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Force, Violence and Dictatorship in the Class Struggle

*Bordiga, Amadeo
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I. Actual and Potential Violence

In the history of social aggregates we recognise the use of material force and violence in an overt form whenever we observe conflicts and clashes among individuals and among groups which result, through many different forms, in the material injury and destruction of physical individuals.

Whenever this aspect comes to the surface in the course of social history, it is received by the most varied reactions of abomination or of exaltation which in turn furnish the most banal foundations of the various successive mystical doctrines that fill and encumber the thought of the collectivities.

Even the most opposing conceptions are in agreement that violence among humans is not only an essential element of social energetics but also an integral factor, if not always a decisive one, of all the transformations of historical forms.

In order to avoid falling into rhetoric and metaphysics – such as those numerous confessions and philosophies which oscillate between either the apriorisms of the worship of force, of the “superman” or of the superior people, or else the apriorisms of resignation, non-resistance and pacifism – it is necessary to go back to the basis of that material relationship, physical violence. It is necessary to recognise its fundamental role in all forms of social organisation even when it acts only in its latent state, that is through pressure, threat and armed preparation which produce the most widespread historical effects even before there has been bloodshed, after it, or without it.

The beginning of the modern age, which is socially characterised by the gigantic development of productive techniques and the capitalist economy, was accompanied by a fundamental conquest of scientific knowledge of the physical universe that is bound to the names of Galileo and Newton.

It became clear that two fields of phenomena which Aristotelian and scholastic physics had held as absolutely separate and even metaphysically opposite – the field of terrestrial mechanics and the field of celestial mechanics – were in reality one and the same and had to be investigated and represented with the same theoretical scheme.

In other words it was understood for the first time that the force which a body exerts on the ground on which it rests, or on our hand which supports it, not only is the same force which puts the body in motion when it is left free to fall but it is also the same force which governs the movements of the planets in space, their revolutions in apparently immutable orbits, and their possible collisions with each other.

It was not a question of a merely qualitative and philosophical identity but of a scientific and practical one, since the same kind of measurement could establish the dimensions of the fly-wheel of a machine and determine, for instance, the weight and the velocity of the moon.

The great conquests of knowledge – as could be shown by a study of gnoseology conducted with the Marxist method – do not consist in establishing new eternal and irrevocable truths by means of revealing discoveries, since the road always remains open to further developments and to richer scientific and mathematical representations of the phenomena of a given field. Instead, they consist essentially in definitively breaking down the premises of ancient errors, including the blinding force of tradition which prevented our knowledge from reaching a representation of the real relationships of things.

In fact, even in the field of mechanics science has and will make discoveries which go beyond the limits of Galileo's and Newton's laws and formulas. But the historical fact remains that they demolished the obstacle of the Aristotelian conception according to which an ideal sphere, concentric to the earth, separated two incompatible worlds – the earthly world of ours, that of corruption and wretched mortal life, and the celestial world of incorruptibility and of the icy, splendid immutability. This conception was profitably utilised by the ethical and mystical constructions of Christianity and was perfectly adaptable as a social parallel of the relationships in a human world based on the privileges of aristocracies.

The identification of the field of mechanical facts revealed by our immediate experience with the field of cosmic facts allowed for it to be simultaneously established that the energy a body possesses is identical in substance whether its movement with respect to us and its immediate surroundings is empirically evident or whether this body itself is apparently at rest.

The two concepts of potential energy (energy with respect to position or positional energy) and of kinetic energy (the energy of motion) when applied to material bodies will be and have already been subjected to more and more complex interpretations. These interpretations will lead to the point where the quantities of matter and energy which appeared invariable in the formulations of the classical physics texts (and which are still adequate to calculate and construct structures on the human scale that utilise non-atomic forms of energy) will prove to be transmutable through an incessant exchange whose radius of action extends to the entire cosmos.

However, it still remains that the recognition of the identity in their action between the potential reserves and the kinetic manifestations of energy was a historically decisive step in the formation of scientific knowledge.

This scientific concept has become familiar to everyone living in the modern world. Water contained in an elevated tank is still and appears motionless and lifeless. Let us open the valves of the pipeline with a turbine situated below and the turbine will be set in motion yielding us motive power. The amount of available power was already known before we opened the valve since it depends on the mass of the water and on its height: that is to say it is positional energy.

When the water flows and moves, the same energy manifests itself as motion, i.e. as kinetic energy.

By the same token, any child of today knows that if we do not touch the two still, cold wires of an electric circuit, no exchange will take place between them; but if we introduce a conductor, sparks, heat and light are emitted with violent effects on muscles and nerves if the conductor is our body.

The two harmless wires had a certain potential, but woe to whomever transforms this energy into a kinetic state. Today all this is known even by the illiterate but it would have greatly baffled the seven sages of ancient Greece and the doctors of the church.

Let us now pass from the field of mechanics to that of organic life. Among the much more complex manifestations and transformations of biophysics and biochemistry which govern the birth, nourishment, growth, motion and reproduction of animals, we find the use of muscular power in the struggle against the physical environment as well as against other living beings of the same or of different species.

In these material contacts and in these brutal clashes the parts and the tissues of the animals are hurt and lacerated and in the cases of the most serious injuries, the animal dies.

The intervention of the factor of violence is commonly recognised only when an injury to an organism results from the use of muscular power by one animal against another. We do not see violence, in common language, when a landslide or a hurricane kills animals but only when the classic wolf devours the lamb or comes to blows with another wolf which claims a share of it.

Gradually the common interpretation of these facts slips down into the deceitful field of ethical and mystical constructions. One hates the wolf but one weeps for the lamb. Later on man will legitimise without question the killing of the same lamb for his meal but will scream with horror against cannibals; murderers will be condemned but warriors will be exalted. All these cases of the cutting and tearing of living flesh can be found in an infinite gamut of tones which furnish the prolific soil for endless literary variations. Among them we also could include – to give an ethical problem to those who would judge our actions – the incision of the surgical knife on the cancerous tumour.

The early human representations, with the inadequacy which characterised them, investigated the phenomena of mechanical nature and, due to an infantile anthropomorphism, applied moral criteria to these phenomena.

Earth returned to the earth, water returned to the sea and air and fire rose because each element sought its own element, its natural position, and shunned its opposites, since love and hatred were the moving forces of things.

