

(From the review "The Internationalist Proletarian" n.8)

**Theses on the tactics of the Communist Party of Italy, of Rome (1922).**

The Theses begin with the revindication of a unitary direction of the Communist Party, that is, of its centralism:

"1.- *The Communist Party, which is the political party of the proletarian class, presents itself in its action as an **operating collectivity with a unitary direction.** (...)*" (Theses on the tactics of the Communist Party of Italy, of Rome, 1922).

The two factors of this unitary action of the Party are reminded, the programmatic conscience and its militant will. They are understood not as the result of a sum of perfect militants but as the result of the integration of their activity in the unitary collective organism of the Party:

"2.- *The integration of all the elementary impulses in a **unitary action is manifested through two principal factors: one of which is the critical consciousness from which the party extracts its program; the other, of will, which is expressed in the disciplined and centralized organization of the party, which is the instrument of its action.** It would be erroneous to consider these two factors of consciousness and will, as faculties which can be obtained or must be demanded of each individual, since they are only realized through **the integration of the activity of many individuals in a unitary collective organism.***" (Theses on the Tactics of the Communist Party of Italy, of Rome, 1922).

The Left makes evident what was well known to all: the consultations and democratic elections in the congresses were not and have never been the true source of formation and selection of the structure of the Party but only a formal choreography, an organizational fraud, an optical illusion by which it was ratified what was already a consummated material fact and had been determined outside the session hall.

"4.- *The proclamation of these programmatic declarations, as also the designation of the men to whom the different grades of the party organization are entrusted, formally result from a democratic consultation of representative congresses of the party, but **in reality they must be seen as the result of a real process which, by accumulating the elements of experience and by carrying out the preparation and selection of the leaders, gives form to the programmatic content and to the hierarchical constitution of the party.***" (Theses on the Tactics of the Communist Party of Italy, of Rome, 1922).

As we have stated before, and should never be forgotten, the formal Party is not and cannot be exempt of crisis as it is a product of the surrounding environment before even being able to be a factor of it:

"6.- *The process of formation and development of the proletarian party **does not present a continuous and regular march; but on the national and international level, it is susceptible to go through very complex phases and periods of general crisis.** (...)*" (Theses on the tactics of the Communist Party of Italy, of Rome, 1922).

The Left raises a fundamental question, closely linked to the need for organic centralism: the need for strict continuity of approaches both within the Party and, with equal or greater reason, in its external projection.

"8. - (... ) *It is not a question here simply of producing an effect of a didactic character on the masses, and much less of the fickleness of exhibiting an intrinsically pure and perfect party, but*

*of obtaining precisely the maximum profit in the real process by which (as will be seen better later on) the displacement of the action of an ever greater number of workers is carried out, from the terrain of partial and immediate interests to the organic and unitary terrain of the struggle for communist revolution, by means of the systematic work of propaganda, proselytism, and above all of active participation in social struggles. **Only when such a continuity exists is it possible, not only to overcome the vacillating mistrust of the proletariat towards the party, but also to channel and frame quickly and effectively the new energies acquired both in the field of common thought and action, creating that unity of movement which is an indispensable revolutionary condition.***" (Theses on the Tactics of the Communist Party of Italy, of Rome, 1922).

Without this programmatic and external continuity of action, it is useless to fantasize about a true unity of movement. And there can be no continuity if at every step the majority can modify the programmatic and tactical approaches of the Party. This brings us to the problem of tactics.

"22.- (...) *In a certain sense, **the problem of tactics does not consist only in choosing the good way for an effective action, but also in that the action of the party does not exceed the adequate limits, by withdrawing into methods that correspond to situations that have been overcome, which would provoke as a consequence the interruption of the process of development of the party and a retreat in the revolutionary preparation.***" (Theses on the tactics of the Communist Party of Italy, of Rome, 1922).

The tactical question is thus referred to the fixing of certain well-drawn limits which must not be crossed, on the risk of disfiguring the nature of the Party.

"29.- *The possession by the communist party of **a critical method and of a consciousness, which lead to the formation of its program, is a condition of organic life.** For this reason, the party and the Communist International **cannot limit themselves to establishing the maximum freedom and elasticity of tactics, entrusting to the judgment of the leading centers – prior examination of the situations – the execution of the same. The program of the party does not have the character of a simple end to achieve by any means, but that of a historical perspective of ways and ends linked to each other. In the successive situations, the tactics must be in relation to the program; for this very reason, the general tactical norms for the successive situations must be specified within certain limits which are not rigid, but which are more and more precise and less oscillating as the movement strengthens and approaches the general victory. To direct the action, only such a criterion can allow to approach more and more to the maximum effective centralization in the parties and in the International, so that the execution of the central dispositions is accepted without resistance, not only within the communist parties but also in the movement of the masses that they have managed to frame.** It should not be forgotten that the acceptance of the organic discipline of the party is based on the initiative of individuals and groups (which depends on the influences of the situation and its developments) and on the continuous and*

