled with the immediate abolition of all laws enforcing contract, would at once destroy the possibility of profit-making, and would give us opportunity for getting into working order the decentralised voluntary organisation of production which we hope to see take the place of the present Hierarchy of Compulsion.

William Morris

## The Policy of the Socialist League

"Commonweal", Vol 4, No. 126, 9 June 1888, p.180;

Since the Socialist League was founded to support the principles of International Revolutionary Socialism, and since there has been some difference of opinion amongst us as to the meaning of those words, the Council of the League thinks it its duty to point out what in its opinion that meaning is, as expressed by publications of the League, which at the time of their publication were not challenged by any of its branches or members; and in doing this the Council wishes to disclaim any narrowing of the principles of the League beyond what it believes has been recognized from the first as necessary to give it a reason for existence separate from that of other Socialist bodies.

The aim of the Socialist League, therefore, is the realization of a society based on equality of condition for all persons without distinction of race, sex or creed; a society which will not recognize the right of any privilege to interfere with that equality, whether such privilege rests its claim on birth, wealth or capacity in the individual.

The League holds that the necessary step to the realization of this society is the abolition of monopoly in the means of production, which should be owned by no individual, but by the whole community, in order that the use of them may be free to all according to their capacity: this we believe would necessarily lead to the equality of condition above-mentioned, and the recognition of the maxim 'from each according to his capacity, to each according to his needs'.

It is necessary to explain here that some Socialists believe this first step, the abolition of monopoly in the means of production is the end of Socialism, and that the society so founded will admit of competition for the relative shares of the wealth produced for use; although it is obvious that success in such competition can only be attained by the successful at the expense of the unsuccessful, and thus new classes would be formed which would take the place of those destroyed by the abolition of monopoly. On this point, therefore, the Socialist League differs in its aim or ideal of society from some other Socialists.

Again, the League believes, when it speaks of International Socialism, that the word internationalism applies only to the present state of slavery, as expressing that the workers do not recognize the national distinctions made by their masters, and that in the society of the future, nations as political entities will cease to exist, and give place to the federation of communities bound together by locality or convenience.

Here again the League differs from some Socialists who cannot see so far as the abolition of nationality, and this again implies a difference in ideal.

As to the means for the attainment of the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production, and through that to equality of condition for all persons, the League believes that the first and most indispensable of such means is the putting before the people its aims, ultimate and immediate, plainly and honestly, and has always acted on that belief; in the confidence that however strange these aims may be to the greater number of persons, the time will come when circumstances will force the workers to accept them as their own, and that it is no waste of energy meantime to familiarize them with these aims and thereby to quicken their desires and give something for their intelligence to seize hold of, and for their hope to feed on. The education of the vague discontent which (happily) is now so prevalent among the workers into a definite aim, is the chief business of the Socialist League; nor can this work ever be dispensed with even on the very eve of the first obvious and open steps towards revolution.

There are other Socialists, however, and they are numerous enough, who are not contented with the slow and patience-trying work of getting the workers to understand their position and the remedies for it. They cannot believe that anything is being done unless attempts are being made to get Socialists into Parliament, and other elected bodies; although it is clear that these bodies are the most direct expression of the power of our enemies, and their intention to put down all attempts towards the regeneration of society; and though the passing of a few palliative measures is the utmost that could be hoped from Socialists in Parliament until the time when the people are strong enough to destroy Parliament itself.

The Socialist League has declared over and over again its sense of the futility of Socialists wasting their time in getting such palliative measures passed, which, if desirable to be passed as temporarily useful, will be passed much more readily if they do not mix themselves up in the matter, and which are at least intended by our masters to hinder Socialism and not to further it. Over and over again it has deprecated Socialists mixing themselves up in political intrigues; and it believes no useful purpose can be served by their running after the votes of those who do not understand the principles of Socialism, and who therefore must be attracted by promises which could not be fulfilled by the candidates if by any chance such candidates were returned to Parliament. The two last Annual Conferences of the League have declared by large majorities of the delegates assembled that it was the policy of the League to abstain from parliamentary action, and have refused to allow any alteration of this policy.

The Council of the Socialist League therefore feels itself bound frankly to point out the impossibility of propaganda by electioneering coexisting with the educational propaganda in the same body to any good purpose. Those holding the two sets of ideas will and must mutually hamper each other, even where their root-principles do not differ widely; and this all the more as the advocates of propaganda by electioneering must feel how heavy their task is, and that they must begin at once with it and insist early and late on the necessity, of turning all our attention to getting Socialists into Parliament by any means feasible. The Council of the Socialist League believes that there will for a long time be this difference of opinion as to the method of propaganda, and thinks itself justified not only in pointing out the evil effects of contesting the point within the League itself, but also in appealing to those Socialists who agree with the League and who now belong to other bodies, to join it, rather than impair their usefulness also by remaining in those bodies when they feel themselves out of harmony with their tactics.

At the same time, the Council wish it to be clearly understood that they have stated the differences between the League and other Socialists in no contentious spirit, but only to justify the continued existence of the League as a separate body, and to deprecate any alteration in its principles and tactics, which, if carried out would put it into a position of mere factious opposition to other Socialist organizations. The Council desires further to say that it thinks it the duty of the League and its members to co-operate in the most cordial way with other Socialists on all occasions when it can do so without loss of principle, and without prejudice to the form of propaganda which it has from the first believed it to be its duty to press forward.

William Morris

## **Anti-Parliamentary**

Commonweal, Vol 6, No. 230, 7 June 1890, p.180-181

Most of those into whose hands this paper will fall know that as the organ of the Socialist League the Commonweal advocates abstention from Parliamentary action; that the Socialist League neither puts forward candidates, nor advises its members to vote for this that or the other candidate; that the readers of these columns will indeed find Parliament mentioned in them, but never with respect, and most commonly only to point the moral of the corruption of these latter days of capitalism. Our policy is, in short, abstention from all attempts at using the constitutional machinery of government, whereas to some Socialists this seems the only means of bringing us to the verge of the Social Revolution. Now this policy of abstention seems to some mere folly, and perhaps to others seems inexplicable. Let us, then, try to explain it, and leave others to call us fools if they needs must after having listened to our explanation.

What is the purpose of Socialist propaganda? Surely it intends to make it clear to all the working-classes that society (so-called) as it exists to-day, is founded on the robbery of the 'lower' classes by the 'upper' of the useful by the useless, of the many by the few; that so long as this privileged robbery goes on, those who do all the useful work that is done will be constantly deprived of the refinements of life which are supposed to make the difference between the civilized man and the savage; while their lives will be much more laborious and much more pleasureless than the lives of most savages. In short, thorough discontent with their position and a sense of its unfairness is the first thing we want to impress on the minds of the workers.

Next, we want to make it clear to them that this position of slavery, this unfairness which makes them so wretched and so bitter, is not a necessary condition for those who live by producing the wealth of the country (that is, the only people in it who have a chance of being honest); that these working-men and women could still work, live, and be useful if they were working for each other, that is to say, for their friends and not for their privileged masters, i.e., their enemies.

Again, we have to make it clear to the workers that this privilege of a few to compel the many to live miserably, is merely an explanation of the phrase, The institution of private property; that he who declares that he wishes to abolish privilege means to say that he wishes to abolish the institution of private property; that he who defends the Institution of private property defends privilege, the gross inequality of rich and poor, the consequent misery of all genuine workers, and the

consequent degradation of people of all classes. Let it be clearly understood that only two systems of society are possible, Slavery and Communism; all who know the ABC of Socialism know that this is so. Communism or the abolition of the individual ownership of property is our aim, the aim of all real Socialists.

Will Parliament help us towards the accomplishment of this aim? Take another question as an answer to that first question. What is the aim of Parliament? The upholding of privilege; the society of rich and poor; the society of inequality, and the consequent misery of the workers and the degradation of all classes.

Clearly if this is its aim, its reason for existence, it will only exchange its aim for ours if it be compelled to do so, or deluded into doing so.

Can it be forced? Well, Parliament is the master of the Executive; that is to say, of the brute force which compels the useful classes to live miserably; it will use that brute force to compel those classes into submission as long as it dares. When it no longer dares, it will practically no longer exist. Now I, for my part, say as I have always said, that in the last act of the Revolution the Socialists may be obliged to use the form of parliament in order to cripple the resistance of the reactionists by making it formally illegal and so destroying the power of the armed men on whom the power of the parliament and the law-courts really rests. But this can only come in the last act; when the Socialists are strong enough to capture the parliament in order to put an end to it, and the privilege whose protection is its object, the revolution will have come, or all but come. Meantime, it is clear that we cannot compel parliament to put an end to its own existence; or, indeed, to do anything which it does not believe will conduce to the stability of Privilege, or the slavery of the workers.

Well, then, can we jockey parliament into Socialism, into Communism? It seems to me a most hopeless enterprise. We shall not find it difficult, perhaps, to put so much pressure upon it as to make it pass measures for 'the amelioration of the lot of the working classes'. But what will that mean save the 'dishing' of the Socialists? — who, if they do not take care, will find that instead of using parliament, they will be used by it. Let us remember, too, that the knowledge of Socialism is growing with tremendous rapidity, and that even MP's and their wirepullers will soon get to know what it means, and will then strain their ingenuity to take the sting out of any measures that look Socialistic on the outside; or at last, and perhaps before long, will stiffen themselves up into mere rejection of anything that looks like Socialism. The failure of the attempt to capture the Star for the parliamentary Socialists ought to be a sufficient lesson to them of the power of the reactionists, Liberal as well as Conservative, and the way in which they will

refuse to be driven into a corner.

Well, then, if we cannot force Parliament to declare its function of safeguarding privilege at an end, when it is obviously in vigorous life; if we cannot jockey it into furthering the very thing which it hates most, and has most reason to hate — Socialism, to wit — what can we do? ‘Nothing’, say our parliamentary friends. I cannot see that. Is it nothing to keep alive and increase discontent with the vile slavery of to-day? Is it nothing to show the discontented that they can themselves destroy that slavery? Is it nothing to point out to them what lies beyond the period of struggle, and how workers can be happy when they are not robbed of all the pleasure of life by the idlers that live upon their labour?

Moreover, the events of the last twelve months are producing a different spirit in the mass of the workers, and they are now beginning to learn how to combine in earnest. It is now far more hopeful than it was five years ago to turn their attention from the Parliament of their masters to their own organization. In short, the true weapon of the workers as against Parliament is not the ballot-box but the Boycott. Ignore Parliament; let it alone, and strengthen your own organizations to deal directly with your masters in the present, and to learn how to manage your own affairs both now and for the future, and keep steadily in mind, and work for, the day when you will have to use the great weapon which your own wretched position of unrewarded toil puts into your hands, the weapon of the general strike. See to this, and let politicians elect politicians; let the upper and middle-classes by themselves choose for themselves members of the Committee for the Continuance of Slavery, which should be the name of the House of Commons, and you will see what terror you will inspire in the hearts of the canting hypocrites who call themselves statesmen. A terror which will be fully warranted by events; for such an anti-parliamentary boycott will show your determination to be free, and will give you the instrument of attaining your freedom.

## **Inaugural Manifesto of the Irish Socialist Republican Party (1896)**

«The great appear great to us only because we are on our knees; Let us rise».

### **Object**

Establishment of AN IRISH SOCIALIST REPUBLIC based upon the public ownership by the Irish people of the land, and instruments of production, distribution and exchange. Agriculture to be administered as a public function, under boards of management elected by the agricultural population and responsible to them and to the nation at large. All other forms of labour necessary to the well-being of the community to be conducted on the same principles.

### **Programme**

As a means of organising the forces of the Democracy in preparation for any struggle which may precede the realisation of our ideal, of paving the way for its realisation, of restricting the tide of emigration by providing employment at home, and finally of palliating the evils of our present social system, we work by political means to secure the following measures:

- Nationalisation of railways and canals.
- Abolition of private banks and money-lending institutions and establishments of state banks, under popularly elected boards of directors, issuing loans at cost.
- Establishment at public expense of rural depots for the most improved agricultural machinery, to be lent out to the agricultural population at a rent covering cost and management alone.
- Graduated income tax on all incomes over £400 per annum in order to provide funds for pensions to the aged, infirm and widows and orphans.
- Legislative restriction of hours of labour to 48 per week and establishment of a minimum wage.
- Free maintenance for all children.
- Gradual extension of the principle of public ownership and supply to all the necessaries of life.
- Public control and management of National schools by boards elected by popular ballot for that purpose alone.
- Free education up to the highest university grades.
- Universal suffrage.

### **The Irish Socialist Republican Party**

That the agricultural and industrial system of a free people, like their political system, ought to be an accurate reflex of the democratic principle by the people for the people, solely in the interests of the people.

That the private ownership, by a class, of the land and instruments of production, distribution and exchange, is opposed to this vital principle of justice, and is the fundamental basis of all oppression, national, political and social.

That the subjection of one nation to another, as of Ireland to the authority of the British Crown, is a barrier to the free political and economic development of the subjected nation, and can only serve the interests of the exploiting classes of both nations.

That, therefore, the national and economic freedom of the Irish people must be sought in the same direction, viz., the establishment of an Irish Socialist Republic, and the consequent conversion of the means of production, distribution and exchange into the common property of society, to be held and controlled by a democratic state in the interests of the entire community.

That the conquest by the Social Democracy of political power in Parliament, and on all public bodies in Ireland, is the readiest and most effective means whereby the revolutionary forces may be organised and disciplined to attain that end.

Branches wanted everywhere. Enquiries invited. Entrance fee, 6d. minimum. Weekly subscription 1d. - Offices: 67 Middle Abbey Street, Dublin.

## SUMMARY OF OUR GENERAL MEETINGS

**General Party Meeting** - Firenze, January 27-29 [RG127]

- Saturday Session

History of India: The national movement

Course of capitalism: Production and trade

The missed revolution in Germany

The Military Question: the First World War, on the Italian front

The PCd'I and the Arditi del Popolo

- Sunday Session

The Hungarian revolution of 1919

Report of Venezuelan comrades

The meeting took place in an optimal way, according to our praxis, in an orderly and attentive way, both in the organizational part, of evaluation of work done and of planning of future work, and in the presentation of the many reports. A brief synthesis is given below to our readers, as customary.

What we claim to be the embryo of what will be the great party of the international communist revolution destructive of capitalism lives today in the determination of our team of militants, disciplined to the historical program and informed of our class science and tradition of social war.

In the useful overlapping and sound succession of generations of communists it is for the party to pass on modules of interpretation both of the world and of itself, which are the dialectic and drastic denial of the bourgeois ones.

Capitalism in its becoming enormous and corrupting tends inexorably to impose ever more extensive and pressing the conditions for its destruction and its capsizing into communism, and the party represents, already in the present society, such total overcoming, anti-individualist and anti-mercantile.

If the working class still lives in the society of the commodification of man and of war, its revolutionary party is in a position to evaluate it and fight it also from its outside. The trade union is immersed in the competition environment, and the bargaining on the price of the labor force is its constitutive purpose; but the party is not the union, only it aims at directing it from the outside. Even the soviet, the state of proletarian dictatorship, the red army are indispensable instruments, organs of the working class, in which the influence, even if minoritarian, of non-communist directions is inevitable. But the party is not the soviet, it is not the state, it is not

the army, and it contrasts with its nature and with its aims the adoption within it of the methods of the union, the soviet, the state, the army.

Not in the sense that in the party a space of polycentric freedom and of loose discipline opens up: on the contrary, only in the communist party, unlike in the other intermediate bodies between the party and the class, is a superior historical form of convergence of aims and work, a discipline (which means "learning") that rejects democracy, the historical bourgeois flag.

In this spirit we also organize the work at our meetings, at the general ones in particular, a method, moreover, sought and applied in all previous historical forms of the party, from the League of Communists to the First International, to the Third in its early years.

At meetings we work for this result, to welcome the wealth of contributions from the periphery, in different languages and in their partiality, to make them converge and insert them into the large and complex building of the unitary body of doctrine of our Left Communist current, in the common interpretative key and in the word that the party addresses to the unending social war of the working class.

#### **General Work Meeting** - Torino, May 26-28 [RG128]

- Saturday Session

The Military Question: the First World War

Course of capitalism: towards a huge crisis

Marxism and mathematical models

India: The national movement

Rearming of States

The succession of modes of production

Report of the venezuelan section

- Sunday Session

The missed revolution in Germany

Party trade union activity

The concept of dictatorship before Marx

The Hungarian revolution

We held the May meeting in Turin, in the ample and comfortable environment which a rank and file union has allowed us to use, in a neighborhood of what, despite the crisis, remains a city with a strong proletarian and workers component.

Consistent presence of our delegations, from Italy, the United Kingdom, France and

Germany.

The work began on Friday mid-afternoon, already in the presence of numerous comrades, with the usual report of the center on the results of the work in the past few months, which was followed by all comrades with different commitments, who reported amply, anticipating the conclusions that would have been presented in the reports, during the full sessions of Saturday and Sunday, and which, subsequently, would find definitive formulation, arrangement and sometimes integration in the party press.