If water or mercury did not drop down in the overturned vessel it was because nature abhorred a vacuum. After Torricelli had carried out a barometric vacuum, it became possible to measure the weight of the air, which also is a heavy body and tends downwards with such violence that it would crush us to the ground if we were not surrounded and penetrated all over by it. Air therefore does love its opposites after all and should be condemned for an adulterous violation of its duties.

In every field, to one extent or another, voluntarism and ethicism lead man to believe in the same stupidities.

Going back to the violent struggle of the animal against adversities or to the struggle for the satisfaction of his needs through the use of his muscular strength

(and leaving aside the bourgeois Darwinian discourse on the struggle for survival, natural selection and similar refrains) we shall point out that here too the same motives and effects of the use of force can present themselves as potential or virtual on one side, and as kinetic or actual on the other.

The animal who has experienced the dangers of fire, ice and flood will learn that instead of confronting them it is best to flee as soon as he perceives the danger signs. In the same way violence between two living beings can exercise its effects in many cases without being physically manifested.

The wild dog will never contend with the lion for the killed roe-buck since he knows that he would follow the same destiny as the victim. Many times the prey succumbs from terror before being actually seized by the carnivore; sometimes a glance is enough to immobilise it and deprive it not only of the possibility of struggle but also of flight itself.

In all these cases the supremacy of force has a potential effect without need of being materially carried out.

If our ethical judge should pass sentence on the matter, we doubt that he would acquit the carnivore on the sole ground that his prey had freely chosen to be devoured.

In the primitive human aggregates the network of the relationships among individuals grows and extends itself progressively. The greater variety of needs and of the means to satisfy them, in addition to the possibility of communication between one being and another due to the differentiations of language, all give rise to a sphere of relationships and influences which in the animal world were only roughly outlined.

Even before it is possible to speak of a true production of objects of use that can be employed for the satisfaction of the needs and necessities of human life, a division of functions and of aptitudes to carry them out is established among the members of the first groups, who devote themselves to the tasks of harvesting wild vegetables, of hunting, of fishing and of the first rudimentary activity in the construction and conservation of shelters and in the preparation of food.

An organised society begins to form itself and with it arises the principle of order and authority. The individuals who have a superior physical strength and nervous energy no longer resort only to muscular strength to impose fixed limits on others in the use of their time and their labour and in the enjoyment of the useful goods that have been acquired. Rules begin to be established to which the community adapts itself. Respect of these rules is imposed without the need of using physical coercion every time; it suffices to threaten the would-be transgressor with fierce punishment and in extreme cases with death.

The individual who, driven by his primitive animality, might want to elude such impositions must either engage in a hand-to-hand combat with the leader (and probably also with the other members of the collectivity who would be ordered to back their leader in exercising the punishment) or else the individual must flee from the collectivity. But in this last case he would be compelled to satisfy his material needs less abundantly and with more risks since he would be deprived of the advantages of organised collective activity, however primitive it might be.

The human animal begins to trace his evolutionary cycle, a cycle which certainly is neither uniform and continuous nor without crises and reversals but which, in a general sense, is unrestrainable. From his original condition of unlimited personal freedom, of total autonomy of the single individual, he becomes more and more subjected to an increasingly dense network of bonds which takes the features and the

names of order, authority, and law.

The general trend of this evolution is the lessening of the frequency of cases in which violence among men is consumed in its kinetic form, i.e. with struggle, corporal punishment and execution. But, at the same time, the cases in which authoritarian orders are executed without resistance become doubly more frequent, since those whom the orders are addressed to know by experience that it would not pay to elude these dictates.

A simplistic schematisation and idealisation of such a process leads to an abstract conception of society which sees only two entities, the individual and the collectivity, and arbitrarily assumes that all the relationships of each individual to the organised collectivity are equivalent (such as in the illusory perspective of the "Social Contract"). This theory postulates the ongoing march of the human collectivity as being conducted either by an obliging god who leads the drama towards a happy ending or else by a redeeming inspiration, more mysterious still, which is placed who knows how in each person's mind and is immanent to his way of thinking, feeling, and behaving. It is presented as a march which leads to a idyllic equilibrium in which an egalitarian order allows everybody to enjoy the benefits of the common work, while the decisions of each individual are free and freely willed.

Dialectical materialism on the contrary, scientifically sets into relief the importance of the factor of force and its influence not only when it is overtly manifested, such as in wars among peoples and classes, but also when it is applied in a potential state by means of the functioning of the machinery of authority, of law, of constituted order and of armed power. It explains that the origin and the extension of the use of force springs from the relationships in which individuals are placed as a result of the striving and the possibility to satisfy their needs.

If we analyse the ways and means by which human aggregates since prehistory have procured their means of subsistence, as well as the first rudimentary devices, arms and tools that extend the reach of the limb of animal man to act over external bodies, we will be led to the discovery of an extremely rich variety of relationships and intermediate positions between the individual and the totality of the collectivity which are the basis of a division of this collectivity into many diverse groups, according to attributions, functions and satisfactions. This investigation furnishes us the key to the problem of force.

The essential element of that which is commonly called civilisation is this: the stronger individual consumes more than the weaker one (and up until this point we remain within the field of the relationships of animal life and, if we want, we can also add here that so-called "nature", which bourgeois theories conceive of as a clever supervisor, provided for the fact that more muscles means more stomach and more food); but the stronger also arranges things in such a way that the major share of the workload falls on the weaker one. If the weaker refuses to grant the richest meal and the easiest job (or no job at all) to the stronger, then muscular superiority subdues him and inflicts on him the third humiliation of being struck.

The distinctive element of civilisation, as we said, is that this simple relationship explained above is materialised innumerable times in all the acts of social life with no need to use coercive force in its actual, kinetic form.

The division of men into groups which are so dissimilar in their material situation of life has its basis initially in a distribution of tasks. It is this which, in a great complexity of manifestations, assures the privileged individual, family, group, or class a recognition of its position. This recognition, which has its origins in a real

consideration of the initial utility of the privileged elements, leads to the formation of an attitude of submission among the victimised elements and groups. This attitude is handed down in time and becomes part of tradition since social forms have an inertia which is analogous to that of the physical world; due to this inertia these social forms tend to trace the same orbits and to perpetuate the same relationships if superior causes do not introduce a disruption.

