

FOLLOWING THE THREAD OF TIME XIX - MUNICIPALITIES AND SOCIALISM

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The original title of this Following the Thread of Time is "I comuni ed il socialismo". In Italian, the word "comune" has different meanings, to which correspond different translations in English.

The word "comune" may correspond to the English word "common" which, in turn, has multiple meanings suitable for the bourgeoisie (and especially the petty bourgeoisie) to make a multitude of puns.

We have for example the title of "the commons" in the Spanish state assigned, with the general acceptance of the bourgeois press, to the opportunist political conglomerates social-democratic in content in which the elements of the petty bourgeoisie coming from the Stalinist parties and related environments have been reformulated. This is the case of candidacies such as "Ahora en común" (Now in common), "Barcelona en común" (Barcelona in common), "Más Madrid" (More Madrid), etc. In the British state, none other than the parliament is called the "House of Commons" and the petty bourgeoisie all over the world gets enthusiastic recalling the bourgeois revolutionary urban cities and communes of the Middle Ages.

In Italian, the word "comune" also corresponds - and this is the sense in which it is used in the text - to what in English is called depending on the place: Local Government, Municipality, Local Council, Borough, etc. The word "comune" in the sense of "municipality" has been fallaciously used to give an aura of communism to municipalism.

Opportunism has sown, sows and will always sow confusion with the use of words. The struggle of Marxism, since we opposed to the Spectre the Manifesto of our Party (1848), is against these confusions of terms and ideas. The text clarifies

that Communism does not come from Municipality ("Comune", in Italian) but from the community of the means of production and objects of consumption, the result of expropriating them from the bourgeoisie and their subsequent socialization. We will also note that the text uses the term "il Comune" for the municipality, town hall or local council (including the first autonomous cities of the bourgeoisie in the Middle Ages, usually called "communes" in English) and "la Comune" to refer to the Paris Commune, the first historical example of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In the Spanish state, the territorial divisions superior to the Provinces are called Autonomous Communities. In several Latin American states, such as Colombia or Chile, the districts of a Town or Municipality are called Communes. This diversity and overlapping of nomenclatures give rise to the most diverse interested confusions, such as those that opportunism has recently launched by equating the Communes of Cali with the historic Paris Commune of 1871 (see the article "*Colombia: the matchstick and the boiling water*", published in The Internationalist Proletarian no. 8).

Opportunism will always judge things by their label and not by their content, thinking consequently that the content has changed when the label changes. We communists will not stop to look at the label, but, putting aside the aesthetic and literary wrapping, we will always analyze the content and verify if it is the one that interests the proletarian class: overthrow of the bourgeoisie and its State, centralized dictatorship of the working class to abolish revolutionarily the division into classes, wage labor, private property and the mercantile and enterprise regime.

YESTERDAY

Using the expression: the Communes¹ and communism, or in other words: the Communes and the communists, rather than making a pun, would contribute to favoring the confusion of terms and ideas against which the Marxist party systematically fights and of which, on the other hand, the opportunists make their daily fodder.

We want to talk about the Municipalities as current local administrative entities, and it does not seem banal to emphasize the premise that communism does not come from Municipality but from the community of instruments of production and objects of consumption. *Instruments* and objects that are physical and will always be so as long as the terms goods, wealth, merchandise and alike entail social relations that the communist revolution will destroy.

The historical distinction between Municipality and State is not always clear. Engels says that primitive society without private property, the nucleus of which is the original tribe or gens, did not yet have a State, there being no division into classes, struggle between classes and state political power, the expression of the strongest class. The first political states appear

with limited territories and comprising a single city with a notable number of inhabitants, and since the same term refers to the territory organized as a unit and to the institutions that govern it, the city is confused with the state. But the Greek "polis" and the Roman "civitas" do not correspond to our modern urban municipality but to the national states. The Roman *Municipium* was the current Municipality, Rome was the metropolis, but when the juridical quality of citizen, word that comes from city (rather it is *civitas* that comes from *cives*²) is recognized to the Italics of all the municipalities up to the Po, the whole peninsula forms the territory of the Roman political state with uniformity of law and jurisdiction. On the other hand, the term politics, that is, the science, the art of the State, comes from the Greek "polis", understood not as a city, an agglomeration of houses, but as a territory and a single regime.