On Saturday morning we completed the planning of the future work of the party, then began the presentation of reports, all of which very much demanding from our small but determined forces.

Saturday evening, a common dinner, organized by the local section, was an opportunity to get to know each other and exchange opinions among us.

The very good results of our studies and the effectiveness of our propaganda derive from the scientific-communist-revolutionary method that distinguishes us: no personalism, no forms of competition, no need to amaze the audience with inventions or glaring discoveries, but the objective research of historical facts and their interpretation in the light of the invariant class doctrine, tested by centuries of class struggle.

**A very well attended General Meeting in Genua** - September 29 - October 1, 2017  
[RG129]

- Saturday Session

Course of the economic crisis

The Military Question: the First World War

The war in Syria

The missed revolution in Germany

The Hungarian revolution of 1919

Economy and strikes in XIX century England

Party's union activity

Report of the Venezuelan section

- Sunday Session

The Military Question, continues: The Caporetto Rout

The concept of the Party in Lenin

Winds of war in Korea

The concept of dictatorship before Marx: Babeuf

In accordance with an hyperstested method and rhythm of work, which allowed the present party to pass unscathed these long decades of counterrevolution, we held the general meeting that according to our detailed and always updated indexes boasts the number 129 since 1974, in complete continuity as method and contents with the earlier 62 occurred since 1951.

All militants are invited to general meetings, individually, although, due to organizational convenience, reports are made for whole sections or work groups.

Representatives were present from England and France and, from Italy, of Torino, Genova, Friuli, Cortona, Bari, Roma, Firenze, Parma. Others, unable to be present, have sent their salutations and a written report of their and their section's work.

The subjects reported by the numerous work groups and on our external activity, all very demanding, are faced with an impersonal approach, that is, with disdain of any originality or creativity, with the sole aim of tracing in the past of our class and of our party the interpretative keys of today's events.

## History of India: the National Movement

The comrade continued the reports on the history of India describing the Hindu and Muslim organizations that opposed the colonial regime until the first decade of the XX century.

During the first session of the Indian National Congress, held in Bombay in 1885, the Muslim component was little represented, in addition to the Bengali, both little present in the new professions from which came the majority of delegates, lawyers, doctors, journalists and teachers. But some large vassal princes, a number of members of the Maratha aristocracy, and some industrialists made a valuable financial contribution.

Starting with the Congress of 1887, held in Madras, also a number of large landowners, merchants and bankers and even small and medium-sized landowners, village leaders and Muslim religious leaders participated, a change resulting from the growing pressure to which these classes were subjected following the centralization process initiated by the colonial state.

A modern nationalist ideology was developed, disapproving India's colonial economic dependence on Britain with an uninterrupted drainage of wealth, for the creation of a modern conception of an Indian nation, with political claims not as citizens of the Empire but as part of a nation.

Even if in such a vast territory as India, the objective elements that, according to the ideology of the time, should have characterized a national identity seemed to be missing. India, in fact, as the British bourgeoisie was not tired of repeating, was not uniform as race, religion, culture, and language.

The answer given by the first Indian theorists was not evidently materialistic but subjective: for Surendranath Baneijea, influenced by the writings of Giuseppe Mazzini, a nation came into being when the members of a community claimed their belonging to a given territory.

The benevolent neutrality towards the Congress by the colonial leadership turned into explicit hostility within a few years.

However, to the consensus that the Congress had obtained among the notable Indians it was necessary to give an answer: during the last decade of the nineteenth century there was a series of administrative reforms. These measures were judged totally inadequate by the Congress, but they reached the goal of opening new connections between the colonial leaders and the notables. The latter

realized that they could deal on an almost equal level with the colonial class. As a consequence, in the second half of the nineties, most of the notables abandoned the Congress.

For Congress, the only possible remedy was a strategy that would mobilize broader sectors of the Indian masses behind the ideals of nationalism. Objective class opposition made it difficult. The Indian masses were predominantly rural and generally very poor. Certainly this was also the result of colonial exploitation, but there were privileged classes, especially landowners and great merchants, only exceptionally British, among the beneficiaries of the colonial system; and the Congress had counted on the support of many of those notables, taking charge of their political demands. For the Congress, interpreting the needs of the peasant masses meant opposing the privileged Indian classes.

Class struggle, however, was not at all in the program of this organization, unlike nationalist intellectuals, who knew well the existing misery and social discrimination; they believed however that mobilizing the masses would weaken the nationalist movement, countering a part of the people, the exploited, to the Indian ruling classes. In order not to take sides with the deprived, the Congress preferred to lose its political weight in the second half of the 1990s.

Some internal tensions intensified, the old moderate leadership was challenged by a new, more radical, "extremist" current, but socially just as conservative. Their political intransigence was accompanied by a timidity towards socio-economic reforms that was no different from that of the moderates. They only managed to succeed thanks to the political use of Hinduism, a language of metaphors and figurations of Hindu religious tradition. Although political Hinduism became increasingly popular in those years between the Hindu petty bourgeoisie and the students, it did not generate a mass following to nationalism. Hinduism turned to the peasants affected by the 1896 serious famine in Deccan, but also to the nascent proletariat of Bombay, showing that it wanted to protect the workers' union rights, but only of those who did not depend on Indian owners, with whom Hinduism sought to establish good relationships.

Meanwhile, tension also grew in the context of the so-called Westernized Muslims, part of the surviving sectors of the Mughal aristocracy, whose political leadership was however closely linked to the British.

In this complex situation, the anti-British currents, both within the Congress and among young Westernized Muslims, were fueled by British politics that launched a series of measures with a view to reducing costs.

In the Congress the struggle focused on two demands put forward by the "extremists": a form of self-government identical to that already enjoyed by the "white" dominions and to widen the boycott movement to the whole of India.

But in 1907, at the Congress of Surat, the works ended with a majority of moderates that formalized the expulsion of extremists. The splitting of the Congress gave the colonial authorities the opportunity to intervene with a heavy hand. The main leaders and the most active militants of the extremist current were arrested and, in general, condemned to heavy prison sentences. In the spring of 1908, the New Extremist Party was dispersed and reduced to impotence. A terrorist movement remained active, which was soon infiltrated by the Central Intelligence Department of the Indian police and, although possibly dangerous for the individual Briton, was far from being a real threat to the colonial state.

At the next meeting the comrade continued on the period from the early twentieth century until 1920, outlining the economic and political decline of England and the slow strengthening of Indian nationalism.

The nationalists had maintained an openness towards the Muslim League, which saw itself pushed towards the Congress by two events of 1911. The first was the attack of Italy to the Ottoman Empire, made possible by the benevolent English neutrality, which triggered the first Balkan war, as a result of which the Ottoman Empire lost all its residual possessions in Europe, except for Constantinople. These events, together with a series of massacres perpetrated in Persia by the Russians, then allies of the British, aroused the indignation of Indian Muslims, profoundly influenced by pan-Islamism, who saw England behind the final attack on the last great independent Islamic State.

The second important fact was the revocation of partition of Bengal, moving the capital from Calcutta to Delhi, a completely unexpected act and seen by Indian Muslims as the renounce to a series of commitments by the colonial authorities. The conviction therefore emerged that in order to protect the interests of the Muslim community in India, an agreement with the Congress was to be sought.

All the years from 1914 to 1947 were marked by the ineluctable crisis of the colonial power system, due to the overlapping of three processes. The first was the decline of England. The second was the growth of Indian nationalism, which immediately after the First World War changed from substantially elitist to a mass movement. The third was the progressive loss of economic importance of India for Great Britain.

India had been fundamental for England because it fulfilled a triple "imperial commitment": the payment of home charges and other debts contracted with England; the role of buyer of British industrial products and of export of agricultural products and raw materials; the employment for the army of Indian troops, paid by Indian taxpayers. Only the first "imperial commitment" still existed (but only until the forties, when India turned from debtor to creditor of England), while the other two became increasingly inapplicable since the years of the First World War.

The British economy, like all those capitalistically advanced at the time, was going through a process of change that progressively made it less dependent on the colonies, both for the purchase of raw materials and for the sale of industrial products. The British industries were turning to produce goods that, although still having market in the western countries, were however scarcely marketable in the colonies because of the latter's limited purchasing power.

During the First World War, the Indian army's contribution to the victory of the Entente was considerable, but the costs for its deployment, especially when it was employed on a large scale, began to be intolerable.

In August 1914, India learned that it had entered the war alongside England against the Central Empires. Immediately there were declarations of loyalty and solidarity from different sectors of the Indian bourgeoisie, which counted on bringing the British to new and more generous political concessions. But the lack of English response to these expectations gave way to a process of radicalization.

In 1917 our revolution in Russia was followed with interest by many politicized Indians, who for a long time had denounced the analogies between the tsarist empire and the Anglo-Indian empire. Among these was Manabendra Nath Roy who, after having contributed to the establishment of the Mexican Communist Party in 1919, had participated in the second congress of the Communist International. But, having returned home with a task of the International, he did not find much success among other Indian Marxists, nor was he able to establish a consistent contact with the working class and peasant classes.

Moreover, the objective conditions described in this report offer little similarity with what happened in Russia. Even the subjective conditions greatly diverge, as will be described in the rest of the study.

On 11 November 1918 Germany signed the armistice that ended the war.

Already in February 1919 rumors of a campaign of "civil disobedience" began to circulate. The man who supported this initiative was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. After his death he will be recognized as "father of the nation" and the world bourgeoisie will sanctify him for the "non-violent" methods of struggle: "satyagraha", "firmness in truth". Ideal that did not prevent him from siding several times on the side of the British imperialist butchers. In 1899, at the beginning of the Second Boer War, he declared that the Indians had to support the war effort if they wanted to legitimize their citizenship request. In 1906 he created the Indian Health Corps to bring assistance in the war against the Zulus. During the First World War he supported Britain also by promoting a recruitment campaign for Indian soldiers.

In April 1917 there was a series of agitations in India: the first in Bihar, where the peasants were exploited by the English indigo planters, and others in Gujarat, by the peasants of the district of Kaira and the workers of Ahmedabad. Gandhi was among the organizers, and obtained moderate success that gave him a certain following. All this however through mediation between the sides. In the great strike between December 1918 and January 1919, the textile workers of Bombay, predominantly of ethnic Marathas, called Gandhi to direct the fight, but he refused so as not to be against the entrepreneurs, mainly Gujarati and Parsi, who had begun to support him politically and economically.

In those years the theses on nationalism and colonialism were clearly presented at the second Congress of the International and became a clear theoretical and practical orientation for all communists. Three types of countries in relation to the national movement were distinguished in them: the first was formed by the capitalistically advanced nations, in which the progressive bourgeois national movement had long since ended; the second included the countries of Eastern Europe, Austria, the Balkans and Russia, where national movements had partly developed in the 20th century; in the third were the semi-colonial countries. In Asia "the driving forces of the bourgeois democratic national revolution will be the workers and the peasants" and was hoped for "the closest alliance between the communist proletariat of Western Europe and the peasant revolutionary movement of the East of the colonies and of the backward countries in general». Socialists "must support the most revolutionary elements of the bourgeois democratic movements of national liberation, help them in their insurrection, and, if the case arises, in their revolutionary war against the imperialist powers that oppress them". In fact, against the thesis that there could no longer be any national wars, Lenin wrote: "Every war is the continuation of politics by other means. Continuation of the policy of national liberation of the colonies will necessarily be the national wars

of these against imperialism ".

Gandhi's movement had certainly not been "the most revolutionary element of the bourgeois movement", so much so that, under the pretext of non-violence, he repeatedly managed to disarm the Indian masses in the face of the ferocity of their oppressors. Although he was a defender of the pariahs, the last of the Indian castes, Gandhi considered the division of the society into castes as fundamental.

On February 24, 1919, during a period of very strong social tensions and strikes in several cities, Gandhi announced a campaign of "civil disobedience". Due to the pressure from below by the uprising struggles, a series of hartals, general strikes, was announced throughout India. The first ones, on March 30th and April 6th, depending on the area, were characterized by the participation and by scenes of fraternization between Hindus and Muslims. The situation soon escaped the control of both the British and the Gandhians, and in various parts of the subcontinent riots broke out with dead and wounded, particularly in Punjab but also in Bombay, Ahmedabad and Calcutta. Called to order by the cowardly Indian bourgeoisie Gandhi suspended the movement, and arranged to organize a body of volunteers trained in "non-violent fight techniques", which would frame and direct the future mass movements.

In 1920 the Indian government established that a fixed and substantial share of tax revenues could no longer be used by the Empire, a norm presented as a concrete step forward towards the "responsible government" promised in 1917, namely self-government. To the richer 3% of the population, which corresponded to the active electorate, essentially landowners, merchants and moneylenders, industrialists and wealthy professionals, was devolved the management of over a third of the financial resources of the provinces, offering them the possibility to influence, far more than ever before, the destination of the remaining resources. But these reforms were wholly inadequate to the ideals and needs of nascent Indian nationalism.

Gandhi's party was faced with two irreconcilable interests: on the one hand, the workers and peasants who, although lacking a rooted revolutionary party, driven by a serious economic crisis, put forward with determination the social question; on the other, part of the Indian bourgeoisie, well aware of the situation and happy to accept the partial concessions of the English Crown.

Gandhi's party certainly did not aspire to take the leadership of the workers and peasants, and revived the anti-colonial struggle through a non-cooperation and non-violent movement: a progressive boycott of the colonial state through the

renunciation of titles and honorary duties, resignation from civil state employment and tax evasion. Eventually, the resignation from the army and the police and the boycotting of elections foreseen by the reform law were added. Therefore a very moderate political action, preferred by the majority of the Congress and the Muslim League, fearful that the revolution against the British could be transformed into a social revolution against the privileged Indian layers of which they were representatives. The outcome of the movement against the partition of Bengal constituted a worrying warning, which had found a recent confirmation in the double revolution in Russia.

## The Catastrophic Course of World Capitalism

### A. The productions

The capitalist mode of production has disrupted the ancient mercantile economy relations of production based on the peasant family economy and small craft production of cities and villages. It ruined and expropriated the old producers, proletarianized them by forcing them to sell, in exchange for a salary, the only good left to them, their labor force. In so doing and replacing the independent and dispersed production of the peasant and the artisan with the collective and centralized production of the mechanized economy and of the great industry, capitalism has socialized the productive forces and ended up undermining the foundations of mercantile production.

The great mechanized capitalist agriculture and the big industry, by mobilizing immense armies of workers, that operate collectively and in a centralized way, employing the latest technical and scientific knowledge, have blunted the limitations of the ancient modes of production and freed the productive forces, and the frenzied accumulation of capital has exalted its development to an unprecedented scale.

However, at the end of the nineteenth century, after the appearance of the monopolies, today called "multinationals", capitalism became in turn an obstacle to the development of the productive forces. On the one hand, the deadly accumulation of capital – in itself uncontrolled – leads to an ever-increasing socialization of production, on the other hand the appropriation remains private. This fundamental contradiction periodically leads capital to a crisis of overproduction.

The accumulation of capital rests on the appropriation, in the act of production, of labor unpaid to the worker: surplus-value. Capital gets to a gigantic accumulation of surplus value, that is of value, value being nothing but the crystallization of labor in the produced object, be it agricultural or industrial.

The more the productivity of social labor increases, the more the rate of profit falls, and therefore the return on invested capital decreases.

To illustrate this decline in the rate of profit, at the meeting we presented three tables on the progress of industrial production in the great imperialist countries, in the years 1900 to 2007. This long period was divided into 5 cycles.

The antagonism between the productive forces unleashed by the accumulation of

capital and the capitalist production relations themselves lead to cyclical crises of overproduction. These are the ways in which capital lets off and temporarily solves its own contradictions. The accumulation of capital is first and foremost an immense accumulation of commodities, and the crisis appears in the circulation of goods when the drop in sales triggers insolvencies.

In the warehouses unsold commodities are piled up, protests are issued and the banks' budgets are inflated with postponed or unpaid promissory notes. Financial and industrial failures are no longer avoidable. The economy is paralyzed: it is the crisis. Companies "restructure" and lay off massively, unemployment takes on gigantic proportions. The fictitious capital, the result of the frenetic speculations that preceded the crisis, sees its prices plummet. The constant capital of many industrial companies loses value. The financial institutions themselves fail and the bulk of their bad debts, previously kept hidden, is sold off. The goods in stock end up being liquidated, constant capital is partly devalued, wages are at the lowest level, unemployment at the top as well as precariousness.

At this point the rate of profit begins to rise again, the tension gives way and little by little the activity resumes. Later unemployment decreases and consumption resumes. For a certain period productions pass from trot to gallop. Speculation, which has resumed mounting, reaches its peak, the cost of raw materials, under the effect of strong demand and speculation, skyrockets, wages are in turn increased and, to force the market to absorb the gigantic amount of goods, credit is pushed to the maximum. Under the combined effect of speculation and credit, which result from the enormous accumulation of capital, interest rates, which with the recovery had begun to rise gently, are once again at their highest.