Let us continue our analysis, which even the reader who is unfamiliar with the Marxist method will understand to be a schematic explanation for the sake of brevity. When for the first time the minus habens (the have-not) not only does not constrain his exploiter to use force in order to compel him to execute the orders, but also learns to repeat that rebellion is a great disgrace since it jeopardises the rules and order on which everybody's salvation depends – at this point, hats off please, the Law is born.

The first kings were clever hunters, valiant warriors who risked their life and shed their blood for the defence of the tribe; the first wizards were intelligent investigators of the secrets of nature useful for curing illnesses and for the well-being of the tribe; the first masters of slaves or of wage labourers were capable organisers of the productive efforts for the best yield in the cultivation of the land or in the use of the first technologies. The initial recognition of the useful function they fulfilled led them to build the apparatus of authority and power. This apparatus permitted those who were at the top of the new and more profitable forms of social life to appropriate, for their own enjoyment, a large portion of the increased production that had been realised.

Man first submitted the animals of other species to such a relationship. The wild ox was subjugated to the yoke for the first time only after a harsh struggle and with the sacrifice of the boldest tamers. Later, actual violence was no longer necessary in order to make the animal lower his head. The powerful effort of the ox multiplied the quantity of grain at the master's disposal and the ox, for its nourishment and for the preservation of its muscular efficiency, received a fraction of the crops.

The evolved homo sapiens did not wait long to apply this same relationship to his fellow-man with the rise of slavery. The adversary, defeated in a personal or in a collective conflict, the prisoner of war, crushed and hurt, is forced with further violence to work with the same economic contracts as the ox. At the beginning he may have revolted, rarely being able to overwhelm the oppressor and escape his grip; in the long run the normal situation is that the slave, even if superior to his master in muscular strength just as is the ox, suffers under his yoke and functions like the animal – only providing a much wider range of services than the beast.

Centuries pass and this system builds its own ideology, it is theorised; the priest justifies it in the name of the gods and the judge with his penalties prohibits it from being violated. There is a difference, and a superiority of the man of the oppressed class over the ox: no one could ever teach the ox to recite in a most spontaneous way, a doctrine according to which the drag of the plough is an immense advantage for him, a healthy and civilised joy, a fulfilment of God's will and an accomplishment of the sanctity of the law, nor will it ever happen that the ox officially acknowledges all this by casting votes in a ballot box.

Our long discourse on such an elementary subject aims at this result: to credit the fundamental factor of force with the sum-total of effects which are derived from it not only when force is employed in its actual state, with violence against the physical person, but also and above all when it acts in its potential or virtual state without the uproar of the fight and the shedding of blood.

Crossing the centuries (and avoiding a repetition of the analysis of the successive historical forms of productive relationships, of class privileges, and of political power) we must come to an application of this result and this criterion to present-day capitalist society.

It is thus possible to defeat the tremendous contemporary mobilisation of deceit, the big universal production which provides for the ideological subjugation of the masses to the sinister dictates of the dominant minorities. The fundamental trick of all this machinery is “atrocitism”: that is, the exhibition (which incidentally is often corroborated by powerful falsifications of facts) of all the episodes of material aggression in which social violence, as a result of the relationships of force, is manifested and consumed in blows, gunshots, in killings and in atomic massacres – and this last would certainly have appeared as the most infamous if the producer of this show had not had tremendous success in stupefying the world.

It will thus be possible to give the proper consideration, the quantitatively and qualitatively preponderant importance, to the countless cases in which aggression, resulting always in misery, suffering and destruction of human life on a tremendous scale, is exercised without resistance, without clashes and – as we said at the beginning – without bloodshed even in times and places in which social peace and order seem to be dominant. This is the social peace and order that is boasted of by the professional pimps of spoken and written propaganda as being the full realisation of civilisation, order, and freedom.

In comparing the importance of both factors – violence in an actual state and violence in a potential state – it will be evident that despite of all the hypocrisies and scandal mongerings, the second factor is the predominant one. It is only on such a basis that it is possible to build a doctrine and to wage a struggle capable of breaking the limits of the present world of exploitation and oppression.

II. The Bourgeois Revolution

The research we have engaged in regarding the “dosage” of violence exercised in its actual state (through physical beatings and injuries) and violence left at its potential state (by subduing the dominated to the will of the dominators through the complex play of penalties threatened but not exercised) if applied to all social forms which preceded the bourgeois revolution would prove to be too lengthy. For this reason we shall consider the question by starting from a comparison of the social world of the “ancien régime” which preceded the great revolution with that of capitalist society in which we have the great joy to be living.

According to a first and well known interpretation, the revolution which carried into effect the principles of freedom, equality and fraternity, as expressed in the elective institutions, was a universal and final conquest for mankind. This was claimed on the basis

1. that it radically improved the conditions of life of all the members of society by freeing them from the old oppressions and by opening up for them the joy of a new world and
2. that it eliminated the historical eventuality of any further social conflict which could violently shatter the newly established institutions and relationships.

A second interpretation which is less naive and less impudently apologetic about the delightfulness of the bourgeois system, recognises that it still harbours large differences of social conditions and economic exploitation to the detriment of the working class and that further transformations of society must be carried out through more or

less brusque or gradual means. However it maintains with absolute obstinacy that the conquests of the revolution that brought the capitalist class to power represented a substantial advancement also for the other classes which, thanks to it, gained the inestimable advantage of legal and civil liberties. Therefore, it alleges that the question is only that of proceeding on the road that has already been opened up; that is to say, it is claimed that all that is necessary is to eliminate the remaining forms of despotism and exploitation – after having eliminated the most sever and atrocious ones – all the while keeping hold of those first fundamental conquests. This worn out interpretation is served to us in many forms. This is the case when Roosevelt, from the summit of the pyramid of power, deigned to add new liberties, freedom from need and freedom from fear, to the well known liberties of the old literature (and this at a time when a war of unprecedented violence was raging, bringing an extermination and starvation of human beings beyond any previous limit). This is also the case when, from the base of the pyramid, a naive representative of the vulgar popular politicking formulates, with new words, the old concoction of democracy and socialism by chattering about social liberties which should be added to those that have already been achieved.

We should not need to recall that the Marxist analysis of the historical process of the rise of capitalism has nothing to do with the two interpretations we have mentioned.