Much poetry has been made about the urban Commune of the Middle Ages by the bourgeois revolutionaries first-hand who end up with Carducci, and by those of today, second-hand, composed of oafs whose delicate corns had been rudely stepped on by Mussolini. The medieval urban Commune where the first bourgeoisie fought courageously against the feudal order and then succumbed in Italy to the aristocratic Lordships, in that ebb

¹ TN: in the sense of Municipalities and communism. Precisely in order not to make this pun and contribute to the confusion we are fighting against, in the title and henceforth the term Municipality is used to translate the Italian "il Comune" and Commune for "la Comune". The only exception is the medieval bourgeois urban commune, which we have called in this way because the text wants to emphasize that it does not coincide with a mere municipality, but that it was a real state power.

² TN: City and citizen in Latin respectively.

that our country suffered for centuries as a result of the development of world trade and production (but which, however, had forever excluded the threat of the return of the feudal specter, a threat on which thinkers, writers, teachers, politicians childishly are fed and intoxicate with it), the medieval urban Commune was a political state of small territory, formed by a large urban center with a number of villages and fields with a common elective political order, it was a *polis*, not a *municipium*. Dante had already understood how in the meeting between the Coalition members from Legnano³ and Barbarossa the fundamental element of the modern state centralized in a large territory that would have led much further than the political fragmentation and organizational and mental anxieties of "*quei che un muro ed una fossa serra*"⁴ was on his side. But the rhetorical puffers of political history when they have seen where the Palladium of Freedom rises, they have seen it all. Formula of good sons of Troy.

In the modern bourgeois state, the Roman municipality has been renewed in the pretended autonomy of the local administrations, running in general more like low camorra when they have a local model of little parliament than when the state puts its officials there.

The Marxist vision of the class struggle investigates and presents such social fact in the individual enterprise where the wage earner depends on the bourgeois boss, and the development in the national framework where the working class leads its struggle against the state, organ of the ruling bourgeoisie, to overthrow it, and in the international framework of proletarian solidarity. It has as its field and as a scene of class struggle also the Municipality and the Province or Canton, undoubtedly, but the issue is not reduced to the gossip of going to see Montagues and Capulets⁵.

Politics and Administration, the bourgeois chattered, two different fields. Silly and faithful echo, the well-off socialists pretended that in the local authorities it was useful and beautiful to contribute to pilot – the wretches were also good technicians, honest and disinterested while the opportunists of today are filibusters – the administrative barge, as soon as the classist postulates were defended in the State and in the International. Therefore, they said that the party principles could be well supported in the national political and parliamentary campaigns, while locally they should not make "political issues" but contribute to the good solution of *technical* and *concrete* problems in the interest, vaguely expressed by the workers, but also with that of the "population", of the "generality" of "our city", and the like. You want to maintain, they said, an attitude of principled opposition to the state and in parliament, to reject government mandates and alliances with other parties, but in local administrations the workers expect from us (in the end it is always the workers who expect all these things – patiently at all hours they are waiting, it is the councilors, advisors, mayors and other insects who expect nothing else than what was the dream of a lifetime) positive work for their welfare, and there is no contradiction with our socialist principles if we do good administration and if for that purpose we make agreements with other parties.

Be very careful and roll up your sleeves. Politics and administration? For the bourgeois liberal ideologist, the political sphere is that in which the opinions, the confessions, the liberal professions of political faith of the citizens play and are found,

which in formulating them question their conscience and the civil education received from the school and the press of the "free" capitalist state. The Citizen who fulfills the sacred free right and duty of voting does not question his interests nor does he remember the economic class to which he belongs, but chooses according to the political philosophemes that have most seduced him in the sentences of the candidates. From this noble field arises the supreme organ of popular government of the nation, which guides it according to the supreme principles and dictates of democratic consecration. In the lowest "administrative" field one can then, with the great Ideas on one side, deign to deal with the facts of material life, streets, canals, aqueducts and, pardon me, even sewers. The atheist and the Catholic, the republican and the dynastic can agree on the solution.

But precisely the socialist vision blows up all this foolishness, with a total overturn. The satisfaction of the material needs of the working class and its economic interests is possible only by confronting the bases of social privilege of the adversary class, built on a system of institutions and defenses that have a role in all territorial and business angles but emanate from a unitary center nestled in the political state. Every problem of the technique of production and of the administration of social activity in a narrow or broad field becomes a political problem, or rather it is a political problem, of confrontation and clash of political forces, and it is on this basis that the socialist movement builds its class organization and action.

Appeals and reasonings of this nature were enough to lead the Italian Socialist Party at the Ancona congress of 1914 to throw overboard the thesis of the famous popular administrative blocs. In spite of the reformists and opportunists it was said that there would be class struggle and class politics even in the Municipality of Milan and in that of Borgocolleferato.