Then the crisis is back.

More tables represented growth in the nine major industrial countries, which are at the same time imperialist nations in the sense of Lenin. The growth of industry is determined by the rate of profit, because that is what determines investments. The growth of productions is a reflection of the rate of profit: when the rate of profit is high, growth is also robust, whereas when, on the contrary, the rate of profit is low, as in the case of the old imperialist countries, growth of production is equally low.

In order to follow the course of capital on a global scale, we presented a table with the average annual percentage increases in industrial production. The table can be read vertically and horizontally. Vertically, countries are listed for increasing growth rate, which corresponds to decreasing seniority, as the older capitalist

countries have lower profit rates. Horizontally, from cycle to cycle, we can see the rate of growth declining over time, which corresponds to the historical slowdown in the rate of profit.

It is noted in the 1929-1937 cycle, which precedes the Second World War, the failure to resume growth in Germany, the USA and in particular France, despite the effort to rearm. Italy and England, on the other hand, remain at levels close to those of previous cycles.

The United States during the war years produced a gigantic military effort. The war allowed world capitalism to start a new long cycle of accumulation and it was a great deal for American capitalism, while on the battlefield "his" uniformed proletarians were being massacred.

Capitalism is rejuvenated by the imperialist war. The war produces gigantic destruction and terrifying massacres. These massive destructions entail an extensive destruction of capital and the general devaluation of constant capital, as in the crises of overproduction but on a much higher scale. There is a considerable drop in wages, linked to mass unemployment and great insecurity, which brings with it a sharp increase in the rate of surplus value. These two factors cause a remarkable rise in the rate of profit, as in the days of the first seasons of capitalism, especially during the period of "reconstruction". Even after this, years 1946-1950 after World War II, and when the productions have regained their pre-war level, the new increased productivity, linked to the introduction of new technologies, lowers the cost of production of constant capital, momentarily reducing the organic composition of capital.

It is worth noting the reversal of the trend following the Second World War: the 1937-1973 cycle marked a recovery of increases. As early as 1950 the various countries regained the 1937 level, the highest reached before the war. England regains an almost youthful increase with an average of 3%. Germany, which had experienced appalling destruction, grew by 7.2%, close to the USSR, 8.2%, which was a younger capitalism. Russian capitalism, following the destruction of the civil war, had almost disappeared and almost had to be reborn.

But this post-war cycle, which saw a vigorous and almost prodigious accumulation of capital, and on the material level a formidable development of the productive forces, ended definitively in the two-year period 1973-1974 with the first serious world crisis following the second conflict. Later, from cycle to cycle, the increases have steadily decreased. While in the period 1950-1973 there were practically no recessions, or limited to national phenomena, the 1973-2007 cycle is divided by

successive crises into five short cycles: 1973–1979, 1979–1989, 1989–2000, 2000–2007; the last one, begun in 2007, is not yet concluded. Each of these short cycles corresponds to a period of expansion followed by an international recession.

## **B. The strangulation of the market**

The aim of production, in the capitalist mode of production, is not the satisfaction of human needs but the accumulation of capital: every capital invested must generate a profit.

Capital presents itself as a mass of commodities whose value must be converted, i.e. it must be sold on the market.

The fact is that there can be no balance between production and the market, because these two phases of the circulation of capital are governed by laws in contrast. Production is not determined by needs, by demand, but the opposite happens: production in capitalism, unlike previous production modes, precedes the demand, and then finds itself having to dispose of the production of commodities, a condition to be able to start over again a new cycle.

It is vital for capitalism to extend the market, whatever the cost, in order to dispose of the increasingly gigantic production of goods. The increase in wages increases the sale, but if wages increase, surplus-value decreases: this is the grip that tightens capitalism. As the domestic market soon becomes saturated, outlets are to be found abroad: hence the importance of international trade. The other means of circumventing the limited purchasing power of individuals and businesses is credit, which defers payments. However, sooner or later the accounts must balance.

We have shown a table concerning the percentage growth of world trade, adding exports and imports. In the world total obviously imports and exports balance.

It goes from 4.3% for the cycle 1836–1890, to 3.3% of 1890–1913, to 0.5% for the cycle covering the two world wars. Then a strong comeback after the Second World War with 8.3% in the "glorious thirty years", and a sharp deceleration to 5.1% in the 1974–2008 cycle. However, the increase remains high.

We then divided the 1974–2008 cycle according to the short cycles corresponding to international trade crises. In the periods that follow 1980, there was first a spectacular collapse of the increase up to 1992, then a net, although discontinuous,

going up again to 2008, followed by a sharp slowdown in the following cycle, from which we have not yet emerged.

The slowdown for the 1997–2000 cycle corresponds to the monetary and financial crisis that hit the countries of South-East Asia in 1997, starting from Hong Kong, then extending to South Korea and from there to Russia, whose State declared itself insolvent, and finally reaching the countries of Latin America, such as Mexico, Brazil and especially Argentina, which experienced a terrible recession and whose State was forced to declare itself bankrupt.

What explains the strong increase in the increase in world trade from 1992 to 2008? Two factors: first, the relocations and outsourcing that have increased the transfer of goods, secondly the formidable development of capitalism in China and Southeast Asia.

Today commodities are rarely produced entirely in the same country. To lower their cost of production, large companies have "outsourced" part of their production and made use of subcontractors. Taking advantage of the significant reduction in freight rates, especially maritime, they put small and medium-sized companies in competition all over the world. Thus, the same product before becoming salable can travel many times back and forth between different countries. Intermediate goods today represent between 40 and 60% of international trade. This is how Germany between 2003 and 2009 became the world's leading exporter. Eventually, the United States were back first, but then China overtook both, becoming the world's leading exporter.

#### **- The growing weight of Asia**

The dazzling development of capitalism in China and Southeast Asia has offered a new market, first of all for the goods of the manufacturing sector, then for the capitals of the big monopolies: industrial groups like General Motors, Honda, Siemens, Renault, etc., linked to investment banks that directly and indirectly control thousands of companies throughout the world. While the North American, Japanese and European markets are growing at a slowcoach pace, those of Southeast Asia and China gallop.

A second table showed the percentage growth in the volume of trade. That of the great imperialist countries has halved in the 1974–2008 cycle compared to the previous 1949–1974. That of Asia, excluding Japan, remains high and stable in both cycles. World trade has therefore been driven by Asian countries and in general by

emerging countries that continue to attract monopolies. However, after 2015, some of these countries have entered a recession, such as Brazil, or their growth has slowed considerably.

China. Between 1959 and 2008, its international trade grew at an average rate of 9.1%, more than the contemporary 8.5% of Western countries. The short cycles begin with 1959–1966, which saw in China the terrible crisis of 1961–1962, in which industrial production fell by 48%. This crisis has been accompanied by a serious agricultural crisis that has caused millions of deaths. This explains the collapse of its international trade. This recession will be followed by another in 1967–1968, after the 1960 high was exceeded in 1966: 1043 against 924 in the index of industrial production. The crisis was less severe, but however the fall in production reached 22%. Which explains the political crisis in the apparatus of the party and the state and the enlistment of a part of youth in the so-called "cultural revolution". However, this crisis does not appear in the average increase of the whole cycle, on the contrary its very high rate corresponds to a capitalism in a youthful phase of sustained growth.

China has taken full advantage of the "globalization", as can be seen from the rise of its increases, from cycle to cycle, up to an average of 18% per annum in 1997–2008. Goods flowed everywhere, but also and above all capitals, and Chinese exports exploded.

Then came the end of the binge: the global recession of 2008–2009, with a 14% fall in world trade. Exports decreased by 28% in Asia, 21% in Europe, 18% in North America and 9.3% in China.

This fall in Chinese exports was followed by a strong recovery in 2010. But, by investigating China's foreign trade, we see that it slowed sharply in 2014, 2015 and 2016, announcing a considerable recession.

In another table we reported the relative global weight of exports of the main industrial countries. France, the United Kingdom and Italy are in a remarkable and inexorable decline. The last two are at the same level of Belgium, whose retreat is much weaker, but is surpassed by South Korea. Germany also moves back, but more slowly, and Japan returns to its quota of 1973–1979. The United States marks a slow decline and is found in the cycles of 2000–2007 and 2007–2015 at a level slightly lower than that of the 1973–1979 cycle.

In the opposite direction we can observe the dazzling rise of China which goes from a negligible value in the 1973–1979 cycle, to 5.1% of 2007–2015, world

maximum, having overtaken the United States. In exports, China has surpassed the United States since 2006 and in the volume of trade since 2013. South Korea continues its slow but no less noticeable rise.

The share of the great imperialist states goes from 55% to 38% while Asia passes from 8% to 30%.

It took two world wars for the United States to finally replace England. But in our days, productivity is such that the growth of capitalism is much faster, and it also ages much faster. This means that, in the event that the proletariat cannot stop the mad rush of world capitalism, a single world war will suffice. In the meantime there will be another overproduction crisis, which we expect for 2018–2019. Among these gigantic bumps in history will be the alternative: International Communist Revolution or World War III.

### **C. The ongoing crisis**

In order to give an overview of the course of world capitalism after the 2008–2009 recession, two tables were presented. The first contained the percentage increases of industrial production compared to the previous year, the second the same percentage increases but relative to the highest previous level of production. The year corresponding to this previous maximum volume of industrial production is in most cases 2007 or 2008.

The 2008–2009 overproduction crisis hit all the major imperialist countries hard, with the exception of China. Russia, Japan, Italy and Spain have seen their industrial production fall by over 20% compared to the previously reached peak, while the United States, Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Belgium saw drops between 10% and 16%. In some less old capitalisms, like Mexico and Brazil, production fell 6–7% while others simply marked time like India. Still others, such as China and South Korea, which are also large industrial and imperialist countries, but of younger capitalism, have simply undergone a sharp slowdown, with a fall in production in some industrial sectors.

Then, in 2010–2011, all of them recorded a recovery in industrial activity that was more or less sustained but overall quite lively: + 6.1% and + 3.2% for the United States, +11.3 and + 7% for Germany, +5.1 and + 2.6% for France, +11.3 and + 3.9% for Belgium, + 15.1% for Japan, +16.3 and + 6% for South Korea, etc. But this recovery was followed by a relapse in the years 2012–2014. Afterwards, after mid-2014 or 2015, depending on the country, we saw a weak recovery, which is

slowing down. So we had a double recession, followed by weak growth.

The United States did not follow this general pattern, on the contrary, after the recovery of 2010–2011 they recorded a continuous growth, but that is slowing down, up to a negative increase in 2016.

Among the imperialist countries, a handful of them, but not the smallest ones, in 2016, after 8 years have recovered and surpassed the maximum reached in 2007–2008: the United States, with a production of over 1.4% to that achieved in 2007; Germany, with a +2.2% and Belgium, with a remarkable +7.8%. But as an annual average over eight years, the increases are reduced, respectively, to 0.2%, 0.3% and 0.9%.

All the others are in a much more difficult situation, if not even in the abyss: -25% for Spain, -20.9% for Italy, -18.8% for Portugal, -17.6% for Russia (reference year 1989), -14.8% for Japan (despite all the efforts of the Shinzo Abe government and the massive interventions of the Japanese Central Bank), -14.8% for the United Kingdom (the previous maximum dates back to 2000!), -11.6% for France. The unhappy Greece pays a terrible tribute to the crisis with a -25.8%! When will we have the same figures for the great Germany? Soon, and they will be even worse!

Developing countries either slow down, like India, or are in full recession, like Brazil, with a fall in production of -17.1% compared to 2012.

#### **D. Finance capital**

The sharp slowdown in capital accumulation during the 1973 through 2007 cycle was accompanied by an unprecedented increase in public and private indebtedness and speculation if compared to the 1950–1973 cycle. By now the indebtedness in all the big capitalist countries, including China, goes beyond that reached by the United States on the eve of the Great Depression of 1929–1932, at the bottom of which the index of industrial production touched the lowest point with a fall of 43%.

Speculation becomes all the more frantic as the accumulation of capital is slowed by the fall in the rate of profit. Banks, insurance companies, investment funds, pension funds, etc., they all flung themselves into speculation rather than invest in industry, which yields too little profit. Speculation does not create any wealth, it is a game in which there are those who lose and those who earn by exchanging large shares of surplus value already produced.

If the accumulation of capital slows down following the fall in the rate of profit, the mass of commodities produced is still gigantic and the demand for raw materials remains strong. Today, this demand is further increased by the accelerated accumulation of capital in China.

First, the high demand for raw materials encourages speculation, pushing prices upwards. Speculators, on cereals, metals or energy resources, relying on a strong demand, buy large quantities, often to term, i.e., with deferred payment, for example to 3 months, thus causing a temporary shortage, waiting for prices to rise before selling them, thus earning a profit. This is how the price of oil could surpass 150 dollars per barrel and cereals have seen their price skyrocketed in 2007–2008, exacerbating scarcity and famine.

The same speculation took place in the real estate sector, but also on securities of all kinds. You buy securities, bonds, shares, etc., that is, loans at interest, not so much in view of the interest, but simply in the prospect of seeing their prices grow, and therefore selling them at a higher price. Debts for this purpose are also contracted. Speculation is all the more frenetic today that money is not expensive, that the "price of money", that is, interest, is low.

At the height of the euphoria the value of speculative securities had reached 7,424 billion dollars, that is half of the American GDP, while the Dow Jones, the index of the New York stock exchange, on October 11, 2007 reached the dizzying record of 14,198 points with an increase of 84% compared to September 2002.

But what had to happen inevitably happened. Lehman Brothers, the fourth American investment bank, was making substantial profits in the real estate sector. In 2006, its portfolio of mortgage securities reached \$146 billion, with a turnover of \$19.3 billion and a net profit of \$4.2 billion. These transactions were carried out through a "leverage effect" of 31, i.e., these 146 billion represented 31 times the value of the bank's own funds, all the rest had been borrowed on the banking market to be lent a second time.

In the first quarter of 2007, the first symptoms of the overproduction crisis were felt with some insolvency in the payment of mortgage loan installments. The bank had to borrow to face losses and repayments. The machine came to a halt because the number of missed payments increased exponentially. On March 17, 2008, Lehman Brothers saw its shares fall by 48%. The bank's agony will continue until September 13, after its shares price fell by 93%, forcing it to declare bankruptcy.

A second leviathan, the AIG, the world's leading insurer whose assets exceeded \$1,000 billion (the GDP of Italy in 2007 was \$ 2,203 billion), shortly after the failure of Lehman Brothers was rescued by the US state thanks to a contribution of public funds of 182 billion. Without this investment, the entire international financial system would have risked collapsing like a domino.

The stock market then sank and on March 9, 2009, the Dow Jones reached its lowest level at 6,457 points: a slide of 54% that exceeded that of 1931, which was 52.6%.

If the value of the securities rises or falls, the country is no richer or poorer than before. This game only allows a layer of skilled parasites to live in luxury at the expense of the bourgeois dopes, but it is always surplus value that has already been produced in the production process. At the Stock Exchange the bourgeois exchange money, just like in a poker game.

Central banks and the States intervene generously to avoid the collapse of the financial system because a recession would be far worse today than that of 1929-1931.

The States got themselves indebted to save the banks, to the point that some of them were forced to declare themselves insolvent, or in the situation of having to threaten it.

The energetic intervention of the central banks, the FED, the Bank of England, the ECB, the Bank of China, seek to delay the collapse of the financial system by buying back billions of securities, treasury bills or mortgages, and by lending to banks hundreds of billions at rates close to zero.

In China, banks open a lot to credit by applying the central bank directives. This conduct, coupled with the big public works that mobilize hundreds of billions of dollars, has avoided a clear recession.

The states and large enterprises of the developing countries, which, unlike the old imperialist countries, are not in recession, can contract cheap debts. These North American, European and Japanese capitals, which do not find employment in the continents of origin, expatriate to those countries where capital continues to accumulate at a sustained or at least discreet pace. But the party for these countries ended in 2014 when the FED put an end to its third "quantitative easing", accelerating the coming of a recession that began to have its effects in a number of these countries: Brazil, South Africa, etc.

So where are we after ten years of recession? The indebtedness of the states has reached peaks never seen before and, apart from the German State that has slightly reduced the own indebtedness, all continue getting indebted. On average, their debt expressed as a percentage of GDP is twice that of the United States on the eve of the Great Depression of 1929, when it was close to 54%, and for Japan even the quadruple.

The private sector indebtedness, both households and non-financial companies, after having reached the maximum in 2009, shows a slight decrease, except for Belgium and France, where it continues to grow. The most indebted households are the Anglo-Saxon ones: 87.6% of GDP in the United Kingdom and 79.5% in the United States in 2016, against a debt ratio of 62% to 41% for other countries. It should be noted that the indebtedness of Chinese households is 44% of GDP.