In fact, Marx never said that the degree of exploitation, oppression and abuse in capitalist society was inferior to that of feudal society but, on the contrary, he explicitly proved the opposite.

Let us say right now, in order to avoid any serious misunderstanding, that Marx proclaimed that it was a historical necessity for the Fourth Estate to fight side by side with the revolutionary bourgeoisie against the monarchy, the aristocracy, and the clergy. He condemned the doctrines of “reactionary” socialism according to which the workers – warned in time of the wild exploitation to which they would be subjected by the capitalists in the manufacturing and industrial plants – should have blocked with the leading feudal class against the capitalists. The most orthodox and left-wing Marxism recognises that in the first historical phase which follows the bourgeois revolution, the strategy of the proletariat could not be other than that of a resolute alliance with the young Jacobean bourgeoisie. These clear-cut classical positions are not derived at all from the assumption that the new economic system is less bestial and oppressive than the previous one. They result instead from the dialectical conception of history which explains the succession of events as being determined by the productive forces which, through constant expansion and utilisation of always new resources, weigh down upon the institutional forms and the established systems of power, thus causing crises and catastrophes.

Thus revolutionary socialists have been following the victories of modern capitalism for more than a century in its impressive expansion all over the world and they consider this as useful conditions of social development. This is so because the essential characteristics of capitalism (such as the concentration of productive forces, machines and men into powerful units, the transformation of all use values into exchange values and the interconnection of all the economies of the world) constitute the only path that leads, after new gigantic social conflicts have taken place, to the realisation of the new communist society. All this remains true and necessary although we know perfectly well that the modern industrial capitalist society is worse and more ferocious than those which preceded it.

Of course, it is difficult for this conclusion to be digested by minds which have been shaped by bourgeois ideology and which have been ingrained with the idealisms pullulating from the romantic period of the liberal democratic revolutions. In fact if our thesis is judged according to sentimental, literary and rhetorical criteria, it cannot but arouse the banal indignation from those righteous people who would not fail to confront us with their jumbled erudition about the cruelties of the old despoticisms – the autos-da-fé, the Holy Inquisition, the corvées of the serfs, the right of the king as well as the last feudal squire to dispose of the life and death of their subjects, the *jus primae noctis* and so forth – thus showing us that pre-bourgeois societies were the theatre for daily incessant violence and that their institutions were dripped with blood.

But if the research is founded on a scientific and statistical basis and if we consider the amount of human work extorted without compensation in order to allow a privileged enjoyment of wealth; if we consider the poverty and misery of the lower social strata; if we consider the lives which are sacrificed and broken as a result of economic hardships and of the crises and clashes which break out in the form of private feuds, civil wars, or military conflicts among states; if we consider all this, the heaviest index shall have to be computed and attributed to this civilised, democratic and parliamentarian bourgeois society.

In response to the scandalised accusation of those who reproach the communists for aiming at the destruction of private property, Marx answered – and it is a fundamental point – that one of the basic aspects of the social upheaval brought forth by capitalism was the violent, inhuman expropriation of the artisan labourer. Before the rise of the large manufactures and mechanised factories, the isolated craftsman (or one who worked in association with a few relatives and apprentices) was bound to his tools as well as to the products of his work by a factual, technical and economic tie. The right of ownership over his few implements and over the limited amount of commodities produced in his shop was, in fact, legally recognised with no limitation. The coming of capitalism crushes this patriarchal and almost idyllic system. It defrauds the intelligent industrious craftsman of his modest possessions and drags him, dispossessed and starving, into the forced labour camps of the modern bourgeois enterprise. While this upheaval unfolds, often with open violence and always under the pressure of inexorable economic forces, the bourgeois ideologists define its legal aspects as a conquest of liberty which frees the working citizen from the fetters of the medieval guilds and trade rules, transforming him into a free man in a free state.

Such was the process which manufacturing industry underwent on the whole, and the presentation, in Marxist terms, of the development of agricultural production is not much different. To be sure, the system of feudal servitude obliged the labourer of the soil to give up a large portion of his production for the benefit of the dominant classes, i.e. the nobility and the clergy. But the serf who was bound to the soil maintained a technical and productive tie with the earth itself and with a part of the products, a tie which indirectly offered him a guarantee of a secure, quiet life (a situation which was also due to the low population density and to the limited exchange of products with the large urban centres).

The capitalist revolution breaks those relationships and claims to free the serf-peasant from a whole series of abuses. However the land labourer, reduced to a pure proletarian, follows the destiny of the slave-army of industrial labourers, or else he is transformed into a fully legal manager or owner of a small plot of land, only to be dispossessed by the capitalist usurer, the tax collector, or through the melting away of the value of money.

It is not in the scope of this work to go into a detailed analysis of this process. However the elementary considerations we have made will be enough to answer those who pretend they have never heard before that Marx considered the new bourgeois society to be more infamous than feudal society.

The essential point to establish is this: the differentiating criterion which must be used in order to know if a new historical movement should be supported or combated is not whether or not this movement has realised and accorded more equality, justice and freedom, which would be an inconsistent and trivially literary criterion. Instead it is the totally different and almost always opposite criterion of asking whether the new situation has promoted and brought forth the development of more powerful and complex productive forces at society's disposal.

These more highly developed forces are the indispensable condition for the future organisation of society itself in the sense of a more efficient utilisation of labour which will be able to provide a larger amount of consumer goods for the benefit of all.

It was not only useful but also absolutely necessary for the bourgeoisie, by means of civil war, to demolish the institutional obstacles which hampered the development of large factories and the modern exploitation of the land. If we consider these results, it does not matter that the first and immediate consequence, a transitory one on a larger historical scale, was that of making the chains of the social disparity and the exploitation of the labour force heavier and more hideous.

The critique of scientific socialism has clearly shown that the great social transformation achieved by capitalism (a transformation which historically has fully matured and which in turn is fertile with further great developments) cannot be defined either as a radical liberation of the vast masses or as a meaningful leap forward in their standard of living. The transformation of the institutions concerns only the mode in which the small, dominant, privileged minority aligns and organises itself in society.

The members of the pre-bourgeois privileged classes formed a system of complex hierarchies. The high-ranking ecclesiastics belonged to the ordered and well-organised network of the church; the noblemen, who also occupied the highest civil and military offices, were hierarchically arranged in the feudal system which had at its summit the King.

