

COMMUNIST ORGANIZATION AND DISCIPLINE

From «Prometeo», n. 5–1924, translated by «The Internationalist Proletarian»

PO Box 52076 - 28080 Madrid - Spain - pci@pcielcomunista.org

Premise to the question

The problems inherent to the relations of the internal life of revolutionary parties are currently of great importance due to the recent and important discussion maintained inside the Russian Communist Party, and because they are reproduced both in the polemic between Communists and other movements claiming to defend the proletariat, as well as in the internal debates over the cases of disagreement and crises particular of our international Communist organization.

In any case, the question is posed in the wrong way, counterposing both criteria of the mechanical centralist dependency and the majority democracy. The question is posed on the contrary according to a dialectical and historical method, and for us Marxists a "principle", whether centralist or democratic, that would be presented as a prejudicial rule whence to mandatorily depart in order to solve the problem, would have no sense.

In one of the issues of *Rassegna Comunista* an article about the "democratic principle" was published, considering its application whether in the State or in the union or political organizations, and developing the demonstration that for us this principle is not sustainable, whereas it can be debated whether the introduction or not of a numerical and majority democracy mechanism can be convenient, for certain organisms, in certain historical situations.

It is implicit in Marxist thought the critique of the pompous majority illusion according to which, the correct way is always indicated by the confrontation between the ciphers of a pole in which every individual would have the same weight and influence. And this critique of the majority criterium can lead to refuse it as an illusion not only in the huge lie of the

parliamentary bourgeois state but also for the functioning of the revolutionary state, and even inside the proletarian economical organisms and our own party, granting the eventuality of having adopted it in practice given the lack of a better organizational convention. Nobody more than us, Marxists, recognizes the importance of the function of the organized minorities and the absolute need, in the phases of revolutionary struggle, that the class and the party that conducts it work under the strict direction of the hierarchies of the organization itself and under the most solid discipline.

To have been liberated of any prejudice of equality or democratic nature does not have to lead though to put in the basis of our action a new prejudice which is the formal and metaphysical negation of the latter. We reclaim for that purpose to what we have written in the first part of the article about the national question (Prometeo #4) about the way to get a prospective of the big problems of communism.

That in practice the organizational mechanism and the rule of internal functioning of Communist Parties might be an intermediate line, so to say, between absolute centralism and absolute democracy, results from the expression of "democratic centralism" which is recurrent in the texts of the International, and is conveniently recalled by the known letter of comrade Trotsky which has brought up big discussions among Russian comrades.

We say right away that, since we do not believe it is possible to ask for solutions of the revolutionary problems to abstract and traditionalistic principles whether of freedom or authority, *so little satisfies us* the expedient of finding our response through some kind of mix of the two mentioned terms almost considered as fundamental ingredients that must be combined with each other.

The communist position in the problems of organization and discipline must according to us be much more complete, satisfying and original.

In order to point it in a synthetic way (setting down clear before that we are against all kind of *autonomous federalism* criteria, and we accept the term of centralism because it has the meaning of synthesis and unity as opposed to some kind of association by chance and "liberal" of forces aroused from the most various independent initiatives), we prefer ever since a lot of time the expression "organic centralism". Regarding a more complete development of the reached conclusion, we retain that it will exist, most likely in texts that will be able to be discussed in the 5th World Communist Congress. The problem is also partially considered in the tactic thesis for the 4th Congress which have recently been reproduced by *Stato Operaio*.

Let us go now to a simple historical claim that must be borne in mind in order to avoid any simplistic solution of the problem, whether that one that at any moment requires a vote to provide righteousness to the majority, whether that one that on the contrary in all cases considers the central and supreme hierarchies to be right. The problem is to show how to reach through a real and dialectical way the effective overcoming of the perhaps tormenting dilemma to which the problems of disciplinary nature in practice often lead.

Let us reclaim ourselves to the history of the traditional socialist parties and the II International. These parties, in the opportunistic groups that had taken their direction, sheltered in the shadow of the bourgeois principles of democracy and autonomy of the various organs. This however did not impede that against the leftist elements that reacted to the revisionist and opportunistic tendencies the *bugbear* of the *discipline of the majority* and the *discipline to the chiefs* were largely used. This became in fact the main tool by which those parties could assume, especially when the first world war exploded, the function, into which they degenerated, of instruments of ideological and political mobilization of the working class by the bourgeoisie. A true dictatorship of the rightist elements was thus imposed, against which the revolutionaries had to

fight, not because immanent principles of internal democracy of the party were violated or to oppose the centralizing criteria of the class Party, which precisely the Marxist left vindicated, but because in the concrete reality the matter was to oppose effectively anti-proletarian and anti-revolutionary forces.

The method of building opposition fractions to the leading groups was thus completely justified in these parties, to conduct against them a merciless critique, in order to reach afterwards the separation and split which allowed the foundation of the current Communist Parties.

It is therefore clear that the criteria of the discipline for the discipline is, in certain situations, used by the counterrevolutionaries and is used to obstruct the development that leads to the formation of the true class revolutionary Party.

The most glorious example, of how the demagogic influence of these sophisms must be disregarded, is given by Lenin himself, who was hundred times attacked as dissolver, segregator, violator of party duties, but which continued undaunted though his way, and became with perfect logic the vindicator of the healthy Marxist principles of organic centralization in the State and in the party of the revolution.

On the contrary the most disgraceful example of the formal and bureaucratic application of the discipline is given by the vote that Karl Liebknecht considered himself forced to make on August 4th 1914 in favor of the war credits.

It is true therefore that in a certain moment and situation, whose possibility to take place and maybe be reproduced we will have to better consider at the right time, the revolutionary way is marked by breaking discipline and hierarchically concentrate a persistent organization.