If the old intransigent socialist Serrati was colossally mistaken in the report on the great questions of the Third International, it was largely due to the suggestion that the conquests of these "fortresses" by the party, constituted by Town Halls, Mutual Societies, Cooperatives, which he believed could play in the revolutionary sense even if they were in the hands of gray reformists dedicated to the overused and concrete work, exerted on him. In vilifying Serrati, however, then well and truly dead, the concretists of the Turin-based *Ordine Nuovo* group not only did not lag behind, but touched the peak of virulence, not to mention venom. This did not prevent them from defending the fusion with the repentant Serrati, instead of simply re-admitting him to the ranks. But the anti-serratism of that time has prevented even less in recent times, when one of the many funambulists of post-fascism, without however taking himself seriously, manipulated a new historical-political theory – Who does not have one among those over twenty years of age? Mussolini had made a fortune with it, and they reason as in the betting pool – that is, that of the Administrative State, has not prevented, we say, Togliatti from attributing a Marxist sense and launching one of the so skillful winks of sympathy to this rude nonsense in freedom.

A further phase of the confusion between Municipality and State, especially in the definition of the doctrinal differences between Marxists and anarchists, occurred with regard to the Parisian Commune of 1871. In long years of revolutionary propaganda socialists and anarchists have well vindicated that glorious battle, but the critical contributions of Marx and Engels

³ TN: It refers to the battle of Legnano (1176) between the Lombard League and Emperor Frederick Barbarossa.

⁴ TN: "Those whom a wall and a moat enclose," quoted from Dante's Divine Comedy.

⁵ TN: A drama that stages in a love tragedy the struggle between the Guelph and Ghibelline factions, in the 13th century.

especially in the decisive clarification of Lenin's "The State and Revolution" have defined the argument. The Commune was the first example of a revolutionary state organized after having broken the traditional capitalist and parliamentary state. If it erred, it was in hesitating to break such institutions of the bourgeois regime and in not employing sufficient force and authority to crush the surviving minorities of the old ruling class. The Parisian revolutionaries conquered the municipal house and seemed to replace the ministers of the national government by a municipal power, but the historical substance lies in the foundation of a new proletarian political power that wanted to spread itself throughout France and make the working class insurrect throughout France. The arms of the bourgeois republic supported by the Germanic Prussian empire prevented the formation of this workers' state, of this first proletarian dictatorship, of which Marx and Lenin have demonstrated the unitary, centralist and non-federative nature.

If the capitalist economy now has ultranational limits, the communist economy will not be closed in narrower, corporate or municipal limits. And thus, the historical form of the revolutionary power that will guide the economic transfer until the dissolution of the State, of Democracy, of the Administration itself in the present sense (Lenin, Engels) cannot be of a narrow territorial limit. We tend to a world Commune, not a municipal one, since a municipal economy would have no sense, not even a medieval sense.

The ease of the rough, romantic and Romagnolo spirits had awakened in Mussolini, when he was still leading the Italian Marxists of the left, one of the many thoughtless sympathies for an ism that wanted to emerge with the usual pretension of

overcoming the classical Marxist directives: Municipalism. It is hard work to keep these great politicians of yesterday and today away from their bad habit of pecking in all directions, from thinking that for stale camaraderie everything makes a good broth. Even administrativism... brrr!

TODAY

The slogan of the Stalinist parties regarding the Municipalities seems to be this: in the central political bodies everything is allowed, but in the local ones even more is allowed. As an example, the bloc together with the anyoneists. We do not want to venture inaccuracies but if we had the possibility to compile all the lists from Castiglione Messer Marino to Pieve Porto Morone, we believe that we would find Stalinist blocs with monarchists, Christian democrats and mysists. And the Central's slogan is only one: do not give up your posts. *Enrichissez-vous!*⁶ A major municipalist success story has been reported with the Stalinist mayor of the small French town of Vallauris⁷, that has celebrated with impeccable style the marriage of the century. This one did not smell the odor of feudalism, what do you know. The press of the rudest city in the world, New York, came out ten minutes later to say in eight columns that Rita found it "magnificent".

Mayors, deputies, ministers, union officials and party bosses, all work in series and in agreement with the aim of making the world proletariat, from event to event, the "cocu magnifique" - the magnificent cuckold⁸ - of history.

We hope, however, to see them one day pierced by those horns.



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⁶ TN.: Get rich! In French in the original.

⁷ TN: refers to the marriage of Rita Hayword and Prince Ali Khan in 1949.

⁸ TN: *cornuto* in the original. Literally, "horned".