It is quite different in the new type of society (and it must be understood that we are referring here to the first and classical type of bourgeois economic society based on the unlimited freedom of production and exchange and leaving aside the great differences between the various nations and historical phases). In this society the members of the higher and privileged stratum are almost totally free from ties of interdependence since each factory owner has no personal obligations towards his colleagues and competitors in the management of his company and in the choice of his initiatives. This technical and social change, in the ideological field, takes the appearance of a historical turn from the realm of authority to that of freedom.

It is clear however that this conquest, this sensational change of scenery, did not take place on the theatre of the entire social collectivity but only within the narrow circles of the fortunate stratum of full and gilded bellies, to which we may add the small following of accomplices and direct agents, i.e. politicians, journalists, priests, teachers, high officials and the rest.

The mass of half-empty bellies are not absent in this gigantic tragedy – on the contrary, they participate in it fighting with the sacrifice of their lives and blood. What they are excluded from is the participation in the benefits of this

transformation.

The conquest of legal freedom, which all charters and constitutions claim to be the heritage of all citizens does not concern the majority who are even more exploited and starved than before; in reality this conquest is only the internal affair of a minority. All the contemporary and historical questions which have been placed again before the nauseating postulate of freedom and democracy must be resolved in light of this approach.

On the scale of the individual, the materialist thesis states that since the mind functions only when the stomach is nourished, the theoretical right to freely think and to freely express one's thought in fact concerns only he who actually has the possibility of such superior activity. Of course it is perfectly contestable whether those who constantly boast of having attained this superior activity actually should be credited with it, but in any case it is certainly precluded for the mass of poorly-fed bellies.

The harshness of this thesis customarily unchains a sequence of bitter reproaches against the "vulgar obscene materialism". This materialism is accused of taking into account only the factor of economics and nourishment, ignoring the glorious realm of spiritual life and refusing to acknowledge those satisfactions which are not reducible to physical sensations, i.e. those which man is supposed to draw from the use of reason, from the exercise of civil liberties, and from the enjoyment of electoral rights by which the citizen chooses his representatives and the heads of state.

Here we have nothing new to present and at the most we will only verify well-known theories with recent facts. Therefore in regard to these reproaches it is necessary once again to establish the real scope of the economic determinism professed by Marxists as opposed to a common deformation which is more obstinate in refusing to disappear than scabies or other contagious diseases. This deformation reduces the problem to the petty individual scale and pretends that the political, philosophical or religious opinions of each individual are derived from his economic relationships in society and mechanically spring forth from his desires and interests. Hence the large landowner will be a right-wing reactionary bigot; the bourgeois businessman will be a conservative in regards to economics but sometimes, at least until recently, vaguely leftist in philosophy and politics; the petty bourgeois will be more or less democratic; and the worker will be a materialist, a socialist and a revolutionary.

Such a Marxism, custom-made for the bourgeois democrats, is very convenient for optimistically declaring that since the economically oppressed workers constitute the great majority of the population, it will not be long before they have control of the representative and executive organs and, later on, all wealth and capital. Naturally for the rapid movement of this merry-go-round it will be of great advantage to swing the political opinions, beliefs and movements towards the left, forming blocs and jumbled conglomerations with all the slime of the middle strata which supposedly are progressively evolving and taking a position against the politics and privileges of the upper classes.

In place of this stupid caricature, Marxism draws a totally different picture. While speaking of the ideological, political and mystical superstructures which find their explanation in the underlying economic conditions and relationships, Marxism establishes a law and a method which have a general and social relevance. In order to explain the significance of the ideology which, in a given historical epoch, prevails among a people who are governed through a given regime, we must base our analysis on data concerning the productive techniques and the relationships of the distribution of goods and products. In other words, we must base it on the class relationships

between the privileged groups and the collectivities of producers.

Briefly, and in plain words, the law of economic determinism states that in each epoch the general prevailing opinions, the political, philosophical and religious ideas which are shared and followed by the great majority are those which correspond to the interests of a dominant minority who holds all power and privilege in its hands. Hence the priests and wisemen of the ancient oriental peoples justify despotism and human sacrifice, those of the pagan civilisations preach that slavery is just and beneficial, those of the christian age exalt property and monarchy, and those of the epoch of democracy and the Enlightenment canonise the economic and juridical systems suitable to capitalism.

When a particular type of society and production enters into a crisis and when forces arise in the technical and productive domain which tend to break its limits, class conflicts become more acute and are reflected in the rise of new doctrines of opposition and subversion which are condemned and attacked by the dominant institutions. When a society is in crisis, one of the characteristics of the phase which opens up is the continuous relative decrease in the number of those who benefit from the existing regime; nevertheless, the revolutionary ideology does not prevail in the masses but is crystallised only in a vanguard minority that is joined even by elements of the dominant class. The masses will change ideologically, philosophically and religiously through the force of inertia and through the formidable means utilised by every dominant class for the moulding of opinions, but this transformation will occur only after a long period following the collapse of the old structures of domination. We can even state that a revolution is truly mature when the actual physical fact of the inadequacy of the systems of production places these systems into conflict even with the material interests of a large section of the privileged class itself. And this is true in spite of the fact that the old traditional dictates of the dominant opinions, with their tremendous reactionary inertia, continue to be endlessly repeated by the mass which is the victim of it as well as by the superior layers which are the depositories of the regime.

Thus slavery definitively collapsed, in spite of an obstinate resistance on the level of ideology and that of force, when it proved to be a system which was scarcely profitable for the exploitation of labour and which was of little advantage for the slave-masters.

To say it briefly, the liberation of an oppressed class does not proceed first from the liberation of the spirit and then of the body but it must emancipate the stomach well before it can affect the brain.

The forces for deceptively mobilising the opinions of the masses in a way which conforms to the interests of the privileged class are, in capitalist society, much more powerful than in pre-bourgeois societies. Schools, the press, public speeches, radios, motion pictures, and associations of all kinds represent means which are a hundred times more powerful than those that were available to societies in the past. In the capitalist regime, thought is a commodity and it is made to order by utilising the necessary equipment and economic means for its mass production. Germany and Italy had their Ministries of Propaganda and People's Culture, and Great Britain, in turn, instituted its Ministry of Information at the beginning of World War II in order to monopolise and control the whole flow of news. In the period between the two World Wars, the dispatch of news was already a monopoly of the powerful network of the British press agencies; today such a monopoly obviously has crossed the Atlantic. Thus as long as military operations were favourable for the Germans the daily production of tall tales and lies from the English information factory attained a level

that the fascist organisations could only envy. To give one example, at the time of the incredible German military operation to conquer Norway in 48 hours, the British radio broadcasted the details of a disastrous defeat of the German fleet in the Skagerrak!