logical progress of experiences and rectifications of the road to follow to conduct the most effective struggle against the conditions of life imposed on the proletariat by the present social order. Consequently, the party and the International must systematically outline **the set of general tactical norms, for the application of which they will be able to call to action and sacrifice the formations of adherents and the layers of the proletariat which are around them, proving how such norms and perspectives of action constitute the inevitable road to victory. It is therefore a practical and organizational necessity, which leads to establish the terms and limits of the party's tactics, and not the desire to theorize and schematize the complexity of the movements that the party may be called upon to undertake. It is precisely for these very concrete reasons, that the party must adopt decisions which seem to restrict its possibilities of action, but which are the only ones which guarantee the organic unity of its work in the proletarian struggle.**" (Theses on the tactics of the Communist Party of Italy, of Rome, 1922).

A condition of organic life is the possession by the Communist Party of a critical method and of a consciousness (that is, of doctrine), which leads to the program. But this program is not a simple end. It is a historical perspective of ways and ends linked together. This is why tactics must be linked to the program. We have a conscience (doctrine) that explains the course of history and sets us an objective (program) to which we are sure to arrive through a succession of situations (foreseen and explained by the doctrine) in which we foresee a succession of actions on the part of the Party (tactics). The program represents **what** makes up our historical objective, the doctrine is the explanation of the **why** of this objective and of the previous history of humanity that leads us to this conclusion. The tactic is **how** we are going to arrive at this program based on the doctrine. A thousand times it has been verified that, if we limit ourselves to an adherence based on the "what" and the "why" but leave the "how" open and undetermined, we end up modifying both the objective (program) and the theoretical foundations (doctrine): *"It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness."* (Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, K. Marx). Thus, the doctrine-program-tactics forms a unity. This unity is the only basis for the central orders and dispositions to be accepted without resistance by the militants and by the masses to which the Party extends its influence, applying them in practice and assuming the inevitable sacrifices inherent in the militant activity, with the certainty that the next day they will not be required or made to defend just the opposite of what we defend today, according to the whim of the supposed leading genius of the day.

In the opposition to this apparent restriction, have risen and will always rise the defenders of the "maximum freedom and elasticity of tactics" inevitably paired with "personalism", the "cult of the individual", "internal democracy" and the "ideological terrorism" of "discipline for discipline", which have carried away the Communist International and have been the tomb of several generations of communist militants. The revindication of the freedom of tactics is, in reality, the revindication of having their hands free to violate the principles and the program several times a day; typically, to make use of the movement to place themselves in their parliamentary seats, selling out and leaving behind the militants who – believing that they were fighting for communism – have assumed all kinds of

sacrifices from which only the cause of the preservation of capitalism has benefited.

For this reason, only this tactical program strictly linked to the doctrine and the program, although it seems to restrict and restrict the possibilities of action of the Party, assures that the action of the Party obeys the real principles and aims of the revolutionary communist movement, making possible a true unity and continuity of action of the Party.

### **The tactics of the Communist International in the project of thesis presented by the CP of Italy at the IV World Congress – Moscow (November 1922)**

The project of Theses presented by the CP of Italy (then still led by the Communist Left) to the IV World Congress deals critically with the questions of the "conquest of the masses" and the tactics of the "united front" and the so-called "workers' government", on the basis of which the process of tactical derangement of the International destined to lead to its degeneration was accelerating. Before that, the text synthesizes a part of the questions raised regarding the need for unity of doctrine, program and tactics, the need for a clear tactical program and its close relationship with the possibility of a centralized and disciplined organization.

*"In order to be able to fulfill its task of unification in the struggle of the proletariat of all countries towards the final objective of the world revolution, **the Communist International must first of all ensure its own unity of program and organization. All sections and all militants of the Communist International must be committed by their principled adherence to the common program of the Communist International.***

***Eliminating all vestiges of the federalism of the old International, the international organization must ensure the maximum of centralization and discipline. This process is still developing through the difficulties arising from the different conditions of the various countries and from the traditions of opportunism. This will not be solved effectively with mechanical procedures, but with the realization of an effective unity of method which will bring out the common characters of the action of the vanguard groups of the proletariat in the different countries.***

*It cannot be admitted that any political group can be framed in the discipline and in the international revolutionary organization by virtue of its simple adherence to certain texts and with the promise to respect a series of commitments. Instead, **it must be taken into account the real process that has developed in the organized groups acting in the proletarian political arena (parties and tendencies), the formation of their ideology and their experience of action in order to judge whether they can – and to what extent they can – be part of the Communist International.***

*The disciplinary crises of the Communist International derive from a double aspect that traditional opportunism assumes today: that of accepting with enthusiasm the formulations of the tactical experience of the Communist International without understanding its solid coordination with the revolutionary aims, and taking up again its external forms of application to return to the old opportunist methods, stripped of all consciousness and finalist and revolutionary will; and that of rejecting those formulations of the tactics with a superficial criticism that paints them as a renunciation and a retreat with respect to the revolutionary programmatic objectives. In one case as in the*

other it is a matter of a lack of understanding of the relations that exist between the use of the means and the communist ends.

