

### ORGANIC CENTRALISM: A VITAL QUESTION (III)

(Continues from "The Internationalist Proletarian" n.9)

*"The party organization that allows the class to be truly such and to live as such, appears as a **unitary mechanism in which the diverse "brains" (certainly not only the brains, but also other individual organs) absorb different tasks according to aptitudes and potentialities, all in the service of an objective and an interest** which progressively becomes more and more intimately unified "in time and space" (this convenient expression has an empirical and not a transcendent meaning). **Thus, not all individuals have the same position and the same weight in the organization: to the extent that this division of tasks is carried out according to a more rational plan** (and what is valid today for the party-class, will be valid tomorrow for society), **it is perfectly excluded that whoever is higher up has a privileged position over the others.** Our revolutionary evolution is not towards disintegration, but towards the increasingly scientific connection of individuals with each other.*

***It is anti-individualistic since it is materialist;** it does not believe in the soul or in a metaphysical, transcendent content of the individual, but rather **inserts its functions in a collective framework, creating a hierarchy that develops in the sense of increasingly eliminating coercion, replacing it with technical rationality.** The party is already an example of a collectivity without coercion." (Lenin on the path of the revolution, 1924).*

Starting from the end, we seek the organizational cement of our discipline not in coercion (remember the voluntary nature of Party membership), but in the collective militant commitment to the achievement of the same end, inserting the functions of each party member in an organizational structure that rationally distributes tasks to guide our activity and results towards that end. To organize and carry out this collective work, as well as to distribute the tasks, the Party holds frequent meetings in each section and also general and regional meetings on an international basis. This work is developed in an anti-individualistic, non-personalistic, anonymous way. No comrade is exempt from militant work in all its manifestations and no one gravitates as a privileged above the others. If there are comrades who have the capacity or are in a position to assume tasks of greater responsibility, it will be because they will be those who can best organize a work and a thought that is not theirs but of the party and because they will assume the greatest sacrifices and the greatest commitment to the cause for which we are fighting. The opportunist conception is that the leaders live off the organization, the militant conception of Marxism is that we all live for the Party and for the communist revolution.

***"The leaders and the leader are those who best and most effectively command the thought and will of the class; necessary and active constructions of the premises that the historical factors give us. Lenin was an eminent and extraordinary case of this function, in terms of its intensity and extent. As wonderful as it is to follow the work of this man in order to understand our collective dynamics of history, we will not admit that his presence conditioned the revolutionary process at the head of which we have seen him, much less that his disappearance will stop the working classes in their path."** (Lenin on the path of the revolution, 1924).*

In short, although in the distribution of tasks we take into

account diverse aptitudes and potentialities, although there are comrades whose understanding, possibilities, commitment and spirit of sacrifice put them at the head of the organization at certain times and for certain tasks, we will never admit that the revolutionary process can depend on any Tom, Dick and Harry being present or, worse, on them being "democratically elected".

*"These general elements of the question show how no one better than us is above the banal meaning of egalitarianism and "numerical" democracy. If we do not believe in the individual as a sufficient basis of activity, what value can a function of the gross number of individuals have for us? What can democracy or autocracy mean for us? Yesterday we had a machine of the highest order (a "champion of exceptional class", as sportsmen would say) and this could be placed at the highest apex of the hierarchical pyramid: today this does not exist, but the mechanism can continue to function with a somewhat different hierarchy in which at the apex there will be a collective body made up, it is understood, of selected elements. The question does not arise for us with a legal content, but as a technical problem not prejudged by syllogisms of constitutional law or, worse, natural law. There is no reason of principle for our statutes to write "leader" or "committee of leaders".*

*And it is on the basis of these premises that a Marxist solution to the question of the selection comes out: **selection that makes more than anything else, the dynamic history of the movement and not the banality of elective consultations.** We prefer not to write in the organizational rules the word "leader", because we will not always have in our ranks an individuality with the strength of a Marx or a Lenin. In conclusion, **if the man, the "instrument" of exception exists, the movement uses it: but the movement lives on when such an eminent personality does not exist.** Our theory of the leader is far removed from the cretinies with which theologies and official policies demonstrate the need for pontiffs, kings, "first citizens", dictators and dukes; poor puppets who delude themselves to make history." (Lenin on the path of the revolution, 1924).*

We therefore reiterate that the process of conformation of the Party and its structure is a process of selection and of material and dialectical maturation that derives from the whole past of experiences and practice of the unitary mechanism of the party. For us the exceptional leader is nothing but an instrument that the movement uses, but the movement will always be much stronger when such a personality is not necessary. The dependence of the continuity of the line on one or several persons will always be a great weakness. This is why we no longer want any Lenin, but a movement that from the center to the base understands, embraces and defends an invariant program. Our current always thought that the future revolution *"will be tremendous, but anonymous."* («Carlylian Ghosts»).