The social factor of the manipulation of ideas, which ranges from the falsification of the news to the fabrication of ready-made critics and opinions, is of no small importance (in fact, in the news industry today the various versions of an event are already compiled before the event actually happens, so even if a reporter seems to tell it like it is, it still remains a falsehood – the event that is reported is always the event which must take place according to this or that state or this or that party). This manipulation of ideas is a component of that mass of virtual violence, that is to say, of violence which does not take the form of a brutal imposition carried out with coercive means but which nonetheless is the result and the manifestation of real forces that deform and modify the actual situation.

The modern type of democratic bourgeois society does not joke with the administration of actual (or kinetic) violence through its police and military apparatus – and in reality it exceeds the level of kinetic violence used by the old regimes which are so slandered by bourgeois democracy. But alongside of this, it brings the volume of that application of virtual violence to a level never known before, a level which is comparable to the unprecedented level of production and the concentration of wealth. Due to this, sections of the masses appear which, out of apparently free choices of confessions, opinions, and beliefs, act against their own objective interests and accept the theoretical justifications of social relationships and events which cause their misery and even their destruction.

The passage from the pre-bourgeois forms to the present society has thus increased and not diminished the intensity and the frequency of the factor of oppression and coercion.

And when Marxism, for all these reasons we have explained, advocates the full completion of that fundamental historical step, we certainly do not intend to forget or to contradict this fundamental position.

It is only with criteria which are consistent with those we have established above, that we can judge and unravel one of the burning questions of today, i.e. the transformation of the bourgeois method of administration and government corresponding to the rise of the dictatorial and fascist totalitarian regimes.

Such a transformation does not represent a change of one ruling class for another, or even less a revolutionary rupture of the modes of production. But while making this critique it is necessary to avoid the banal errors which, in line with the deviations of Marxism we have been refuting, would lead to attributing to the democratic-parliamentary form and phase a lesser intensity and density of class violence.

This criterion, even if it were in keeping with the facts, would not in any case be sufficient to induce us to support and defend the democratic-parliamentary phase, for the same dialectical reasons that we have used in evaluating the previous historical changes. But an analysis of this question can demonstrate that to refuse the temptation of considering only actual violence and to take into account, on the contrary, the whole volume of potential violence which is inherent to the life and dynamics of society, is the only way to avoid falling into the deception of preferring (even if it is in a subordinate and relative manner) the hypocritical method and the noxious atmosphere of liberal democracy.

III. The Democratic Form and the Fascist Form of Bourgeois Rule

This work examines the extent to which force is used in social relationships, distinguishing between the two forms in which violence is manifested: the open manifestations which are carried out up to the point of massacre; and the mechanism of social rules which are obeyed by the affected individual or group without physical resistance, due to the threat of punishment inflicted on offenders or, in any case, due to the predisposition of the victims to accept the norms which rule over them.

In the first chapter we have established a comparison between the two types of manifestation of energy in the social domain and the two forms in which energy is manifested in the physical world: the actual or kinetic form (or energy of motion) which accompanies the collisions and explosions of the most varied agents; and the virtual or potential form (or energy of position) which even if it does not produce such effects plays just as great a role in the collection of events and relationships under consideration.

This comparison – developed from the field of physics to that of biology, then to that of human society – has been carried out with brief references to the course of historical epochs. Arriving at the present bourgeois capitalist period we have shown that in this period the play of force and violence in the economic, social, and political relationships between individuals and above all between classes not only has an enormous and fundamental role but – inasmuch as we can measure it – becomes much more frequent and widespread than in previous epochs and pre-capitalist societies.

In a more exhaustive study we could use a social-economic measurement if we try to translate into figures the value of human labour extorted to the benefit of the privileged classes from the great masses who work and produce. In modern society there is a constant decrease in the proportion of individuals and economic groupings which succeed in living in their own autonomous cycle, consuming what they produce without external relationships. Simultaneously there has been an enormous increase in the number of those who work for others and who receive a remuneration that compensates them for only a part of their work; likewise there has been an enormous increase in the social gap between the living standard of the great productive majority and that of the members of the possessing classes. In fact what is important is not the individual existence of one or only a few tycoons who live in luxury, but the mass of wealth which a social minority can use for its pleasures of all kinds while the majority receives only a little more than is absolutely necessary for existence.

Since our subject deals more with the political aspect of the question than the economic, the question we must pose in regard to the regime of capitalist privilege and rule is that of the relationship between the use of brute violence and that of potential force which compels the impoverished to submit to the rules and laws in force without violating them or revolting.

This relationship varies greatly according to the various phases of the history of capitalism and according to the various countries where capitalism has been introduced. We can cite examples of neutral and idyllic zones where the power of the state is exalted as being freely accepted by all the citizens; where there is only a small police force and where even the social conflicts between workers and employers are solved through peaceful means. But these Switzerlands tend, in time and space, to become more and more rare oases in the world-wide capitalist system.

At its birth capitalism could not conquer its ground without open and bloody struggle since the shackles of the state organisation of the old regime could only be

broken through force. Its expansion in the non-European continents with its colonial expeditions and wars of conquest and pillage was no less bloody, because only through massacre could the mode of social organisation of the native population be replaced by that of capitalism, and in some cases this meant the extermination of entire human races, something unknown in prebourgeois civilisation.

In general, after this virulent phase of the birth and foundation of capitalism, an intermediate period of its development begins. Although this period is marked by constant social clashes, by the repression of revolts of the exploited classes, and by wars between states which however do not embrace all the known world, it is the one which has more than any other given rise to the liberal and democratic apologia that falsely depicts a world in which – except for exceptional and pathological cases – the relationships between individuals and between social strata are supposed to have taken place with a maximum of order, peace, spontaneous consent and free acceptance.