With regard to non-financial companies, the debt in China amounts to 166% of GDP, the highest value, followed by Belgium with 163.2%, then France with 128.5% and Spain with 101.7. Japan has an intermediate debt ratio of its non-financial companies with 95.5%. The other countries are below 80% of GDP, which is still a lot. The less indebted country, and this does not surprise us, is Germany with 53.2%.

Savers so far invested in safe securities such as treasury bills or large state enterprises. In France, household savings in 2016 amounted to € 4.841 billion and another 70 to 80 billion are saved each year; in Europe at least 200 billion each year. These are no little thing and the States would like to direct them to industry and in particular to SMEs.

It is interesting at this point to sketch a class analysis. Economists speak of "families", in general and without class distinction. But we know that, for example, in France, 3/4 of savings are held by 20% of households. If 20% of households hold 3,631 billion out of 4,841, considering that there are 37.4 million households in total, this means that on average each of these wealthiest families has on average savings of 485,394 euros. So it has to do with the big and middle bourgeoisie, which holds most of the savings and wealth in general and above all the ownership of the means of production.

At the other end there are 20% of households that do not spare at all or have a negative saving situation. There lies the true proletariat, along with the poor peasants, the small artisans, the retired workers who survive with miserable pensions, and the underclass. There are 60% of families who can save 5 or 10% of

their income and who hold one quarter of the national saving, that is 1,210 billion euro, that is an average figure of 53,922 euro for each family unit. In this case we are dealing with the infamous swamp of intermediate social strata, on which the great bourgeoisie rests to maintain its class rule. Fortunately, however, the crisis is working to proletarianize them by freeing them from their savings. It is certain that the great bourgeoisie will sacrifice them first. Some will join the ranks of fascism, a part will join us to overthrow the bourgeoisie.

The basic problem is that it is not enough to create bodies capable of financing European companies: the latter to invest need to see prospects of making profit on the market, and this is where the problem lies. Although there was a recovery after the end of 2014, it remains very moderate. The only thing that is booming is speculation, which has exceeded in intensity and volume that of the end of the first decade of the new century.

## **Conclusions**

We have seen that after 2014 there was an industrial recovery in the great imperialist countries. However, this is more than moderate, proceeding at a rate of between 1 and 2% per year; for France it is less than 1% per year and for Japan it has remained decidedly negative. Really little to brag about: all these countries, apart from Germany, Belgium and the United States, have a lower industrial production than that achieved in 2007, with decreases ranging from 12% to 25%.

The United States stand out for a strong recovery in 2010 with a +6.1%, but then it slowed down to become negative in 2016. However, this growth in 2014 allowed the United States to surpass the previous maximum of industrial production. But if you go to see in detail you realize that it was the energy sector that drove the indices, while the level of manufacturing production is still lower than that achieved in 2007. It will take another 3 years, at the rate of current growth, to return to that level. In terms of construction, its index is 56% lower than that achieved in 2004!

Even China profits from the more favorable present situation: after a strong slowdown from 2012 to 2015, it has marked a certain recovery. In any case there are symptoms of severe overproduction: a strong slowdown with excess production in key sectors such as steel, cement, energy, etc. A strong public and private indebtedness is growing. Easy to explain: industrial growth in China has been maintained thanks to the great public works and the considerable investments in armaments, which require a lot of steel, and to a galloping indebtedness, just like in

the other big industrial countries that have exploited "quantitative easing", and thanks to considerable public and private indebtedness.

Everything is ready for a formidable crisis of overproduction. The current situation is comparable to that of the eve of 1929, but for the worse. Public and private indebtedness is much higher and states and central banks have exhausted all their munitions.

When the overproduction crisis will explode in China, coinciding with that of the United States, Europe and other Asian countries, such as Japan, Korea, India, nothing will stop it, no protection will hold, they will sink to each other. The central banks will be overwhelmed and many states will be forced to declare themselves insolvent. Fundamental banks of the global finance system, such as Deutsche Bank, will fall by the dozen.

The earth will then open under the feet of the aristocracy of the working class and of the petty bourgeoisie. The ignoble swamp of the half-classes will be ruined and with it a part of the great bourgeoisie. Proletariat and bourgeoisie will be pushed to a bloody clash, provoked by an irreversible fracture in a polarized society.

Then the revolutionary voice of the communist proletariat will once again be heard with the rebirth at the world scale of a great International Communist Party and a red union international.

After no few years of extreme crisis of capitalism, in the following recovery, the alternative: world communist revolution or imperialist Third War, will arise.

### **Lessons of the Lost Revolution in Germany**

Having described the events up until the Spartacist week of the first days of 1919 at the last General Meeting in May 2016, passing through the years 1919, 1920 and 1921, we went on to summarize the process of degeneration of the Third International.

Formed on January 1, 1919, the German Communist Party showed theoretical and tactical deficiencies that would accompany it in all its future defeats. The councilist defect led to proposing exit from the trade unions, which were under the sway of opportunism, turning their tasks over to the workers' councils. On January 5, 1919, the party agreed to participate in an insurrectionary plan alongside the left Independents and the Revolutionary Captains, but already on the day afterwards the

Independents withdrew their support for the Berlin Revolutionary Committee, preparing the terrain for Noske's cops. Rosa and Karl were murdered on January 15.

In February 1919 the so-called campaign for the "socialization" of the mines started in the Ruhr: once again this was directed jointly by Spartacists, Independents and the Majority SPD. After yet another social democratic betrayal, it would lead to a bloodbath. The campaign for "socialization from below" of companies in the Halle region suffered a similar fate a few days later. A new edition of the tripartite "revolutionary committee" in March in Berlin ended in another tragic defeat: between 1,500 and 3,000 murdered, among whom was one of the most important figures of the German left, Leo Jogiches.

In April 1919 the atrocious farce of the proclamation of the Bavarian Council Republic took place, commissioned by the Independents and Majority SPD, who also managed to involve the communists, in order to consign them soon afterwards to the forces of repression: at the head of a republic conjured up by others, they were brutally swept aside on the first of May.

With 1919 coming to an end, the KPD entered into closer contact with the Third International, which in this period managed to break the isolation imposed by the civil war in Russia. From this point on, the International would elaborate all political and tactical resolutions regarding the West according to the German revolution. A reciprocal influence started between KPD and CI, which would be one of the causes of the degeneration of the International itself.

Despite the birth of the Republic, the bourgeoisie did not sleep soundly because the German proletariat and its communist party had not yet been defeated. Moreover, the Versailles Treaty had been a hard blow for the nation. Against this background the Kapp putsch was decided upon. There were only two apparent principal architects: the commandant of troops in Berlin, and Wolfgang Kapp, a man drawn from the Junker class and the old state functionaries. On March 13, 1920 Lüttwitz occupied Berlin, deposing the Ebert government.

The response of the German proletariat was immediate, following which an action committee was installed, comprising the SPD, USPD and unions: a general strike was proclaimed and the whole of Germany came to a standstill.

At first the KPD declared that the clash between republic and monarchy did not directly concern the workers and that the party would have called the workers to a general strike only with a view to seizing power, certainly not to rescue Ebert and

Noske. This position would have been correct if those standing behind Kapp had been nothing more than an echo of the Wilhelmine era. But, formal appearances aside, it was the bourgeoisie that wanted to put an end to the insubordination of the proletariat. The workers had realized this, before the KPD, and went on strike, bringing all of Germany to a halt within a day. The KPD then proclaimed: "For the general strike! Down with the military dictatorship! Down with bourgeois democracy! All power to the workers' councils!"

On March 17 Kapp and Lüttwitz fled but the strike did not end. SPD, USPD and trade unions decided to continue it, with the intention of controlling the situation. Social democracy, under pressure, now came up with the idea of the "workers' government" comprised of "workers' parties". At this point the union organizations, given the "good intentions" of the new government under Müller, decided to end the strike. The proletariat gave in. But so too did the KPD. "Rote Fahne" wrote on March 26: "The KPD thinks that the constitution of a socialist government will create conditions that are extremely favorable to the energetic action of the masses".

The episode evokes the slogan of Workers' Government from long before the Third International and allowed the spirit of legalism to emerge in the KPD. The councilist wing was expelled from the party. On 5 April the KAPD, the Communist Workers' Party of Germany, was founded.

The result of such a confusion in political orientation would be the invitation from the International's Executive to the three "workers'" parties (the left USPD, KPD and KAPD) to merge into a single party based on the 21 conditions for admission. The basic problem for the International was to create a mass party in Germany that would have organizational weight and following among the workers. Zinoviev himself would intervene directly in October at the USPD congress in Halle, hoping for a split in the Independent Party. The USPD effectively split into two factions and more than half of its members followed the International. The Central Committee of the KPD hailed the split at Halle, advocating fusion at the earliest opportunity. Unification would happen in Berlin in December 1920, but only between the left USPD and the Spartacists. The KAPD would not join the new party, preferring to remain a sympathizer party of the Third International.

The United Communist Party of Germany (VKPD) was a mass party, with 400,000 members, and a joint leadership consisting of ex-Spartacists and ex-Independents.

In Munich, the communists took part in the bourgeoisie's demonstrations against the Entente; in the Landtag, communist deputies presented joint motions with bourgeois

deputies; the Bavarian organ of the VKPD advocated the “United Youth Front”, inviting students, who had distinguished themselves in suppressing the Council Republic of Bavaria, to unite with the workers in a new “national sentiment”.

The repercussions at the heart of the International were far from slight. The party debated itself into a serious crisis. Early in March 1921 the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) pushed the VKPD into action. On March 16 it presented the famous “theory of the offensive”.

But on March 19, 1921 Hörsing, the commander of the police in Prussian Saxony, occupied the garrison of Mansfeld-Eisleben with the clear intention of disarming the workers, who still held weapons after the Kapp putsch. The VKPD proclaimed the general strike and called on all German workers to take up arms. However, its appeal was only followed in central Germany. Clashes between demonstrators and police took place in Halle, Berlin, Dresden and Leipzig, but already by March 28 it was clear that the action had failed. On March 31 the party itself called off the action. Once again, the proletariat and the communist party suffered a hard repression.

The entire Third Congress of the CI focused on criticism of the March Action. Lenin’s arguments at the Third Congress are well known and can be summarized with the formula: before calling the proletariat to take decisive action it is necessary to be sure of having conquered the “majority” to the principles of communism.

The International was not in a position to understand the Italian Left’s critique of the formula “conquest of the majority”, which in the West, where the movement was in retreat, could not be interpreted other than as an invitation to struggle on a legal and parliamentary level. It is therefore not a good approach to try to correct an error by means of an error of an opposite nature. This weakens the party and sows confusion within the proletariat. It was not by chance that after the Third Congress the International found itself on a downward trend from which it was unable to recover.

The report, which continued in the subsequent meeting to summarize the past studies of the party, arrived at the events of 1922 and 1923. What characterized the history of the communist movement in Germany in these two years were: the formation of the United Front with social democracy; national bolshevism, following the French invasion of the Ruhr; and the workers’ governments in Thuringia and Saxony until the final defeat in 1923.

The Third Congress of the CI, in 1921, had concluded with the invitation to the world proletariat to form an ill-defined “common front of struggle”. In the following August the KPD congress decided to implement the tactic of the United Front, which was at once not only political-parliamentary but governmental, understanding that the former necessarily implied the latter. In October the KPD agreed to give external support to the SPD-USPD coalition government in Thuringia. As a national tactic the KPD proposed to the two social democratic parties the confiscation of the property of the ousted dynasties, workers’ control of production by means of factory committees, and the imposition of war debts on the capitalists.

The CI endorsed the legalitarian action of the KPD in the “theses on the United Front” of December 18, 1921, now understood as an action from the top between more parties, justified as a vehicle for conquering the majority of the working class.

By contrast the union activity of the KPD, especially in the early months of 1922, was notable: it led many strikes and had an active presence in the struggles. The attempts to extend them and the criticism of the opportunist directions of the social democratic parties and the trade unions enabled the party to strengthen its position greatly within the German proletariat, subsequently obtaining a majority in important trade unions: the railway workers in Berlin and Leipzig, the construction workers in Berlin and Düsseldorf, the metalworkers in Stuttgart and up to 30% to 40% of the general labor confederation, the Allgemeiner Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund (ADGB) in June 1922. It succeeded in passing class positions such as, for example, the reorganization of the trade union on an industrial basis and the dismantling of corporate trade unions. In November 1922 the KPD moreover controlled 80% of factory councils.

But this did not work when transferred from union action to political, sliding towards opportunism. They put forward objectives of a democratic nature, such as the defense of the bourgeois Weimar Republic, which was threatened, it was said, by militarist reaction.

Across Germany, fascist bands were going about organizing themselves under the cover of institutions and the army, drawing into their ranks petty bourgeois ruined by the war and lumpenproletarians.

On June 25, 1922 the KPD entered an agreement with the SPD, USPD, AFA and ADGB for a politics of reform to impose on the government, which was a coalition of “non-workers” parties: laws in defense of the Republic, measures against nationalist and monarchist organizations, amnesty for all the “revolutionary

workers”, formation of workers’ committees of defense, constitution of organs of workers’ control, the general strike for obtaining such a political platform. In short, the preparation of the proletarian revolution was delegated to the bourgeoisie. In fact, the “laws for the defense of the Republic”, the only ones accepted by the government, put a further juridical instrument in the hands of the police for arresting communists.

The result was that German proletarians, called to demonstrate by all their parties and organizations, poured into the streets in their millions waving red flags and the flags of the republic. Fifteen days later the government had “Rote Fahne”, the central daily newspaper of the KPD, closed down for three weeks.

1923 was for Germany the year of inflation, a phenomenon of proportions never since seen in the history of capitalism, with a huge devaluation of wages.

On January 11 France occupied the coalfields of the Ruhr under the pretext that Germany was not facing up to the payment of reparations. The Cuno government, the first Weimar government without social democrats, supported by President Ebert, called the population to “passive resistance”: the workers were invited to take part in a “patriotic strike” and blacklegs were called traitors to the fatherland.

At first, the KPD behaved correctly: it convened a conference with the PCF in Essen and called upon the working class to fight on the two fronts, inviting the proletariat to the international brotherhood. The executive of the CI was also clear in this sense: the only true enemy of the proletariat was the bourgeoisie, in whatever country.

But there were already novelties brewing within the KPD: the thesis that Germany, a nation oppressed by the Entente, was a kind of colony and that Communists should place themselves at the head of the anti-French liberation movement. The CI and the Russian state did not help to clarify things: revealing the real economic need of Soviet Russia to form an economic alliance with the German Menshevik bourgeoisie, it reinforced the idea that there was some continuity between the German bourgeois government and the future dictatorship of the proletariat. In April 1923 the CI showed the KPD the way towards national bolshevism. The KPD claimed to be putting itself at the head of the “national liberation struggle”.

The KPD was now a mass party: at the third enlarged executive two and a half million workers organized in the unions followed the KPD, which had the majority in fundamental unions such as metal and construction workers in major cities such as Jena, Stuttgart and Halle. The Communists had also held sway in the factory

councils, in which they distinguished themselves by controlling food prices, rents and leading the fight against speculation and famine, and had also begun to form the “proletarian hundreds” for self-defense of workers against the militarist right and against the French in the Ruhr: the proletarian hundreds developed especially in Saxony and Thuringia where they were also legalized; however, they lacked weapons.

But the thesis of the CI, to which the KPD adapted, was that the conquest of the majority had to be achieved by means of the United Front and that this was the anti-chamber of workers’ government, considered to be the precondition for the seizure of power.

This program was to be tried out in Thuringia and Saxony. Social democracy was thus rehabilitated, considered a workers’ party, the right wing of the proletariat.

Already in January 1922 Inprecor was writing that in Germany the situation was now ripe for the formation of a workers’ government and, even if in the Reichstag the “workers’ parties” did not have a majority, it was always possible in local parliaments.

The opportunity presented itself after the elections to the Saxon Landtag in 1922, which gave 46 seats to bourgeois parties, 40 to the SPD (by now reunited with the USPD) and 10 to the KPD. The question of supporting this coalition government was widely debated at the IV Congress of the I.C. Lenin and Trotsky stated that it was unthinkable for the Bolsheviks to renounce the Red Army and the Soviet State. Nothing was done, and the SPD formed a minority government with the support of some radical bourgeois deputies.

In August 1923, under the direction of the KPD, with the slogan of Workers’ Government, a strike against the high cost of living had paralyzed Berlin, forcing the Cuno government to take anti-inflationary measures and to put an end to the passive resistance in the Ruhr. All of Germany was now in chaos and President Ebert decided to entrust the government to Stresemann: the SPD, returning to government, once again ran to the bourgeoisie’s sick bed in its moment of peril.

Since the KPD had now won over the majority and the masses had shown clear signs of recovery, between July and August 1923 the ECCI reached the decision to prepare the “German October”. On 23 August the political bureau of the CPR decided to approve the action.

The fundamental question was that of arms: nobody could say how many men were

organized into the proletarian hundreds and with how many rifles; it was estimated that around 100,000 men could be organized in Thuringia and Saxony but how to arm them was unknown. Optimistically, it was believed that it would have been the Workers' Government to arm the proletariat.