To eliminate opportunist dangers and disciplinary crises the Communist International **must base its organizational centralization in the clarity and precision of tactical resolutions, and in the exact definition of the methods to be applied.**

**A political organization, that is, based on the voluntary adherence of all its members, only responds to the demands of centralized action when its components know and accept the set of methods that can be ordered by the center to be applied in the different situations.**

**The prestige and authority of the center, which does not have material sanctions, but makes use of parameters that belong to the domain of psychological factors, absolutely demand clarity, decision and continuity in the programmatic proclamations and in the methods of struggle. In this lies the only guarantee of being able to constitute a center of effective unitary action of the international proletariat.**

A solid organization is only born of the stability of its organizational norms; by assuring to each its impartial application, it reduces to a minimum rebellions and desertions. The organizational statutes, as well as the ideology and the tactical norms, must give an impression of unity and continuity.

For these considerations, based on a rich experience, the passage from the period of construction of the International of the communist parties to that of the action of the International Communist Party makes necessary the elimination of totally abnormal organizational norms. This is the case of the mergers of isolated sections of the International with other political organizations; of the fact that some of these can be constituted on the criterion of the adhesion of workers' organizations, and not on that of personal adhesions; of the existence of fractions or groups organized in tendency within the organization; of the systematic penetration and noyautage (entryism) in other organizations which have a political nature and discipline (which applies, with all the more reason, to those of a military type).

To the extent that the International applies such procedures, manifestations of federalism and disciplinary ruptures will be verified. If the process tending to the elimination of such abnormalities were to be slowed down or reversed, or if they were to become a system, the danger of a relapse into opportunism would present itself with extreme gravity." (The tactics of the communist international in the project of thesis presented by the CP of Italy at the IV world congress – Moscow, November 1922).

The International not only failed to remedy these abnormal organizational norms, but gave free rein to improvisations and tactical zig-zags. This produced a multiplication of federalist manifestations and disciplinary ruptures, with the general sinking of the organization into opportunism, simultaneously flooded with democratism and personalist authoritarianism (two inseparable sides of the same coin). We will give more specific details of this process in the following communication.

### **Lenin on the path of the revolution (1924)**

This text recalls a fundamental point: the tactic influences who employs it. "We refuse to translate the Marxist realism of Lenin into the formula that every tactical procedure is good for our ends. Tactics in turn influence who employs them, and it cannot be said that a true Communist, with the mandate of the

true International and of a true Communist Party, can go everywhere with assurance that he will not make a mistake." (Lenin on the path of the revolution, 1924).

All that has been exposed up to this point does not lead us to a cheap assemblyism or to an irrational fear of anarchoid style towards centralism, discipline or leaders, but quite the contrary:

"There are those who thunder against the leaders, who would like to be left aside, who describe, or fantasize, a "leaderless" revolution. Lenin himself illuminates this question with limpid criticism, clearing it of superficial confusionism. There exist, as historical reality, the masses, the classes, the parties and the leaders. The masses are divided into classes, the classes represented by political parties, the latter led by leaders: the thing is very simple". (Lenin on the path of the revolution, 1924).

Now, our conception of the leaders is radically different from the democratic and personalist version. We cannot afford to abandon dialectical materialism just at the moment of confronting such a crucial question for the revolutionary communist movement:

"From our materialist-historical point of view, the function of the leaders is studied by going resolutely outside the narrow limits in which the vulgar individualist conception encloses it. For us an individual is not an entity, an accomplished unit separate from the others, a machine in itself; or whose functions are fed by a direct thread linking it to the divine creative power or to whatever philosophical abstraction occupies the position, such as immanence, the absolute of the spirit, and similar abstruse things. The manifestation and function of the individual are determined by the general conditions of the environment, of society, and of its history. That which is elaborated in the brain of a man has had its preparation, in the relations with other men. (...)." (Lenin on the path of the revolution, 1924).

The Left conceives the function of the leader as that of a material instrument in the service of the Party and not as an autonomous creator of theoretical formulations and practical norms:

**"The brain of the leader is a material instrument which functions by its links with the whole class and the party; the formulations which the leader dictates as a theoretician and the norms which he prescribes as a practical leader, are not his own creations, but precisions of a consciousness whose materials belong to the class-party and are the product of a very vast experience."** (Lenin on the path of the revolution, 1924).

The Party must function as a unitary mechanism oriented to the same objective and the tasks must be distributed and executed. It is far from being only about "cerebral" functions and in their distribution the aptitudes and potentialities of the comrades are taken into account, distributing the tasks in such a way that the goal is effectively achieved, following a rational plan.

*(To be continued in the next issue)*