Let us say incidentally that in these colonial or national wars, revolts, insurrections, or repressions – which constitute, even in the smoother and calmer phases of bourgeois history, the areas in which open violence is unleashed – the bloodshed and the number of victims in these crises tend to increase, all the other conditions being equal, with respect to the crises of the past, and for this we can thank “progressive” bourgeois technological development. In fact, in parallel with the improvement of the means of production, the means of attack and destruction are made more and more potent, more powerful weapons are created, and the casualties which Caesar's praetorians could inflict by putting rebels to the sword were a joke compared to those which machine-gun fire can inflict against the insurgents of the modern epoch.

But our aim is to show that even in long phases of bloodless enforcement of capitalist rule, class force does not cease to be present, and its influence in its potential state against the possible deviations of isolated individuals, organised groups or parties remains the primary factor in conserving the privileges and institutions of the ruling class. We have already cited among the manifestations of this class force not only the entire state apparatus, with its armed forces and its police, even when its weapons are kept at rest, but also the whole arsenal of ideological indoctrination which justifies bourgeois exploitation and is carried out by means of the schools, the press, the church and all the other ways by which the opinions of the masses are moulded. This epoch of apparent tranquillity is only disturbed occasionally by unarmed demonstrations of the proletarian class organisations; and the bourgeois on-lookers can say, after the Mayday march, as in the verses of the poet: “Once more, thanks to Christ and to the police chief, we have had no trouble”.

When social unrest rumbles more threateningly, the bourgeois state begins to show its power by taking measures to maintain order. A technical police expression gives a good idea of the use of potential violence: “the police and the troops are standing by”. This means that there is no street fighting yet, but that if the bourgeois order and the bosses' “rights” were threatened the armed forces would leave their quarters and open fire.

The revolutionary critique has never let itself be hypnotised by the appearances of civility and serene equilibrium of the bourgeois order. It long ago established that even in the most democratic republic the political state constitutes the executive committee of the ruling class; and thus it decisively demolished the stupid theories which would have us believe that after the destruction of the old feudal, clerical and autocratic state a new form of state arises in which, thanks to elective democracy, all the elements of society, whatever their economic condition may be, are represented and

protected with equal rights. The political state, even and primarily that representative and parliamentary one, constitutes an apparatus of oppression. It can be compared to an energy reservoir which stores the forces of domination of the economically privileged class. This reservoir is such that these forces are kept in the potential state in situations where social revolt does not near the point of exploding, but it unleashes them in the form of police repression and bloody violence as soon as revolutionary tremors rise from the social depths.

This is the sense of the classical analysis of Marx and Engels on the relationship between society and state, or in other words between social classes and the state. All attempts to shake this fundamental point of the proletariat's class doctrine have been crushed in the restoration of the revolutionary principles carried out by Lenin, Trotsky and the Communist International immediately after World War I.

There is no scientific sense in establishing the existence of a quantum of potential energy if it is not possible to foresee that, in subsequent situations, it will be liberated in the kinetic state. Likewise the Marxist definition of the character of the bourgeois political state would remain meaningless and inconsistent if it did not conform to the certainty that in the culminating phase this organ of power of capitalism will inevitably unleash all its resources in the kinetic state against the eruption of the proletarian revolution.

Moreover, the equivalent of the Marxist thesis on the increase of poverty, and on the accumulation and concentration of capital could, in the sphere of politics, be nothing other than the concentration and increase of the energy contained within the state apparatus. In fact once the deceitfully peaceful phase of capitalist era had been closed with the outburst of the war of 1914 and with the economic characteristics evolving towards monopoly and towards the active intervention of the state in the economy and in the social struggles, it became evident – above all in the classical analysis of Lenin – that the political state of bourgeois regimes was taking on more and more decided forms of strict domination and police oppression. We have established in other works that the third and most modern phase of capitalism is economically defined as monopolist, introducing economic planning, and politically defined as totalitarian and fascist.

When the first fascist regimes appeared they were considered in the more immediate and commonplace interpretations as a restriction and an abolition of the so-called parliamentary and legal "guaranteed" rights. In actuality it was simply a question, in certain countries, of a passage of the political energy of domination of the capitalist class from the potential state to the kinetic state.

It was clear to every follower of the Marxist perspective – a perspective defined as catastrophic by the stupid castrators of that doctrine's revolutionary strength – that the increasing severity of the class antagonisms would move the conflicts of economic interests to the level of an erupting revolutionary attack launched by the proletarian organisations against the citadel of capitalist state, and that the latter would uncover its artillery and engage in the supreme struggle for its survival.

In certain countries and in certain situations, for example in Italy in 1922 and in Germany in 1933, the tensions of the social relations, the instability of capitalist economic fabric and the crisis of the state apparatus itself due to the war became so acute that the ruling class could see that the inevitable moment was at hand where, with all the lies of democratic propaganda being exhausted, the only solution was the violent clash between the antagonistic social classes.

Then there occurred what was correctly defined as a capitalists' offensive. Until then the bourgeois class, with its economic exploitation in vigorous development, had seemed to have been slumbering behind the apparent kindliness and tolerance of its representative and parliamentary institutions. Having succeeded in mastering a very significant degree of historical strategy, it broke the hesitations and took the initiative, thinking that rather than a supreme defence of the state's fortress against the assault of revolution (which, according to Marx's and Lenin's teaching, does not aim at taking over the state but at totally smashing it) it was preferable to launch an offensive action aiming at the destruction of the bases of the proletarian organisation.

Thus a situation which was clearly foreseen in the revolutionary perspective was accelerated to a certain extent. In effect, Marxist communists have never thought that it was possible to carry out their program without this supreme clash between the opposing class forces; and moreover, the analysis of the most recent evolution of capitalism and of the monstrous enlargement of its state machineries with their enormous framework clearly indicated that such a development was inevitable.

The great error of judgement, tactics, and strategy which favoured the victory of the counter-revolution was that of deplored capitalism's powerful shift from the democratic hypocrisy to open violence, as if it was a movement that could be historically reversed. Instead of counterposing to this movement the necessity of the destruction of capitalist power, one counterposed instead the stupid pacifist pretension that capitalism would go in reverse, backwards along its path, in a direction opposite to the one which we Marxists have always ascribed to it, and that for the personal convenience of some cowardly rogue politicians, capitalism would be kind enough not to unsheathe its class weapons and return to the inconsistent and obsolete position of mobilisation without war which constituted the "pleasant" aspect of the previous period.