There will be times when we will have among us comrades with exceptional aptitudes and we will be able to incorporate these "instruments" into the common work, there will be times when we will be subjected to a repression that will limit our possibilities of communication, there will be times when groups of comrades will even be isolated for a time because of this repression or because of circumstances such as war. In the multiple circumstances in which the Party will have to develop and survive in the whole process that separates us from the triumphant revolution and even in the subsequent phase of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the Party will have to and will be

able to adapt its organizational structure maintaining its centralized character and a solid organizational discipline if, and only if, the unity of doctrine, program and tactics is maintained as an unalterable base, having expelled from its interior any democratic or personalist weakness.

### **Draft Thesis presented by the Left to the 3rd Congress of the Communist Party of Italy (Lyon, 1926)**

The following series of quotations are part of the Lyon Theses (1926). The Lyon Congress was the first congress in which the opportunist direction of the Communist Party of Italy (the *ordinovist* current, headed by Gramsci and Togliatti - the latter later appointed Minister of Grace and Justice by the Italian Monarchy - hand-picked by the International) formally obtained the majority. How did obtain it? The opportunist leadership forbade the attendance of a whole series of delegates who were on the line of the Left (the current that founded and led the Communist Party of Italy until the degenerating International changed its direction taking advantage of the fact that fascism had imprisoned an important part of the comrades). Then, it was instituted that the votes of the absentee delegates would be counted in favor of the proposals of the opportunist direction. As simple and democratic as that. But we will not react to these maneuvers with the naive claim of a true democracy. As we have been explaining, it is a matter of understanding how these maneuvers are inextricably linked to democratic deception, which must be overcome forever. It is also a matter of understanding how the crises and degenerations of the formal Party are a material historical fact and that they have never depended on nor have they ever been avoided through the vote count of a congress session, but are determined by the hostile environment in which the Party must develop, which is first a product and only then a factor of history.

The Lyon Theses represent a point of arrival and a point of departure, the lessons of the experience of the tactical and then programmatic degeneration of the Third International. As in the case of the previous texts and bodies of theses, although we extract here a series of specific quotations to illustrate the question we have been explaining, they deserve and must be read in their entirety, thus apprehending the general interweaving between their different parts.

*"2.- Nature of the Party. The historical process of the emancipation of the proletariat and the foundation of the new social order derives from the class struggle. Every class struggle is a political struggle, that is, it tends to lead to a struggle for the conquest of political power and the leadership of a new state organism. Therefore, the organ that leads the class struggle to its final victory is the class political party, the only possible instrument of revolutionary insurrection first, and of government later. From these elementary and brilliant affirmations of Marx, reestablished in their maximum evidence by Lenin, there arises the definition of the party as an organization of all those who are conscious of the system of opinions that summarizes the historical task of the revolutionary class and are determined to work for its victory. Thanks to the party the working class acquires the consciousness of its path and the will to walk it; therefore, in the successive phases of the struggle, the party historically represents the class, even if it has in its ranks only a more or less large part of it. This is the significance of the definition of the party given by Lenin at the Second World Congress.*

*This concept of Marx and Lenin is opposed to the*

*quintessentially opportunist concept of the laborist or workerist party, in which all individuals who are proletarians by virtue of their social condition participate by right. Since in such a party, although numerically stronger in appearance, the direct counterrevolutionary influences of the ruling class (represented by the dictatorship of organizations and leaders, who may indifferently come as individuals from the proletariat or from other classes) can and in certain situations must prevail, Marx and Lenin have not only combated this fatal theoretical error, but have not hesitated to shatter the false proletarian unity in order to ensure, even in moments of eclipse of the social activity of the proletariat, and even through small political groups adhering to the revolutionary program, the continuity of the political function of the party in the preparation of the successive tasks of the proletariat. This is the only possible way to achieve in the future the concentration of the greatest possible number of workers around the leadership and under the banners of a Communist Party capable of fighting and prevailing. An immediate organization of all those who are economically workers cannot rise to political, that is, revolutionary tasks, because each of the professional and local groups will feel only limited impulses for the satisfaction of partial demands determined by the direct consequences of capitalist exploitation.*

*Only the intervention of a political party, defined by the political adherence of its members, in the lead of the working class accomplishes the progressive synthesizing of those particular impulses into a common vision and action, in which individuals and groups succeed in overcoming all particularism, accepting difficulties and sacrifices for the general and final triumph of the working class cause. The definition of the party as the party of the working class has in Marx and Lenin a historical and finalist value, not a vulgarly statistical and constitutional one.*

*Any conception of the problems of internal party organization that leads again to the error of the laborist conception of the party reveals a serious theoretical deviation, in that it substitutes a revolutionary vision for a democratic vision, and attributes more importance to utopian schemes of organizational projects than to the dialectical reality of the clash of the forces of two opposing classes; it represents a danger of relapse into opportunism. As for the dangers of degeneration of the revolutionary movement, and the means to ensure the necessary continuity of political direction in the leaders and militants, it is not possible to eliminate these dangers with an organizational formula. Much less are they eliminated by the formula according to which only the genuine worker can be a communist, which is contradicted by the vast majority of the examples that our own experience has provided us with concerning individuals and parties. The guarantee against degeneration must be sought elsewhere, if one does not want to contradict the fundamental Marxist postulate: "Revolution is not a matter of forms of organization", postulate that summarizes all the conquest made by scientific socialism regarding the first elucidations of utopianism.*