Meanwhile after the August strike the German state was gaining strength, on the one hand involving the SPD in the government, and on the other constantly giving greater power to the Reichswehr, the army. The German bourgeoisie was expecting the insurrection and was getting ready to repress it. In September 1923 Stresemann was ready to reach a compromise on the Ruhr, already long hoped for by the USA and Great Britain.

At the start of October 1923 Moscow decided to allow the KPD to enter the Workers' Governments of Thuringia and Saxony. At the same time the predictable reaction of the Reichswehr was unleashed: on October 13 Müller declared the dissolution of the workers' hundreds and all other workers' paramilitary organizations and, despite Brandler being the relevant minister, on October 16 the Saxon police were put under the command of the Reichswehr.

Clashes broke out all over Germany. The social democratic press moaned about General Müller. The unions did not lift a finger. On October 17, Müller sent the Saxon government an ultimatum, demanding the complete submission to the Reich. On October 19 it was Stresemann himself who gave the order to reestablish "public order and security in Saxony".

Despite all this, on October 20 the KPD fixed the insurrection for the 23rd. Unnecessary to say that the social democrats refused either to arm the proletariat or to organize the Red Army, thus leaving it to the communists alone to attempt the action. The German communists had no choice but to back down. After severe repression, on November 23 the KPD was declared illegal, thanks specifically to the law for the defense of the Republic, which a year earlier it had strenuously endeavored to get approved.

The KPD had for more than a year shown itself to be the most democratic party in Germany; now, at the very moment that it called upon the proletariat to go outside the bourgeois state to install its own dictatorship, the proletariat refused to follow. We cannot maneuver the class by brusquely setting opposite objectives; we cannot ally with other parties, especially with those that have already demonstrated on many occasions that they are the executioner of the communist revolution, in the hope of being able one day to bend it to our will. This lesson was not drawn by the CI and it continued to accuse men and fractions without questioning the value

of the method followed in tactical and organizational matters.

What would have been of value, on the contrary, was what the Italian Left would ask at the Fifth Congress: take the scalpel to deviations of principle that inevitably led to these errors in the first place.

Let us seek to draw from these events the confirmation of a thesis that has always guided the Left in its struggle against yielding to the fetish of the “unity” that would win greater numbers to cause of communism.

We must take note of the immaturity, the indecision, the confusion that was far from absent in the broad political forces that flowed into the KPD. This allowed the counter-revolution, led by social democracy, to prevail over the over the generous efforts of a working class ready to fight for a good three months. The revolution in Germany was squashed because the proletariat had not succeeded in giving itself an adequate political leadership.

## The Military Question: The First World War

### - On the Italian front

The report on the military question, which reached the First World War, before moving on to present the movements on the different fronts, needed to clarify the novelties compared to the previous wars: a real industrial system that destroys resources and human lives for the renewal of capitalism. A process that initially was not well understood by the military leaders, involved in a destructive vortex which they thought they could solve only with organization and desire to win, in a fatalistic consumption of the cheapest war material, the human one.

The peace and political aftermath of the war had solved nothing in Europe in terms of the imperialist dynamic of the states and had put the revolutionary solution in Europe on the practical agenda.

The Second World War, which broke out only 20 years after the First one, was almost a continuation of the latter for the definitive settlement of unresolved issues. The states, defeated and victorious, learning from the mistakes at the closure of the First War, prevented any revolutionary possibility, having destroyed the international class party from the foundations.

All this will then guarantee Europe, even if divided, a very long capitalist peace under the control of the victorious powers, confining wars and conflicts to the areas of the so-called Third World.

The First World War was marked by the failure and betrayal of the national Social Democracies, by the disgraceful collapse of the Second International whose parties took sides with the national war fronts. The Second was a total disaster for the international proletariat, betrayed by the false myth of "socialism in one country" and by the myth of the war "against Nazi-fascism".

The two wars have in common the industrialized destruction of resources and human lives, even if in different ways: A "trench" war the first, at least for the European fronts in the west and the south, a "movement" one the second.

The slowness of the German advancement in France transformed the war into the terrifying static massacre of the trench war; also the sudden advances to break the fronts, for example the Italian one of Kobarid, became bogged down in static clashes, as bloody as sterile.

The Second World War, which was characterized as "dynamic consumption", was won by the strongest industrial power, the United States, just like the First.

For the Austro-Hungarian Empire the war represented the extreme attempt to contain the breakdown of the double monarchy, undermined by the bourgeois nationalistic thrusts; only the army, in a peculiar Austro-Croatian-Bosniak-Czech-Hungarian composite form, remained firm on the front; at least until 1918, when the conditions of disproportionate consumption of arms, food, and industrial capacity were fatal for both the Austrian and German empires. This caused the imperial army to split apart due to the national fault lines, first in the Czech component, then in the Hungarian one. The victory was obtained by the industrially strongest part.

After one year since the start of the war, for the Italian bourgeoisie the pretext of the enlargement of the national borders led to a haggling between the alliances. Finally, the Pact of London, with its incredible territorial promises to Italy, opened another front against the Central Empires. In a rugged and complex mountain front the "Napoleon-style" manoeuvres and the traditional organization of the army were totally inadequate; they ran aground in the trench war with a disproportionate tribute of human lives and material resources.

Finally, Emperor Charles of Austria asked for the help of Germany, which will intervene with a completely new strategic offensive concept.

### **The Route of Caporetto**

In the spring of 1917 the operations of the Italian army on the Asiago plateau resumed, with the strategic idea of bypassing the Austro-Hungarian deployment on the plateau from the north, with 300,000 soldiers and an imposing array of artillery for a front of 14 km. But the offensives are put down, with a tragic budget of 25,000 dead for a few kilometres of territorial gain.

The activity then moves back on the front of the Isonzo, with the tenth offensive, from 12 to 28 May. The battle lasted until the 22 May and led to the expansion of the Plava bridgehead at the price of 112,000 dead. With the failure of the attacks towards the last ridge, the continuation of the offensive on Monte Santo resulted in a failure and the advance stopped.

During these fights, probably the only rebellion with a minimum form of spontaneous organization took place: on the 15th and 16th of July at S. Maria la Longa the revolt of the brigade "Catanzaro" bursted, having this already suffered

decimation on the Asiago plateau in May '16. A rebellion that was suppressed atrociously.

After a pause for reorganisation, the 11th offensive developed from 17 August to 10 September 1917, but with a change of strategy. For the Italian army the basic problem on the Karst was the forcing of successive defence lines, one after the other. Now they try to realize a tactical surprise: maximum concentration of forces, with the objective of the fall of the Tolmino bridgehead, then raid on the Bainsizza plateau and circumvention of the positions on the Karst. The offensive lasts for a month.

The 2nd Army penetrates for several kilometers inside the Bainsizza Plateau. Monte Santo was also conquered on 24 August. But in the following days the advance stops abruptly: the 'Plateau proves to be a very difficult terrain to cross and to move on with heavy armaments. Estimating that the advance on Bainsizza was no longer possible, they resume the thrust towards Tolmino, but the last objective of this operation, the San Gabriele Mount, is not conquered despite 20 days of attacks and 25,000 fallen.

The only tactical success was the Bainsizza: for the Austrian army, counter-offensive containment, defence of the S.Gabriele and finally withdrawal to more defensible positions; but the breakthrough would have become a matter of resources and time. The strategy of attack and consumption of resources conducted by the Italian army is achieving its goal at terrible cost.

The Austro-German attack begins on 24 October at 2 am with a violent artillery preparation. Coming from Tolmino at dawn, the 12th Germanic division breaks through the Italian line, goes up the Isonzo valley, on the back of the advanced defense, reaches Kobarid at 3 p.m. Following this division and within a day, the German Alpine body conquers the entire eastern region of Mount Kolovrat, the stronghold of the Italian second line defense. The focused use of toxic gases allows the breakthrough even in the Plezzo basin.

The left wing of the 2nd Army is overwhelmed, positioned in a totally offensive deployment, surprised by the enemy offensive.

Badoglio, in command of the 27th Army Corps, invested by the main foray in Tolmino, disappeared in the crucial phases of the attack.

The entire Italian command body, fossilized in the offensive perspective, gives way under an assault that is not prepared to hold up. At 2 o'clock on October the 27th

the Italian Supreme Command ordered the general folding. One and a half million soldiers leave the areas for which they fought for two years. The attempt of resistance on the Tagliamento line is not possible because nothing has been predisposed for this. The route sees 280,000 prisoners, 350,000 disbanded, 40,000 dead and wounded, 400,000 civilians fleeing.

The "forger" Andrea Graziani is appointed inspector general of the evacuation movement and immediately starts his job.

Finally, the Austro-German advance begins to slow down. Continuing is increasingly difficult for the German Austro-Hungarian army. Armando Diaz will replace Cadorna on the 9th of November. The conditions for the Arrest Battle are outlined.

#### **- In the Middle East and Caucasian Sector**

Here the conflict had territorial and political consequences that still persist today, as proved by the serious crises that never fade away in the countries of the area. The victorious powers completely upset the Middle East by dividing the collapsed Ottoman Empire with artificial borders and imposing power groups subservient to them in charge of the governments of the new states.

It was the largest war theatre of all the First World War, with an asymmetrical line-up of forces: Ottoman Empire and Central Empires against the Russian and British Empires. Also there was a significant role for irregular Arab troops, who created the Arab Revolt against Turkey, and for voluntary Armenian troops who organized themselves in the Armenian Resistance, also against Turkey.

Five main military campaigns took place: that of Sinai and Palestine, that of Mesopotamia, Caucasus, Persia and Gallipoli.

Local and colony troops were heavily involved in the sector: France mobilised 1.4 million soldiers from Africa and the Caribbean and England 4.5 million from its immense empire.

On the 1st of August 1914, day of the beginning of operations in Europe, a secret military alliance agreement was also signed between the German and Ottoman empires: the Berlin government intended to open a path towards Persia and India, to the detriment of London, which was also strongly interested in Caspian hydrocarbons.

Enver Pascià, minister of war and head of the Young Turks Revolution, was

representing the interests of the Turkish bourgeoisie with the Panturanian project.

The opening of a Turkish–Russian front was of great strategic importance for the Central Empires, and more for Germany. This would have eased Russian pressure on the eastern front.

The Anglo–Iranian Oil Company had obtained the rights to the major Persian oil fields with the exception of those of some of the provinces bordering the Caspian Sea, which it intended to acquire with the war: oil had become the fuel of the entire British military fleet and gradually also of the commercial one.

We commented on a map on the division of the Ottoman Empire set out by the secret Sykes–Picot agreement between England and France and on the definition of the relative areas of influence: Caucasian territories were conceded to Russia and an area around Jerusalem was created, entrusted to international administration.

The Armenian community, estimated at around 2 million, was widespread throughout much of the empire, with concentration in the Caucasian territories on the border with Russia and a strong presence in Constantinople. It was the most active and politically organised ethnic minority. They took part in the war and finally managed to obtain the recognition of new Armenian state entities, thanks to Russian support, which had used it in an anti–Turkish function. However these entities had a short life.

Fearing a crisis caused by the Armenians present in its army, the Government of the Young Turks started a vast campaign of raids, arrests, deportations and hangings that in a few months caused the extermination of about 1.5 million Armenians. In turn, the Armenians were attributed massacres of the Muslim populations in the territories under their control.

Militias from the Kurdish minority participated in the conflict, some with the Ottomans and a minority with the Russians, induced by promises of some state concession. They proved to be unmanageable and their use was limited. But, despite the Sèvres agreements of 1920, which recognised the Kurds as a state entity, the British, on the strength of the Sykes–Picot agreements with France, never granted the promised territories that were very rich in oil.

The multiple Arab tribal communities in the Hegiaz region, a long coastal strip on the east coast of the Red Sea, created the Arab Revolt in 1916 with the aim of freeing themselves from Ottoman rule and forming an Arab state entity. The Hascemite Kingdom of Hegiaz had a short and troubled life until it was annexed to

the newborn Saudi Kingdom in 1932, thwarting the hopes of the Arabs to achieve their own unitary state.

Subsequently, the League of Nations, with the institution of the Mandate, gave legal status to the military occupation of all those territories. London put Faysal at the head of the kingdom of Iraq, invented in 1921, which included large territories claimed by the Kurdish community, which had also contributed to the war. His brother Ab Allah Husayn was appointed Emir of Transjordan, now the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

From these brief historical notes one can see already the origins of the main causes of the present conflicts.

The Caucasian campaign was instead fought between the Ottoman and Tsarist empires. The Russian revolution will have a major influence on the outcome of the campaign and on territorial resolutions. The British Empire will take advantage of this to defend and extend its important oil concessions in the Caspian Sea.

The German command here applied the "strategy of distraction", opening up a secondary front far from the main one in Europe to force the Tsar to move troops to the Caucasus.

On November 1, 1914, Tsarist Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire and the offensive penetrated Turkish territory with moderate success. The Turkish counteroffensive, with Kurdish militias, only partially blocked the Russian advance.

Enver decided to launch a winter offensive on the Caucasus mountains to overturn the situation and invade Russia: it resulted in a total disaster.

England then decided to start the campaign of Gallipoli with which it aimed to force the Dardanelles and occupy Constantinople, forcing the Ottoman Empire to re-establish communications through the Black Sea with the Russian Empire. Despite the enormous use of men and vehicles from England, France, Australia and New Zealand, it resulted from February 1915 to January 1916 in the loss of more than 252,000 men, several large ships and some submarines. Turkish wards strongly opposed, also suffering losses of 250,000 men. This first amphibious operation served as a reference for the preparation of the ones of the Second World War

On March 3, 1918, the Ottoman delegation signed the Brest-Litovsk Treaty with the new Russian Soviet Republic, by which the Bolshevik government ceded to the Ottomans all the territories annexed by Tsarism after the war of 1877-78. The Treaty recognised the Republic of Transcaucasia. But the Ottomans resumed fighting until the Armenian army was dispersed.

The Ottoman Empire came to the end of the war having lost important campaigns but with clear success in the Caucasus. All the agreements and borders established by the Sèvres Agreement of 1920 did not lead to any definitive peace and the following year the war broke out between Georgia and Armenia and then between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Not even now, a century later and after the dissolution of the USSR, there is a stable and definite peace in those regions.

### **- The Sinai and Palestine Campaign**

This chapter concluded the exposition regarding the broader Middle East and Caucasian front begun in the previous meeting in Turin.

The German commands pushed the Ottomans to attack the English forces in Egypt, which were supported by the local ones. They had two important objectives: to occupy and close the Suez Canal to all the English traffics, above all military, that from their colonies had flowed enormous quantities of supplies to their war and productive apparatus; to engage the English forces on several fronts in order to reduce their pressure on the European front.

The Sinai and Palestine campaign took place from 28 January 1915 to 28 October 1918 conducted in several steps and subsequently extended to Syria, involving on the Ottoman side a total of 650,000 men led by German military advisers, against a mixed group of English and Anzac (Australian and New Zealand) troops, for a total of 550,000 units.

A first Ottoman offensive started on February 2, 1915 but failed after just two days because the British were fully aware of the enemy plans thanks to their spies.

In July 1916 a second Ottoman offensive was rejected by the British, who moved the front line further into the Sinai to protect the Channel.

In London, the new government of Lloyd George gives a further impulse to the war and, without providing adequate reinforcements, gives orders to the army in Egypt for a vigorous offensive in the sector, both to support the Arab Revolt by distracting Ottoman forces, and to obtain a predictable and easy success that would offset the unsuccessful offensives in the other sectors.

The Ottoman forces have meanwhile settled on a fortified line that from the Gaza fortress on the Mediterranean stretched as far as Beersheba, the terminus of the railway line to Damascus. The bypassing British attack of 26 March 1917 was a failure and the fortress of Gaza was not conquered. Nevertheless, London orders the conquest of Jerusalem and provides its troops with new tanks and asphyxiating gases. However, the following month, the second attack also ends in a defeat.

The new English commander Allenby is supplied with new bombers and fresh and well-trained troops with the order to take Jerusalem by Christmas 1917, taking advantage of the fact that a large part of the Ottoman troops were moved to Mesopotamia and Arabia. The last lines of Ottoman defence were lost and on 9 December the British entered Jerusalem, giving British imperialism great political success and one of the few military successes after 3 years of war.

France has prepared a plan for the conquest of Syria, which it must put to one side, because in the Western sector it has a powerful German offensive to hold out against; for this reason, the English troops are also transferred to the European front.

On September 19, 1918, a sudden English offensive started; the Ottoman retreat began, with their columns heavily bombed by the Air Force to the point that only after a week the Seventh Ottoman Army ceased to exist as an operative unit. The road to Damascus, whose garrison surrenders without fighting and which was taken on October 1, 1918, is freed.

The capitulation of Bulgaria, with the real danger of having enemy armies under the walls of Constantinople, convinced the Turks to ask for armistice. The 600-year Ottoman rule in the Near and Middle East, now under the control of British and

French imperialism, came to an end.