It is not different inside the worker union organizations, a lot of which are currently directed by counterrevolutionary groups. Here also the leading groups have tenderness for democracy and bourgeois freedom, and are ranged among those who refuse with horror the communist thesis about the revolutionary force and dictatorship. This does not take away though that communists, fighting inside those organisms,

must continuously denounce the dictatorial procedures of the leading mandarin bureaucracy; and the specific method to try to overthrow it is the vindication in assemblies and polls the application of practical democracy. This does not mean that we have to shelter in the dogmatic believe for statute democracy: not excluding in fact that in certain situations it may be convenient to take the lead of these organisms by means of a coup. The guide that links us to our revolutionary purpose cannot therefore ever be provided by the formal and constant deference to the officially stated chiefs, and neither by the indispensable fulfillment of all the formalities of an elective consultation. We repeat that our solution is built in a completely different and superior way.

The problem becomes more difficult and delicate when we want to face the internal life of the Parties and the Communist International. A whole historical process separates us from the situation which inside the old International suggested the constitution of fractions which were parties inside the party, and often the systematic rupture of the discipline as starting point towards a fecund split of revolutionary consequences.

Our opinion regarding this sort of problem is that the question of organization and discipline inside the communist movement cannot be resolved without keeping it in close relation with the questions of theory, program and tactics.

We cannot envisage an ideal type of revolutionary party, as the limit that we set ourselves to reach, and try to draw the internal construction and the rule of life of this party. We will easily get to the conclusion that in such a party no fraction competition or dissension of the directives of the central organ by peripheral organisms can be admitted. By applying *sic et simpliciter* these conclusions to the life of our parties and our International we would however not have solved anything: not certainly because such an integral application may not be highly desired by all of us, but precisely because in practice we are in fact not getting close to such application. Not precisely the exception, but the facts lead us to review the rule in the division of the Communist Parties in fractions, and in the dissensions that may perhaps turn into conflicts between those Parties and the International.

Unfortunately, the solution is not that easy.

It needs to be considered that the International does not work as a single world communist party yet. It is on its way to reach this result undoubtedly, and it has made gigantic steps in relation to the old International. But in order to make sure that it proceeds effectively and in the best way in this desired path, and commit to this purpose our work as communists, we must associate our trust in the essence and revolutionary capacity of our glorious world organism to a continuous work based upon the control and rational evaluation of whatever happens in our ranks and of the formulation of its politics.

Consider the maximal and perfect discipline, that would spring out of a universal consensus also in the critical consideration of all the problems of the movement, not as a result, but as an infallible method to use with blind conviction, saying *tout court*: the International is the world Communist Party and one must follow without hesitation and faithfully all that its central organs dictate, is somehow put the problem sophistically upside down.

We have to remind, in order to begin our analysis of the issue, that communist parties are organisms of "voluntary" adhesion. This is a fact inherent to the historical nature of parties, and not the acknowledgement of some "principle" or "model". It is for granted that we cannot force anyone to take our member card, we cannot make a conscription of communists, we cannot establish sanctions against the person that does not act uniformly towards the internal discipline: all of our members are materially free to leave us whenever he or she wants. We do not want to state now whether it is desirable or not things to be this way: the fact is that they are so and that there are no ways apt to change them. As a consequence, we cannot adopt the formula, certainly rich in many advantages, of the absolute obedience in the execution of orders coming from above.

The orders that central hierarchies emanate are not the starting point, but the result of the function of the movement understood as a collective. This is not said in the foolishly democratic or juridical sense, but in the realistic

and historic one. We do not defend, by saying that, a "right" in the mass of communists to elaborate the directives to which leaders have to adhere: we note that in these terms the formation of a class party is presented, and upon these premises we will have to set down the study of the problem.

Thus, is outlined the scheme of the conclusions towards which we tend in that matter. There is no mechanical discipline good for the execution of superior orders or dispositions "whatever they are": there is an ensemble of orders and dispositions that respond to the real origins of the movement that can guarantee the maximum of discipline, that is, of unitary action of the whole organism, whereas there are other directives which emanate from the center that can compromise discipline and organizational solidity.

It comes down therefore to tracking the task of the leading organs. Who will have to do it? The whole party, the whole organization, must do it, not in the banal and parliamentary sense of its right to be consulted about the "mandate" to confer to the elected chiefs and about its limits, but in the dialectical sense that embodies the tradition, the preparation, the real continuity in the thought and in the action of the movement. Precisely because we are anti-democratic, we think that in any matter a minority can have more corresponding views than those of the majority in the interest of the revolutionary process.

Certainly, this happens exceptionally; and it is of extreme gravity the case where this disciplinary overturn appears, as happened in the old International and as it is wished that will not happen amongst our ranks. But without thinking on this extreme case, there are other less acute or critique situations, in which however the contribution of groups in the invocation of precisions in the directive to be drawn by the leading center is useful and indispensable.

This is, in brief, the basis of the study of the matter, which will have to be faced taking into account the true historical nature of the class party: organism which tends to be the expression of the unification towards a central and common goal of all the single proletarian struggles sprung in the

class terrain, organism which is characterized by the voluntary nature of the adhesions.

We thus summarize our thesis, and we believe to be thus faithful to the dialectics of Marxism: the action that the Party develops and the tactics that it adopts, that is, the manner in which the party acts towards the "outside" have at their turn consequences upon the organization and its "internal" constitution. Fatally compromises the party that who, in the name of an unlimited discipline, pretends to have it disposed for an action, a tactic, "whatever" strategical maneuver, that is, without well determined limits known by the ensemble of the militants.

The desired maximal unity and disciplinary solidity will be effectively reached only by facing the problem in the basis of this platform, and not pretending that it is already solved prejudicially by a banal rule of mechanical obedience.