*On the basis of these conceptions on the nature of the class party, an answer must be given to the present contingent problems relative to the internal organization of the International and of the party." (Lyon Theses, 1926).*

The text reaffirms the old Marxist thesis that the proletariat only becomes a class for itself with the constitution of the Communist Party, already enunciated in the Manifesto of the Communist Party. (1848). When asked about the means to avoid the possible degeneration of such a party, it is ruled out that this is possible by means of an organizational formula and the fundamental Marxist postulate is recalled: *"Revolution is not a matter of forms of organization"*. Next, it will be recalled that it is only in this Communist Party that the "inversion of praxis" can take place, reaching the maximum of consciousness and will. The **leaders are mere instruments and operators** of these collective consciousness and will. In other texts, the Left will compare the communist leader to a tramway driver as opposed to the idea of complete freedom in the choice of course.

*"3.- Action and tactics of the Party. The question of how the party acts on the situations and on the other groupings, organs and institutions of the society in which it operates, is the general question of tactics, of which the general elements must be established in relation to the whole of our principles. In a second stage, the rules of concrete action must be specified in relation to each of the groups of practical problems and to the successive phases of historical development. (...) Only proletarian humanity - from which we are still far away - will be able to be free and possess a will that is not sentimental illusion, but the capacity to organize and dominate the economy in the broadest sense of the word. Still today the proletarian class - albeit less than the other classes - continues to be determined within the limits of its own action by external influences; on the contrary, **the political party is the organ in which is concentrated, precisely, the maximum possibility of will and initiative in its entire field of action: not just any party, by the way, but the party of the proletarian class, the communist party, linked, so to speak, by an uninterrupted thread to the ultimate objectives of the future process. In the party, this volitional faculty, as well as its consciousness and theoretical preparation, are collective functions par excellence.***

*With respect to the task assigned in the party itself to its leaders, the Marxist explanation considers the latter as instruments and operators through which the capacities to understand and explain the facts, to direct and desire actions are best manifested, but such capacities always preserve their origin in the existence and the characters of the collective organ. Consequently, the Marxist concept of the party and its action, as we have already announced, rejects both fatalism (passive spectator of phenomena over which it is not capable of directly influencing), and any voluntarist conception in the individual sense, according to which, the qualities of theoretical preparation, willpower, spirit of sacrifice, in short, a special type of moral figure and a requirement of "purity", should be demanded indistinctly from each party militant, who would be reduced to an elite distinct and superior to the rest of the social elements that form the working class. For its part, the fatalistic and passivity error would lead, if not to deny the function and usefulness of the party, at least to support it without further ado in the proletarian class understood in the economic, statistical sense. Therefore, it is necessary to reaffirm the conclusions pointed out in the preceding thesis on the nature of the party, condemning both the workerist concept and that of the elite of intellectual and moral character: both are far from Marxism and destined to find themselves in the path of opportunist outlet." (Lyon Theses, 1926).*

The Lyon Theses contain the following passage, vital to survive under the weight of the counterrevolution. The condition of the revolutionary resumption of the proletariat is the existence of a Party which, without renouncing the possibilities of coherent affirmation presented, knows how to renounce the apparently easier ways. Conscious of being a factor, but also a product, of historical development, the Party must act in the field of tactics by providing itself with precise and respected norms of action, rejecting false ways.

*"It must be said out loud that, in certain past, present and future situations, the proletariat has been, is and will be mostly, necessarily, on a non-revolutionary position, of inertia and collaboration with the enemy depending on the case: but that, in spite of everything, **the proletariat remains always and everywhere the potentially revolutionary class and the depository of the revenge of the revolution, as long as within it the communist party, without ever renouncing all the possibilities of asserting and manifesting itself coherently, knows how to avoid the ways which appear easier for the purposes of immediate popularity, but which would divert it from its task and deprive the proletariat of the indispensable standpoint of its resumption.** On such dialectical and Marxist ground, and never on aesthetic and sentimental ground, the bestial expression that a communist party is free to adopt all means and all methods must be rejected. In affirming that the party, precisely because it is truly communist, that is to say, healthy both in principles and organization, can allow itself all the acrobatics in political maneuvering, it is forgotten that **the party is for us, at the same time, a factor and a product of historical development**, and that, faced with the forces of the latter, the proletariat behaves like an even more plastic matter. What would have an influence on the proletariat would not be the tortuous explanations that the party leaders would present to justify certain "maneuvers", but the real effects that it is necessary to know how to foresee, using above all the experience of past mistakes. **Only if it knows how to act in the field of tactics and energetically reject the false ways with precise and respected rules of action, the party will be able to preserve itself from degenerations, which will never be achieved only with theoretical creeds and organizational sanctions.**" (Lyon Theses, 1926).*

*(To be continued in the next issue)*

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