## The PCd'I and the Civil War in Italy: The Arditi del Popolo

In the previous meeting we had described the birth of arditism in wartime and its subsequent reorganization; we had highlighted its petty bourgeois ideology, oscillating between the open anti-proletarian reaction and an ultra-left nationalism.

As early as November 1920, fascist terror had struck down on proletarian political and trade union organizations and on socialist council administrations and had carried out countless murders of leaders and ordinary militants. But this dramatic scenario had not led the Arditi to take to the field, arms in hand, against fascism.

The following year, in January, the Communist Party split up, with a marked revolutionary and internationalist program. The party already in early March launched the watchword to the proletariat "to accept the struggle on the same ground on which the bourgeoisie descends, to respond with preparation to preparation, with organization to organization, with organization to organization, with discipline to discipline, with force to force, with arms to arms ". The proof that it was not just words came from the military organization prepared by the party, which on several occasions had responded with arms, defending itself and even attacking.

Therefore the Arditi del Popolo were born in July 1921 not because they felt the need to avert fascist violence, but to prevent the Communist leadership of the proletarian revolt. As long as Socialist Party preached and practiced resignation the Arditi had not posed the problem of proletarian defense.

The founder of the Arditi del Popolo himself confessed that "at first fascism appeared to us inspired by patriotism: to curb the so-called red violence".

Above the struggles among bourgeois rival gangs, a single purpose united fascists, Arditi del Popolo, D'Annunzio and socialists of all shades, that of preventing the revolutionary movement of the masses of workers under the leadership of the Communist Party. That some, in the face of white terror, preached peace and resignation and others the violent response did not change their purpose: to bring back and maintain "inner peace", the bourgeois order.

No revolutionary ambition resided in the Arditi del Popolo, indeed, in the event of a resolute working-class struggle they would not hesitate to support fascism, "inspired by patriotism", to stem the "red violence".

The Arditi del Popolo were born suddenly and organized with impressive rapidity

throughout Italy. It is estimated that in the summer of 1921 they had 144 sections with about 20 thousand members.

Many who were not willing to passively suffer fascist violence, but to this violence intended to oppose by force, impulsively adhered to it and promoted the formation of local sections. There were communists and republicans, anarchists and Catholics, socialists and without party.

That proletarians have voluntarily joined this organization is a fact, but it is absolutely not possible that a military structure of such magnitude could arise in the span of days and spontaneously could be able to spread and affirm nationwide. To realize such an apparatus it was necessary that a well-structured body, with the help of the State structure, had taken the initiative. All that could only be very, very, suspicious; and equally suspicious was the fact that this armed militia, as it had suddenly arisen, just as suddenly dissolved.

The Central of the PCd'I gave the decisive instruction that the military organization body of the party should remain completely independent from the Arditi del Popolo, while fighting alongside them, as it happened many times, when they were faced with the forces of fascism and reaction. The reasons for this attitude were essentially practical, dictated by a careful examination of the situation.

Even according to confidential information, obtained with the means at its disposal, the party had learned that the organization was not moving from below, but from a well-defined political center: a substantial sector of the bourgeoisie, of which Nitti was a representative, considered it convenient to curb fascism, which, because of its enormous development, threatened to go beyond the limits that democracy had assigned to it.

Moreover, the aims on which the organization of the Arditi del Popolo had arisen were common to those of socialpacifism: to arrive at a government that respected the freedom of proletarian organizations on the basis of common law, avoiding the phase of the fight against the state, even taking a position against anyone who upset the so-called civil confrontation of ideas.

Therefore, in the event that a Nittish-colored ministry was formed, the Arditi del Popolo would become an illegal force at the service of the legal government, not to curb the fascist squads, but to intervene against the proletariat when it had undertaken a revolutionary action against the state governed by the leftist ministry, and perhaps in collaboration with the socialists.

Completely opposed to those of the Arditi del Popolo were the aims of the communists, who tended to lead the proletarian struggle to the revolutionary victory. The communists denied (and deny) that in the bourgeois regime there could be a normal and peaceful order of social life, and affirm the clear antithesis between the dictatorship of the bourgeois reaction and the dictatorship of the proletarian revolution.

During the report, among the other documents presented, an article was read, written by Umberto Terracini for "Correspondance Internationale" of December 31, 1921 entitled: "The Arditi del Popolo, a daring maneuver of the Italian bourgeoisie".

The Party's Center directive was that the communists could not and should not participate in initiatives outside the party itself, because military preparation and action demanded a discipline at least equal to that of the communist party. It would not have been possible to obey two distinct disciplines, political and military. The communists, therefore, could not accept to depend on other organizations of a military type.

The proletarian military classification was rightly considered as the extreme and most delicate form of organizing the class struggle, in which the maximum discipline had to be achieved. And this meant that it was party-based and depended strictly on the politics of the class party, which by definition aims at regimenting and directing the revolutionary action of the masses. Hence the evident incompatibility.

In those crucial years of the first post-war period there were many movements that presented themselves as revolutionaries, and as many were their "revolution" programs; but, as the party pointed out, it was precisely the existence of too many species of revolutionaries that made revolution difficult, since it requires a clear approach to the struggle. The conclusion reached by the Communist party was that all those "revolutionary" projects were nothing other than plans for the best defense and preservation of bourgeois institutions: to introduce external changes to let the essential content subsist, such is capitalism and the democratic mechanism of the state, such is parliamentarianism. Any attempt to make the proletarian attention and effort converge in those programs, for communists had to be considered counter-revolutionary.

The party warned its militants and the whole proletariat from revolutionary impatience, from the mania to break the record of extremism, and from the dangerous and simplistic thesis that, as long as action can start, one must accept all the alliances, without splitting hairs as to the differences with the temporary

allies.

Excluding organizational arrangements did not prevent actions being carried out in which the communist forces and the Arditi del Popolo were on the same side of the fighting front. However, the party reiterated the need to maintain full control of its forces by the time the revolutionary problem would be imposed and the alliances of the previous period would be tragically broken.

The action for the defense of the proletariat against the reaction could only be conceived as an action by the proletariat to overthrow the regime. For this reason the communists categorically refused to participate in political agreements with a "defensive" nature against the crimes of fascism, but with the aim of restoring "order". For the communists this was nothing but defeatism; the Fascists themselves aimed to "restore order".

## The Hungarian Revolution of 1919

We continued this exposition with the chapter: The “Rose Revolution” and the partition of Hungary.

From June 1918 several strikes broke out throughout Hungary; in October, at the same time as the Austro-Hungarian armies were being defeated on the ground the workers on strike openly refused to obey the orders of the militarized management. They threatened the commanders and officers with a similar fate to that of Colonel di Pécs, whom the soldiers had shot dead. Following a shoot-out in a railroad workshop, the workers looted the offices. One of their demands was the removal of the police from the workshops.

It was in this climate that the essentially pacific bourgeois democratic revolution took hold. A provisional government was formed. Initially Charles IV instructed Hadik to form the government, but only 24 hours later, following the growing agitation among the troops and workers in Budapest, Archduke Joseph called upon Károlyi to define the passage of powers from Hadik to the National Council. The government was formed by the Independence Party and the ‘48, in the liberal-democratic tradition, and the SDPH, to which two secondary ministries were given: Welfare and Trade.

But the protagonist of the revolution was the working class, which, even if not organized and still without its own party, still managed, with the masses of peasants in the army, to overturn the centuries-old power of the Habsburgs. The defeat in the war was for the whole nation, with the bourgeoisie left under the ruins of the old Hungary, together with all the semi-feudal strata.

With the defeat there was not only less of a possibility to oppress foreign peoples; it was entirely foreseeable that a considerable part of the Hungarian population would fall under foreign domination. Hungary suffered unconditional surrender at Villa Giusti, while 47 divisions of the French Eastern army marched on Budapest. The agreements that had only just been signed were violated and the victorious imperialisms of the Entente divide up historically Hungarian territories. Some maps shown to our comrades demonstrated how Hungary lost two thirds of its territories and some millions of Magyars lost their citizenship.

At the beginning of December, three ministers of the Károlyi government tried, with their resignations, to force a return to the National Council’s original platform: they were against the presence of the Social Democrats in the government and against the workers’ and soldiers’ councils, considered “Bolshevik” organizations influenced

by the Communists, who were getting organized. The attempt failed without finding the hoped-for support of the military and political leaders of the old regime and, above all, of the military mission allied to Budapest.

A month later a government reshuffle strengthened the power of Károlyi, who would assume the position of temporary head of state pending the elections to the National Constituent Assembly. The social democrats doubled the number of ministries they held from two to four.

The report continued by setting out the events that led to the birth of the Hungarian communist party.

At the start of the first world slaughter Bela Kun had been sent to the front as an army officer, and in 1916 he was taken prisoner by the Russians. In a prisoner of war camp he very quickly got in touch with the party organization and became a member of the Bolshevik party. Among the prisoners, a group agitated against the monarchy and the war, which Kun gave a decidedly Marxist direction.

On March 24, 1918, still in Moscow, Kun and the Hungarian comrades formed the Hungarian Group of the Bolshevik Communist Party.

At the 8th Congress of the PC(b)R Lenin said regarding the Federation of foreign groups said: "Hundreds of thousands of prisoners (...) returning to Hungary, Germany and Austria have ensured that these countries are now completely contaminated by the Bolshevism virus. And if groups or parties that are in solidarity with us dominate in these countries, it is thanks to the work (...) of these foreign groups in Russia, work that has represented one of the most important pages of the activity of the Russian Communist Party as a cell of the World Communist Party". Bela Kun, together with Lenin, Marchlewsky, Liebknecht and Luxemburg signed the preparatory manifesto of founding congress of the Third International.

"The internationalists – eighty, eighty five percent are Hungarians – fight well, tens of thousands have given their lives for Soviet power," said Sergej Lazo, commandant of the partisans in the Far East. They participated in numerous battles in the Civil War on all fronts: in the cavalry of Budënyj, in Turkestan, in Crimea, along the Volga and in Siberia.

The Hungarian Group was well organized and structured: its newspaper was published twice weekly with thirty to forty thousand copies, in addition to numerous revolutionary pamphlets, with the organization of the course for propagandists with

books published by the Communist Library.

With an article in “Szocialis Forradalom” on October 23, 1918 Bela Kun decisively distanced himself from the Hungarian Social Democratic Party and attacked its opportunist and reformist policy at the service of the bourgeoisie, the great landowners and the Church. He announced the Hungarian working class’s need for a revolutionary communist party, which would see its foundation a few days later, to be precise on November 4, 1918 in Moscow.

At the party’s founding conference, Kun strongly emphasized the fact that he “cannot collaborate with the SDPH; such a collaboration would be impossible, even if the leaders of the SDPH had not occupied ministerial seats and had not made compromises with the bourgeois parties. Our demands could not be satisfied, not even by the most radical democracy and the most popular government. We do not want specific concessions from the bourgeoisie. What we want is power, because only its possession offers the means to liberate the proletariat. The existing dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia for more than a year does not leave any further doubt in this regard (...)

“Every member of the CPR who is originally from Hungary will leave the territory of the Soviet Republic of Russia at the earliest opportunity to put themselves at the service of the international revolution in Hungary.”

On November 6, 1918 Bela Kun, Károly Vântus and another two comrades left Moscow for Budapest.

At our next meeting the comrade presented the chapter regarding “The preparation” from January 1918 to March 1919.

The proletarian masses, exhausted by years of war and poverty, started a series of struggles against their class enemies, bourgeoisie and monarchy, but their altruistic nature was repressed with the help of the social democrats.

In January 1918, to the cry, “Down with the war! Peace! Long live the Russian proletariat!”, the working class went on strike. The leadership of the SDPH tried to put itself at the head of the strike to steer it down the roundabout paths of democracy. This revolutionary impetus throughout the country was broken after three days, with the army intervening in the streets with cannons and machine guns.

In June 1918, thanks to the influence of nearly 500,000 prisoners of war sent back

to their homeland by communist Russia, the strike at the MAV factory resulted in an insurrection. A violent repression followed, which went unopposed by the SDPH. Workers were recalled en masse and sent back to the front. The struggle, conducted heroically for eight days was defeated again and its leaders jailed or sent to the front.

A large demonstration was announced for October 28, 1918. The Soldiers' Council was set up, which immediately got in touch with revolutionary workers. The working masses had intended to go up to Buda from Pest and demonstrate in the citadel in front of the residence of the Archduke Joseph. In front of the Chain Bridge, the crowd tried to break the police and military cordons; the soldiers drew aside but the police fired on the crowd leaving dead and wounded on the ground. The next day workers at the weapons factory broke open the deposits and armed themselves.

The first public activity of the National Council was to send a delegation, in which the leadership of the SDPH was also included, to persuade the workers to give up their weapons, but it was unsuccessful.

On November 1, when military collapse was obvious, the SDPH, promising universal suffrage, declared itself ready to offer the help of the workers even to save the Habsburg dynasty. Duke Mihály Károlyi succeeded the old government with the help of the radical bourgeois party and the social democrats. The bourgeoisie understood that the exploitation of the proletariat could only continue on a democratic foundation, and that social democracy was ready to come to its assistance to such a reorganization of the bourgeois social order, revealing another facet of the same capitalist mode of production. The ministers designated by the SDPH for the new democratic government swore their loyalty to the Archduke Joseph.

In Budapest's factories and the rest of the country all production came to a virtual standstill; there were no raw materials. The immense war and other debts amounted to as much as 40 billion crowns. Meanwhile the working class was demanding decent living and working conditions more and more energetically.

Groceries were also in short supply. Hungary went unheard by the victorious Entente powers: whereas Austria received 288,000 tons of food and clothing, Hungary, where the situation had turned critical, received only 635.

The communists who had arrived illegally in Budapest in November 1918 organized themselves quickly to found the party and edit the party press. They went into the factories, the barracks, the unions, and the villages to carry out propaganda. They

convened assemblies, sometimes entering into heated clashes with representatives of the SDPH. Posters were pasted to the walls and pamphlets distributed everywhere to the masses: “In the democratic republic the standing army, the police and the army of bureaucrats assure the dominion of the bourgeoisie over the people. The bourgeoisie will never bring exploitation to an end (...) The bourgeois state is an instrument dedicated to maintaining this exploitation. The proletarian state, instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat, oppresses the bourgeoisie, taking away its capital to give it back to society.”

Meanwhile the counter-revolution was being organized in the whole country. The large landowners, capitalist magnates, thousands of officials who had lost their incomes and power, as well as the clergy, worried about the loss of their parasitic life, started to get organized and arm themselves.

The unceasing action of the Communist Party on all fronts aimed to attract the soldiers onto the revolutionary path and to win all of the armed organizations of the state (with the exception of the police) to the cause of the revolution. The Party’s organizations seized every opportunity to procure weapons. Demobilized soldiers were told not to return their weapons to the barracks. The Party managed to procure no fewer than 35,000 weapons from demobilized German soldiers, who were returning from the Balkans via Hungary.

Kun wrote to Lenin in a letter dated January 5, 1919: “The situation is very good here, our party is getting larger from day to day (...) All the metalworkers are taking action and the majority is on our side. Others are still hesitant, but it is only the idea of preserving the unity of the party that is holding them back (...) All leads us to suppose that in a few days the government will no longer be composed of social democrats, which means that the counter-revolution will then realize a new momentum. We know very well that our fate is decided in Germany, however, regardless of this, we are doing everything possible to hasten the moment when the workers seize power (...) All of the armies are disintegrating, while we workers are armed”.

The CPH rejected without hesitation every proposal aimed at establishing any transitional power in place of Soviet power. From the foundation of the Party the leaders of the bourgeois-democratic revolution tried to swindle it into reaching an agreement that would lead to any temporary solution enabling it to face the external enemy. When Károlyi offered the CPH the war portfolio in the provisional bourgeois government the party rejected it in a way that was wholly unambiguous. The CPH took a clear stand against the attempt to establish a “workers’ government”, a purely social democratic government. The CPH unanimously

opposed this proposal with a motion that demanded the immediate realization of power by the councils.

On December 12, 1918 the Budapest garrison broke out under arms and expelled the Minister of War from the provisional government. On December 25 the revolutionary hussars of Kecskemét occupied their barracks and disarmed the officers. A clash between workers and soldiers occurred on December 26 in Budapest, leaving many dead and wounded. On December 31 a conflict between soldiers supporting the CPH and those supporting the government in Budapest's two largest barracks was followed by an armed demonstration against social democracy. January 1919 saw the start of mass demonstrations against the bourgeois press and the destruction of the editorial headquarters of bourgeois newspapers, under the Party's leadership.

Other insurrections took place in Budapest and in the province in the second half of January. In the barracks, armed resistance was organized against the order of the social democratic minister to disarm the soldiers with a communist orientation, and in particular the young conscripts. There were also armed demonstrations by demobilized NCOs and the war-wounded.

Beyond the action taken for the occupation of the factories, the Party launched its slogan for the occupation of empty houses. In February laborers began to occupy the large landed estates and in many places were led by the communists.

The line of the CPH was directed without hesitation towards the armed insurrection, towards the overthrow of the bourgeoisie's power and its annihilation, towards the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Since large numbers of poor workers and peasants supported the workers and soldiers in arms, the Hungarian bourgeoisie, which could count on social democracy, was between a rock and a hard place: the Entente and the workers' struggle for power. But the true face of bourgeois democracy soon revealed itself when one morning a detachment of 160 policemen, armed with machine guns and grenades, assaulted the headquarters of the CPH and devastated everything. At the same time a motion was presented to exclude communists from the workers' councils.

In January the miners of Salgótarján had joined the CPH; the government had the entire district occupied by the army, which carried out an enormous massacre. This did not slow the numbers flocking to the CPH, not even locally, even though the government terror continued. Also at Pozsony (Bratislava) the workers declared the dictatorship of the proletariat, but after just 36 hours in power they were beaten by

Czech troops and the city was permanently occupied by Czechoslovakia.

Even the rural village proletariat was joining the struggle; in the Arad Committee, farm workers divided the land; the authorities intervened, seeking to suffocate the movement with arrests.

The government restored to the capitalists the right of command in the factories, taking them away from the workers, suppressed the factory councils and replaced them with factory committees and the old system of personal representatives. There were street clashes during which the headquarters of the social-democratic newspaper "Népszava" were devastated, guilty of a hateful campaign of anti-communist slanders. On February 20 the government had virtually the entire leadership of the Communist Party arrested; the party headquarters and the newspaper "Vörös Újság" were closed and their assets seized. The arrested communists were severely beaten by "police comrades", members of the Social Democratic party.

The working masses now called energetically for the release of the communists. In the large industrial centers, the most important trade union federation, that of the metalworkers, stood side by side with the communists. Print workers went on strike. The bourgeois government was impotent before the organizations set up by the CPH among demobilized soldiers, who soon numbered several hundred thousand. The organization of the unemployed was also impressive.

During the first days of March leadership in the largest factories passed into the hands of company workers' councils, formed not according to legal norms but solely following revolutionary order.

In the meantime, the new central committee of the Party, in which the leader was Tibor Szamuely, pursued its work clandestinely, together with the communists who were in prison. Kun managed to get books and newspapers as well as a typewriter, moreover he was able to stay in touch with Lenin thanks to the party's underground network.

At the next general meeting we continued the exposition with the chapter concerning the CPH program as formulated in the letter that Bela Kun wrote from prison on March 11, 1919, the platform on which the Hungarian labor movement was to be unified.

Given that "as long as we are in a state of arrest we are not willing to deal", he continues:

“As far as the question of the unity of the workers’ movement is concerned, my point of view is that only real unity, rather than apparent, can be of use to the emancipation of the proletariat. I believe that there is no need to prove that the proletarian unity which, as was written in “Nèpszava” of 9 March, led the proletariat as a whole onto the terrain of leaders in the mold of Scheidemann (SPD), would only be ruinous. Proletarian unity, a unitary organization of the proletarian movement, would only be advantageous if it proved to be based on an authentic ideological and principled unity and did not support class collaboration but rather class struggle.”

He also wrote:

“If the Russian Bolsheviks had not put an end to diplomatic niceties in the party in 1907, as Lenin put it; if Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and Mehring – and even the most anemic independent socialists – had not broken with the external unity of the German labor movement during the war; if the Italian socialists had not done the same thing during the war in Tripolitania; if all of them had not secured a freedom of movement that would allow them to create their own organization and to secure the possibility of propaganda, I think that in this case the history of the workers’ movement would have been deprived of rousing revolutionary events and above all of results. It may be the case that the so-called fratricidal struggle, which opposes one side of the proletariat against the other, would not have been so open; but one wonders if this struggle has not spared the proletariat many useless sacrifices, considering that every new year of capitalism requires such sacrifices.

“And I ask you, is it not also a fratricidal struggle that opposes proletarians gathered in the unions to those who are outside? There are inevitable evils, the so-called necessary evils.

“The unification of the proletarian movement is inevitable. But in order for it to arrive, there must first be divisions. This is not a play on words, but a law of dialectics.”

Kun then proceeded in the letter to spell out the points of the platform.

1. Do not give any support to the so-called government of the people; refrain from any participation in a bourgeois state government. Reject any class collaboration; form councils of the workers, soldiers and poor peasants, which are the organisms of working class power.

2. Break with the so-called “territorial” politics or, as we say now, with the “politics of popular integration”. To energetically attack what is called “revolutionary national defense”, which is the consequence of class collaboration; to prevent a new war against the Czechs, Romanians or Serbs at all costs. A proletarian party can consent to a revolutionary war only in the case that:

a) All power has effectively and definitively passed into the hands of the industrial and agricultural proletariat;

b) All communities of interest with capitalism have ceased to exist;

c) We have every guarantee that the war will not create new national oppressions.

3. It can be seen that the Hungarian revolution is currently in a transitional state, between its so-called “general” and “national” phase and that of pure proletarian revolution, i.e. of social revolution. The Hungarian revolution is the manifestation of the revolutionary energies of the international proletariat, developed as a consequence of the general bankruptcy of the capitalist mode of production. The consequences of this can also be drawn in Hungary, as regards the political action to be deployed in the interests of the proletariat. Here they are:

a) No parliamentary republic, but a centralized republic for a transitional period, councils of workers’ and poor peasants’ delegates;

b) Suppression of the permanent army and special armed forces (police, gendarmerie, frontier guards etc.) and their replacement by the class army of the armed proletariat; disarmament of the bourgeoisie;

c) Complete suppression of the bureaucracy. Self-government of the proletarian masses through the councils of the delegates of the workers and poor peasants, who are not only invested with legislative power, but also with executive and judicial powers. All offices must be elective, of short duration and revocable at any time. Economic treatment of elected officials should not exceed that of skilled workers. Higher remuneration is only for specialists, according to the experience gained in the Russian revolution.

“A political constitution conceived in this way would guarantee the implementation of the transitional measures necessary to move forward to socialism and to ensure the repression of counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie”.

## Report of our Venezuelan Section

The work of the section focused mainly on reading and studying articles from the texts and organs of the party, as well as on following the local situation of labor conflicts, politics and the economy. A relevant effort was devoted to the translation of texts and the preparation of the next issue of "El Partido Comunista".

All the comrades of the section are aware of the need to participate and support the work of spreading the principles of left-wing communism in Spanish, in contact with the struggles of workers in Latin America.

We managed to continue the trade union work and, despite some difficulties independent of our will and ability, we managed to maintain contacts with the workers, to provide them with party press and to invite them to our meetings.

The significant increase in printing costs, due to the high inflation that affects the local economy, has led us to reduce the circulation of our publications; distribution is however active via e-mail.

Regarding the situation in Venezuela, we have informed the Party that the political confrontation, predominantly electoral, continues between the supporters of the government and the opposition. This clash, which has great national and international importance on the media, reinforces the confusion and disorientation of workers, who do not have an organization of their own to fight and protest. Even when there have been initiatives of workers' struggles, these were used by one of the two bourgeois fighting fronts, in view of the 2018 governmental and presidential elections.

There is still strong inflation of prices of food and basic products. The government has approved wage increases, but that does not compensate it. The pro-government wing, concentrated in the National Constituent Assembly, is uncertain between paying the political cost of a package of economic anti-crisis measures or a diversionary tactic to gain time until the elections, in order to maintain power in most governorates. The opposition instead tries to take advantage of the mass discontent to secure the vote.

There have been no large wage conflicts. Even if there is dissatisfaction, the regime's unions are responsible for keeping calm. Workers let themselves be mobilized only to support one of the two bourgeois opposing sides. When at the base workers succeed in freeing themselves from the control of the unions, the state repression bodies and the Ministry of Labor immediately coordinate to repress

them.

Due to the difficult material conditions of the working class, the bourgeoisie tries to divert its growing anger with democracy, with electoral propaganda between falsely opposed bourgeois fronts. But neither the current chavist bourgeois government nor one directed by the opposition political parties will solve today the crisis in favor of the workers. The ruling class relies on this only apparent alternative to continue exploiting the working class, divided and disorganized.

The vast majority of trade unions do not mobilize workers, are conciliatory towards the bosses and sacrifice workers' claims to the interests of businesses and the national economy.

Our comrades intervene among workers. They collaborated in the drafting of a document: "The demands of workers in Venezuela and in the world unify the working class without distinction of race, religion, political creed, sex, productive sector. Today more than ever, we must join forces to fight against the bosses – be they public or private – as well as their governments that have only one goal: to guarantee them profits through the exploitation of the working class. Workers should not be distracted by the skirmishes between the bourgeois fronts, they must fight for their immediate economic interests. The counterrevolutionary chorus is joined by the false workers' leaders who only aspire to take part in bourgeois negotiations by offering packages of votes for the enemies of our class. "

We also propose to the class, among the workers and in the trade unions, a series of claims: reduction of retirement age to 50 years for women and 55 for men; reduction of the working day to 6 hours at the same wage; stable employment of all precarious workers, objectives to be imposed with the return to full use of the strike weapon, without notice or legal limits.

Venezuela is going through a serious economic and social crisis, the repercussion of the more general global economic crisis gripping all the capitalist countries.

The two factions, both bourgeois, fighting each other with deaths on both sides, use the media in a bombastic way to accuse each other of anti-national conspiracies.

The working class, which every day undergoes boss and state/government exploitation, is pressed between these false alternatives. However, it is laboriously looking for its own path of emancipation from exploitation, which must necessarily go from the immediate defense of salary, of its purchasing power, to the defense of

working conditions, to struggling against the hectic pace of work, against overtime.

Small groups and company unions go in the right direction to seek class integrity, which means fighting the bourgeoisie as a whole, whether it be government or opposition, waving the banner of democracy or that of national socialism.

In the bustle of the fight to share the power and the booty taken away from the workers' toil, the bourgeoisie, with its repressive apparatus, doesn't lose sight of these little sparks of real class struggle. It intervenes drastically, in an attempt to exclude, marginalize, whoever tries to lead the worker's discontent for the just class demands.

These are the only instrument that can unite the class, presently divided into a thousand rivulets, and lead it to its classic claims, to be achieved with the only methods that can beat the capitalist class, the indefinite strike, with no time limits and with the total block of production.

## Mathematical Theory and Models

For Marxism mathematics is, like the ordinary language, an instrument. As such it is very useful, indispensable, and must be known how to handle it. A tool that has been handed down to us by previous generations and that is continually improved.

However, in an idolatrous society like the present one, mathematics is no exception to the systematic inversion of the means with the end. The Party must always focus on the historical end of the organic activity that distinguishes it, so that the use of mathematical tools does not transform its indispensable research activity, aimed at understanding where the capitalist mode of production goes, in a speculative game, an end in itself.

Our economic theory is expressed by abstract models, whose quantitative laws are represented in the language of mathematics. Once the model has been formalized into economic categories, it is possible with mathematical functions to verify or predict the link between its magnitudes and their relative evolution, over time.

But in no way can the reality of the facts emerge from the model: the facts are only historical, the theory interprets them.

In this operation, simplifications are inevitably introduced, taking into consideration what, for a given social-historical structure, is essential and productive of the major effects, from what appears accidental and just perturbation. Hence a theory is not only a container of measurable quantities, it is also endowed with its own structure, of essentially qualitative properties.

The current use of the word "mathematical model" is different. For us and, we have the ambition to say, for science, the model derives from the abstract theory, it simply represents and verifies the quantitative laws that theory has already guessed. With this premise, in no way can the model deny the theory.

On the other hand, a "mathematical model" understood as "mathematical simulation" is a particular calculation through which, starting from a certain number of actual data, for example the price for which a given commodity has been exchanged at different times in the past, we get, with exclusively formal-mathematical methods, to a hypothetical function that "approaches", as far as possible, the detected prices. And consequently we hope to be able to predict them for a near future. Although recognizing to historical empiricism its merit, even if compared with science.

Several professors have committed themselves to denying some of the laws of our doctrine through the use of these models. For example, an empirical and accurate history of prices opposes our scientific-deterministic law of value. It is a different, class point of view: to whom day after day speculates on the quotations the second is certainly more useful, the first is necessary for who wants to overthrow capitalism.

In accepting a theory there is inevitably an act of faith, unspeakable word in these times of bewilderment, a theory is embraced or rejected by instinct. The theory is

not born of a demonstration, it is its prerequisite. Every social theory is a moral force, a guide for thought and action.

The report then exposed the similarities between the theory of continuum mechanics and the theoretical framework of our economic doctrine. It has been pointed out how the evolution of mechanics, that is the transition from the mere fact to its scientific interpretation, has occurred historically on the path well synthesized by Marx in his Introduction of 1857. The scientific maturation in mechanics envisaged, in principle, with the emergence of bourgeoisie as a class, the abstract conception of the tensor of internal efforts in materials; subsequently the theory of constitutive relations inserted into the solicitation of materials the principles, so dear to us, of determinism and invariance.

The report concluded by giving news on some bourgeois studies with which one intends to reason in mathematical terms about social issues. The NASA of 2012 "demonstrated" the necessity of the catastrophic transition from capitalism to communism; the conclusion of these bigcaps: the only possible recipe to contain the inexorable advance of communism is "to correct the distribution of wealth" and "to protect nature". Trivialities in the form of differential equations!

## The Succession of Modes of Production: Rome

The report dedicated to the ancient classical variant in Rome has been focused on its superstructures, which have passed through the centuries and have arrived to this day, in a modified form to adapt to the new capitalist conditions of production.

The small village community located in the center of the peninsula in its millenarian history became a multinational empire of a power never seen before in the West.

The merit of having given itself a superior form of state is attributed to Rome. For Marx, Engels and Lenin, the state is an instrument of the ruling class to crush the dominated class; from this it follows that the State, whichever the class it represents, including the working class, can in no case be a neutral body with the function of mediating relations between actors with equal rights.

It is not easy to reconstruct the evolution of the Roman state machine. Slowly but inexorably the class State consolidates. This process can be observed both in the mechanism of attribution of offices, which becomes the prerogative of the families of the Roman nobility, and in the great deal of public works, through which the patriciate buys, literally, the State and thanks to which the assets originally owned collectively become private property. The contrast between private plots and public land is the determining factor of the dynamic attitude of the ancient variant with respect to the Asian mode of production.

This dialectical opposition between the original organic community and the nascent class structure of social relations has its own superstructural correspondence in the changes that have occurred over the centuries in the juridical institutes, which, from norms regulating the relations among the gentes, progressively assume the character of institutions governing relations among private citizens.

Because of the extension of the Roman territory due to military conquests, the law accepts new formulas and procedures, borrowing them from the more advanced societies with which the original city-state comes into contact; the winners cannot but make their own social relations more evolved, which better reflect production relations increasingly based on the self-assessment of the exchange value. At the end of this path the original *Ius Quiritium* disappeared and gave way to a complex system summarized in the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* of Emperor Justinian I.

The speaker then mentioned a phenomenon that anticipates the transformation of the ancient mode of production into feudalism. The economic crisis of the III century AD caused the loss of the centrality of the Italic peninsula compared to the imperial periphery; to put a stop to the phenomenon the emperors adopted the system of binding the producers to the land, thus creating that system which in the successive mode of production will be the serfdom. On the one hand, the State

allows powerful local lords to govern their territory in complete autonomy, on the other hand it makes a series of work constraints hereditary and compulsory, and above all links the farmer to the land in such a way that the local lordships when selling the land implicitly alienate the producers who live on it.

The report provided some theses characterizing the thought of Lucretius, whose profound and consequent materialism is weakened only by Epicurean legacies. Like every revolutionary Lucretius was the victim of attacks by the ruling class, who rightly saw in his *De Rerum Natura* a weapon in the hands of the oppressed. The foundations of materialism are expressed in unambiguous poetic formulas: expressions such as "nothing born of nothingness" and "nothing is reduced to nothingness" leave no room for religion, branded as superstition and as a cloak behind which to hide the crimes committed in its name. The accusations of impiety addressed to his doctrine are sent back to the sender: impious is a doctrine that would like the cosmos created for the use and consumption of the human species. Even language is defined as an instrument of production, a thesis that will be developed, after many centuries, by Marxist dialectical materialism.

## The Concept and Practice of Dictatorship Before Marx

With the Revolution of July 1830 we find on the Parisian barricades, next to the plebian heirs of the sans-culottes, numerous proletarians. The liberal bourgeoisie, exploiting the fear that motivated the armed proletariat, replaces the reactionary King Charles X with his cousin, Louis Philippe of Orleans, and a constitutional monarchy as well.

On August 20th, Filippo Buonarroti returns to Paris, merging a legal and propagandistic activity, now possible, with a sectarian and conspiratorial movement. The legal side advocated for a minimum program, consisting primarily of a demand for universal suffrage and progressive taxation. In Paris, the "Friends of the People Society" is founded, where Buonarroti and his followers are present alongside liberals and bourgeois republicans. After an attempted insurrection by the workers of Lyon in 1831, the "Society of Friends of the People" comes to an end in 1832. The "Human and Citizen's Rights Society" is born from its ashes, within which a Buonarrotist minority is formed in opposition to the François-Vincent Raspail's Bourgeois Republicanism.

In 1833 the pamphlet "Boutade d'un riche" by Marc-René de Voyer d'Argenson appears, where it is said that all wealth comes from work, and the people are encouraged to not "demand a poor increase in salary" but to seize power.

The repression of 1832 restricts the possibilities of legal activities. "Order reigns in Warsaw", as the French Foreign Minister Sebastiani says, and throughout Europe. In this order the bourgeoisie accepts a position that is sometimes equal but usually subordinate to the monarchies and the aristocratic classes, who are frightened by the spectre of communism that is beginning to haunt Europe.

With workers' insurrections in 1834, first in Lyon and then in Paris, and the consequent repressive laws in 1835, the "Society of Human Rights" ends. By intervening in the Lyon section, Buonarroti tries to avoid a rebellion that is untimely and likely to be defeated. But these positions do not stop him, after the defeat, from defending the rebels and identifying with their action. Karl Marx did the same in regard to the Paris Commune of 1871.

These days Buonarroti is often accused of having a wait and see attitude, because of his prudence and opposition to insurrectional, reckless and badly organized actions. Then, like now, most of the advocates of "action" wound up gradually in the enemy camp, after the best rebel elements wound up in prison or dead.

The Buonarroti group invites workers to strike in order to obtain wage increases. It encourages ending the ridiculous jealousies and harmful rivalries between workers' associations in the various sectors. They also advocate the creation of a central committee of delegates to represent the particular associations. In articles we read: "To tell them that they are free to discuss the price of their work is an insulting derision for those who are aware that, placed between the needs of today and those of tomorrow, they are forced to suffer the law of the strongest, the law of capital". In 1834 Voyer D'Argenson agrees to the need for the Coalitions and the formation of a central committee representing all sectors of the working class.

The relationship between the Italian Republican Giuseppe Mazzini and Buonarroti clearly highlights their respective positions. Already in 1832 Mazzini turned to the St. Simonian principle of universal association, as opposed to that of Buonarroti of class struggle.

With the failure of Mazzini's expedition to Savoy in 1834, which had been strongly discouraged by all Buonarroti's organizations, the final break between the two occurred. For Buonarroti, Italian unification – the Risorgimento – was part of a European social revolution. But most importantly, a struggle against the privileged classes.

Buonarroti exerted an important influence on sections of the English Chartists. The Irish Chartist, James Bronterre O'Brien, who served as political editor for several English newspapers, translated Buonarroti's "Conspiracy" into English in 1836. Buonarroti and O'Brien have in common the conception that it is necessary to seize power in order to carry out the desired reforms. As well as a criticism of the Utopian Robert Owen, whom they appreciate in many aspects, but not for Owen's appeals to the goodness of the rich and the aristocrats.

Buonarroti's communism certainly has little to do with science and nothing to do with dialectics and materialism. Communists and scientific materialists, try to make the best use of dialectics, without making this, or science, a fetish. But dialectics tells us that Buonarroti, Babeuf and their comrades, are our direct forerunners.

Louis-Auguste Blanqui joined the revolutionary Carbonari in 1824. In 1827 he took part in student demonstrations in Paris, which were harshly repressed by the police, during which he was wounded three times. He therefore took part in the revolution of 1830, the defeat of which was a great lesson for him: his class position was clear when he joined Buonarroti's "Society of the Friends of the People". In a report to that Society in 1832, he correctly stated that in the Restoration of the French monarchy the bourgeoisie shared power with the

aristocracy. But when feeling strong enough the latter reopened hostilities, and the bourgeoisie was immobilized by fear, especially due to the intervention of the people; the bourgeoisie came out of its hiding places only to seize the fruits of the victory. But, Blanqui continues, "a fierce struggle will now be engaged between the people and the middle class, no longer between the aristocratic classes and the bourgeoisie: the latter will need to call even their old enemies for help in order to be able to resist; (...) the bourgeoisie would abdicate their part of power to the hands of the aristocracy, willingly trading tranquility for servitude."

In 1833 he wrote in a note: "To say that there is a commonality of interests between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is a strange reasoning: for our part, we see only the alliance of the lion with the sheep". In an article never published in March 1834, we read: "They are not free who, deprived of work tools, remain at the mercy of the privileged who hold them. It is this grabbing, and not this or that political constitution, that keeps the masses in servitude".

Blanqui was convinced that it was necessary to go beyond the tradition of the Buonarroti and overcome the mythology of Robespierre, which had been present in the great Filippo until the end. Blanqui has nothing to do with sharing with a faith in a gradual and infinite progress, without revolutionary breaks. Years later he wrote that Saint-Simonists, Fourierists and positivists were the new religions, enemies of the revolution as much as the old.

Between 1834 and 1835 the Society of Families was founded. This, and its successor, the Society of the Seasons, even more so, were different from previous secret societies. They were an attempt, with the inevitable limitations, to create the revolutionary party of the proletariat, drawing on the "Conspiracy of Equals" of Babeuf. In the Society of Families the structure of the organization is secret but, unlike the old secret societies, all the members know the methods, the final purposes and the political doctrine.

In the Society of the Seasons, unlike the Families, there are no minutes, lists or documents. In 1839 also the Seasons reached the number of about a thousand members, mostly workers. The Society's documents mention the need for a provisional dictatorial government of unpredictable duration and a planned economy.

In Paris in 1839 there are 150,000 unemployed workers, and those who are lucky enough to have a job, which can be 15 hours a day, see their wages drop. The economic crisis is followed by a political crisis between the king and parliament. The Society of the Seasons believes it is time to move on to the insurrection, which it prepares with accuracy, but overestimates its own strength and influence

on the proletariat. Provocateurs from the police push towards the insurgency to eventually crush it. Blanqui tries to postpone the insurrection, but ends up supporting it because of the impossibility of stopping the course of events.

"Blanqui, leader of the Seasons, is also the creator of the insurgency plan. It takes care of the smallest details, identifies the armouries, bridges, barracks, ministries with all their secondary entrances, military prisons, police stations ... The insurrectionary plan can be summed up as follows: march on the prefecture and occupy it; place guards and barricades on the bridges; transform the seat of the prefecture into a sort of entrenched camp; make the Cité the centre of the organized resistance and from there send columns in all directions". [Gustave Danvier]

On 12 May 1839 the insurrection began and by the 13th it was already over. Only 500 men responded to the call for insurrection and no more than 300 more joined it. The defeat was due not to the clashes with the troops, but to the behaviour of the proletarians, who were divided between indifference and collaboration with the repression.

In the 1950s, the Soviet historian V.P. Volgin criticized Blanqui because he had an insufficient faith in the "ineluctability of communism". Ineluctability and necessity are not the same thing; the second term was not very clear even in Blanqui, but surely the first has a strong smell of positivism and magnificent and progressive fortunes. Blanqui writes: "We do not believe in the fatality of progress, this doctrine of bastardization and squatting." "France full of workers in arms, here is the advent of socialism. In the presence of the armed workers, obstacles, resistance, impossibility, everything will disappear. But for the proletarians who play with ridiculous demonstrations in the streets, planting trees of liberty or with sound barristers' phrases, there will be first the holy water, then the courtroom and finally the grapeshot, always misery."

## Trade Union Activity of the Party

The trade union activity of the party was presented in the four-month period preceding the general meeting, divided into three sectors: 1) intervention in the manifestations of the labor movement, with special leaflets bearing the party's political-union orientation; 2) the drafting of texts for the party press; 3) work performed within the trade unions.

We intervened:

- At the national event of the SI Cobas of 4 February in Modena – with a text in Italian and its translation in English – organized in response to the unjustified arrest of its National Coordinator. The flyer in English, introduced by a short explanation, was published in n. 6 of "The Communist Party";
- At the demonstrations for the March 8th strike, called for the international women's day;
- Attendance at the FCA (Fiat) plant in Cassino, organized by SI Cobas against the conditions imposed on the workers transferred there from the Pomigliano plant;
- Some stakes for strikes organized by SI Cobas in Rome, at the TNT and at an hotel;
- At the three Milan events for May Day: the morning demonstrations of the confederal unions and the Usb; the afternoon session by SI Cobas, Cub and Sgb. The text of the flyer, of a more political nature, as a tradition for the International Workers' Day, has been translated, by comrades and sympathizers, into six languages (English, Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, Russian).

On our Italian press, in addition to reporting the aforementioned flyers, we have:

- completed the publication of the detailed description and commentary on the maneuvers of the CGIL, and of Fiom in particular, from the signing of the unitary collective agreement of 2008 to that, after eight years of unity, of November 2016;
- described the struggle movement of Alitalia workers and given our direction in this regard, in particular by polemizing with the slogan of the nationalization of the company, taken over by basic syndicalism;
- translated: from English the articles on the railwaymen struggle in Southern Rail (which operates in the southern part of the United Kingdom) against the so-called "sole agent" and that of Irish tram drivers; from the Spanish a note on the general strike in Brazil on April 28; from the French an article on the movement in French Guyana that saw the workers struggle subordinated and confused in a generic popular movement;
- drafted a note on the international scene of the struggles of dock workers, a note on the issue of "vouchers" in Italy and a polemical article on the watchword "Against the slogan of exit from the Euro from Europe from NATO", brandished by

the political cartel called "Eurostop" of which the Usb, at the behest of the political group that directs it, is a fundamental constituent part;

- in our Spanish-language organ "El Partido Comunista", in addition to the original versions of the above-mentioned articles, we reported on the development, in which we collaborate, of the mobilization of courthouse workers in Venezuela and wrote a note to support the correct use of the strike against the various methods of scabbing ("Impulsar la lucha reivindicativa sin rompehuelgas").

Within the Usb we intervened at its second Congress and in the provincial congress of Genoa, exposing, at the political level, our criticism of the slogan of exit from the EU, the Euro and NATO, and, at the union level, denouncing the obstacles to the participation of members to union activity. With regard to that Congress, we have drawn up an extensive article of analysis and critique.

The article expresses the meaning and the perspective of the militia in the union by our party comrades, which we consider of correct and sound revolutionary communism in the relationship with the bodies of immediate, economic struggle of the proletariat. The correctness of this approach is confirmed, even in the still small current developments of the labor movement, both by the overall course of the Congress, and by the activity that followed, in view of the general strike promoted by the basic syndicalism.

At the next general meeting we reported on our activity from the end of May to the end of September. We intervened in three events with our flyers:

- that of steel workers of Genoa and Novi Ligure, threatened with mass layoffs on the occasion of the change of ownership of the plants, including the major one in Taranto;

- the national strike in the transport sector (airports, railways, tramways) and logistics on 16 June, proclaimed by almost all the major basic unions, except the Usb;

- in France, in Paris, at the demonstration on 12 September against the new labor reform.

These flyers have been published on our press, the French one provided with an explanation. The one on the 16 June strike, introduced by a note, explained the behavior of the various trade unions, especially the so-called basic ones, before, during and after it.

On the Italian press have also been published: an extensive commentary on the

USB at its second national Congress; an evaluation of the general "double strike" of basic syndicalism; the full text of the contents of the conferences held by the party in Turin, Genoa, Bologna, Florence and Rome on the subject of the Class Trade Union United Front.

But the level that most involved us in recent months was that of the activity within the trade unions. We continued to follow the activity of the Usb and SI Cobas, participating in demonstrations and pickets.

After the national transport and logistics strike of June 16th, immediately commented on our newspaper, the same unions that had promoted it on July 8th proclaimed a general strike of all categories for the following October 27th. Following this call, our comrades collaborated to draw up a document on behalf of the "Registered Usb Coordination for the Class Union" entitled "Problems of the strike of 27 October", published on 4 August, in which, after stressing the importance of the mobilization, some limits were highlighted in order to overcome them. A certain interest and appreciation of the document arose, which made it possible to establish contacts with some union activists of various organizations and to draw up with them an "Appeal for the formation of a Unified Trade Union Front, for a general action of struggle of the whole working class, in defense of the freedom to strike".

Of the intense activity following the publication of this document we reported in the article "The bumpy but ineluctable path towards a single trade union front".

## The Organic Activity of the Communist Party in Lenin

The party claims total continuity with the purest revolutionary tradition of the working class, starting from the Communist Manifesto of 1848, the First International and through the theoretical expressions of orthodox Marxism of the Second, restored and confirmed in the Third; it proclaims itself heir of the Left Current which within the Italian Socialist Party led to the foundation of the Communist Party of Italy in 1921, with which it also has a physical continuity, of organization and militants, defenders over almost a century of the incorrupt tradition of left-wing revolutionary communism.

While not losing contact with the working class and with its daily struggles, we have recognized the need to devote much energy, especially in times when the conditions for the revolutionary attack are lacking, to the study of the theoretical foundations of our way of existing and operating, both to continually repossess it, and to continue in the work of sculpturing our positions in doctrine and tactics. This does not mean "enrichment", "updating" or, worse, revision, but the highlighting of ever clearer and more detailed confirmation of the correctness of our way of understanding the revolutionary process.

The party is at the same time the guardian of the doctrine and the organ that on the basis of it will have to carry out an action to guide the revolutionary class. It is therefore important for us to pay particular attention to this instrument, an organ of the working class even when this, in the vast majority of its members, is not aware of it, as it is now.

The International Communist Party is not the heir of an invention or aesthetic preference of the Italian Left: it is our demonstrable belief that there are no differences in substance between the way we understand our party and that of Lenin, obviously considering the historical and environmental differences in which the two organizations found themselves operating. The report presented at the general meeting intended precisely to read the experience of Lenin and his party to identify its characteristics of general value, to be compared with those of the small movement of today.

To understand what the communist party meant for Lenin, and to correctly interpret

its positions, it is essential to have a clear picture of the context in which it operated. The report in the first part presented at this meeting focused on the period in which the Bolshevik party took shape, before and after the Second Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party (POS DR).

It is in the years around 1880 that Marxism penetrates Russia, where by then the populist movement had developed. Around the Marxist theory and right propositions on the tactics of the proletariat in the double revolution, the Emancipation of Labor group is formed abroad.

In the first period, 1880-1898, the Marxist struggle took place mainly against populism, which had become a reactionary petty-bourgeois doctrine that defended a false rural socialism based on the Russian rural community. To settle accounts with this doctrine intervene not only the authentic Marxists, but also a whole series of elements for which the criticism of populism means passage from tsarism to bourgeois democracy: "legal Marxism". The struggle is therefore conducted on two fronts: against populism and against petty bourgeois democratism.

At this time the Russian Marxists are reduced to a small group. It is important what Lenin writes in "What is to be done?": this nucleus of militants had already been able to learn "everything" from European Marxism: it did not have to wait for the movement of Russian masses.

The first considerable labor unrest occurred in 1896, and that group of intellectuals threw themselves into the struggle, indicating to the movement not only its immediate tasks, but also the prospect up to socialism. The effects of this movement and the following ones were the following: 1) the party was linked to the class; 2) the party clearly separated from "legal Marxism"; 3) the party organization was established (1898).

Lenin affirms in all his works, including "What is to be done?", that since 1896 the Russian proletariat was never more static. The inadequacy was of the party organization in leading the lively movement of the working masses. Thus is posed the question in "What is to be done?", where the crucial problem is just this: how to make the party suited to guide the workers' movement? It is in front of this exuberant workers movement that the economicist deviation manifests itself.

After an examination of the relations between the classes in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century, the report described the path up to the Second Congress of the POS DR, the one in which the party bases were laid, derived from the intense theoretical and organizational activity of the group making reference to

Iskra magazine, an activity of recovery of the right Marxist positions, mainly by Lenin.

An opportunist current in the party, which is also present within Iskra's editorial staff, manages to break it up, on issues that are only apparently marginal. At the congress there was a confrontation: as the Bolsheviks put forward their postulates, oppositions were manifested. And where, obviously? In the organizational question! All those who had previously been opponents of Iskra on the theoretical, programmatic and tactical level, now shouted against centralism and discipline and for the autonomy and democracy of the organization. Except then to drive a split in spite of the results of the democratic mechanism.

The narration continued until 1906, when a temporary reunification took place. Lenin, throughout the course of those years, which were still years of party formation, was always ready to postpone the clarification on secondary divergences while waiting for the necessary growth in the experience and maturation of the formal party, up to reluctantly accept the democratic mechanisms.

But there were aspects on which he was not willing to compromise: on the theoretical level, the orthodox application of the doctrine of Marx and Engels, to be accepted en bloc, without distinctions, very valid even in the presence of a perspective of double revolution; on the organizational level, a clear characterization of the militant, distinct from the mists of kindreds, sympathizers, fellow-travelers, and the affirmation of the cornerstones: absolute centralization and strict discipline.

- International Communist Party