The basic mistake is to have been astonished, to have whined or to have deplored that the bourgeoisie carried out its totalitarian dictatorship without mask, whereas we knew very well that this dictatorship had always existed, that the state apparatus had always had, potentially if not in actuality, the specific function of wielding, preserving and defending the power and privilege of the bourgeois minority against revolution. The error consisted in preferring a bourgeois democratic atmosphere to a fascist one; in shifting the battle front from the perspective of the proletarian conquest of power to that of an illusory restoration of a democratic method of capitalist government in the place of the fascist one.

The fatal mistake was of not understanding that in any case the eve of the revolution which had been awaited for so many decades would reveal a bourgeois state drawn up for the armed defence against the proletarian advance, and that therefore such a situation must appear as a progress, and not as a regression, in comparison with the years of apparent social peace and of limited impetus from the class force of the proletariat. The damage done to the development of the revolutionary energies and to the prospects of the realisation of a socialist society does not stem from the fact that the bourgeoisie organised in a fascist form is supposedly more powerful and more efficient in defending its privilege than a bourgeoisie still organised in a democratic form. Its class power and energy is the same in both cases. In the democratic phase it is in its potential state: over the muzzle of the cannon there is the innocuous protection of a covering. In the fascist phase energy is manifested in the kinetic state: the hood is taken off and the shot is fired. The defeatist and idiotic request which the traitorous leaders of the proletariat make to exploitative and oppressive

capitalism is that it put back the deceitful covering over the muzzle of the weapon. If this were done the efficiency of the domination and exploitation would not have diminished but only increased thanks to the revitalised expedient of legalistic deception.

Since it would be even more insane to ask the enemy to disarm, we must gladly welcome the fact that, compelled by the urgencies of the situation, it unveils its own weapons, for then these weapons will be less difficult to face and to defeat.

Therefore the bourgeois regime of open dictatorship is an inevitable and predicted phase of the historical life of capitalism and it will not die without having gone through this phase. To fight to postpone this unmasking of the energies of the antagonistic social classes, to carry on a vain and rhetorical propaganda inspired by a stupid horror of dictatorship in principle, all this work can only favour the survival of capitalist regime and the prolonged subjection and oppression of the working class.

And with just as much certainty we can conclude the following, though it is quite likely to cause an uproar from all the geese of the bourgeois left: the comparison between the democratic phase of capitalism and the totalitarian phase shows that the amount of class oppression is greater in the first (although it is obvious that the ruling class always tends to choose the method which is more useful for its conservation). Fascism undoubtedly unleashes a greater mass of police and repressive violence, including bloody repression. But this aspect of kinetic energy primarily and gravely affects the very few authentic leaders and revolutionary militants of the working class movement, together with a stratum of middle bourgeois professional politicians who pretend to be progressive and friends of the working class, but who are nothing but the militia specially trained by the capitalists for use in the periods of the parliamentary comedy. Those who do not change their style and their costume in time are ousted with a kick in the ass – which is the main reason for their outcries.

As for the mass of the working class, it continues to be exploited as it has always been in the economic field. And the vanguard elements which form within the class for the assault against the present regime continue as always to receive – as soon as they take the correct anti-legalistic way of action – the lead which is reserved for them even by the bourgeois democratic governments. This we can see in countless examples, on the part of the republicans in France in 1848 and 1871, on the part of Social Democrats in Germany in 1919, etc.

But the new method introducing planning in the management of capitalist economy – which in relation to the antiquated unlimited classical liberalism of the past constitutes a form of self-limitation of capitalism – leads to a levelling of the extortion of surplus value around an average. The reformist measures which the right-wing socialists had advocated for many decades are adopted. In such a way the sharpest and extreme edges of capitalist exploitation are eased, while forms of public assistance develop.

All this aims at delaying the crises of class conflicts and the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production. But undoubtedly it would be impossible to reach this aim without having succeeded in reconciling, to a certain degree, the open repression against the revolutionary vanguard with a relief of the most pressing economic needs of the great masses. These two aspects of the historical drama in which we live are a condition for one another. Churchill in his latter days said with good reason to the Labourites: you won't be able to found a state-run economy without a police state. More interventions, more regulations, more controls, more police. Fascism consists of the integration of artful social reformism with the open armed defence of state power.

Not all the examples of fascism are at the same level. Nevertheless the German one, as pitiless in the elimination of its enemies as one may say, has achieved a very high average standard of living economically speaking and an administration that technically was excellent, and when it has imposed war restrictions these even fell on the propertied classes and this to an unprecedented extent.

Therefore, even though bourgeois class oppression, in the totalitarian phase, increases the proportion of the kinetic use of violence with respect to the potential one, the total pressure on the proletariat does not increase but diminishes. It is precisely for this reason that the final crisis of the class struggle historically undergoes a delay.

The death of revolutionary energies lies in class collaboration. Democracy is class collaboration through lots of talk, fascism is plain class collaboration in fact. We are living in the midst of this latter historical phase. The rekindling of the class struggle will dialectically arise from a later phase, but for the time being let us establish that it cannot proceed through rallying the working classes behind the slogan of the return to liberalism, in which they have nothing to gain, not even relatively.

This section deals mainly with the use of force, violence and dictatorship by the ruling classes. It does not exhaust the subject of the use of these energies by the proletariat in the struggle for the conquest of power and in the exercise of power, an important question that will be reserved for following sections. But still remaining within the field of the study of the bourgeois forms of dictatorship, it would do well to specify that when we speak about the fascist, totalitarian and dictatorial capitalist method we always refer to collective organisations and actions. We do not see the prevailing factor of the historical scene to be individual dictators, who so greatly occupy the attention of a public that has been artfully enthralled, whether it is by their supporters or their adversaries.

During the last world war, two of the Big Three have been eliminated: Roosevelt and Churchill. But nothing has substantially changed in the course of events. We will leave Italy aside because here the examples of fascism and anti-fascism have had a very clownish character (the first models of an innovation always make one laugh, as the early automobiles which can be seen in a museum compared with a modern mass produced one). In Germany the person of Hitler represented a superfluous factor of the powerful Nazi organisation of forces. The Soviet regime will do very well without Stalin when his time has come. The other impressive machinery of domination, that of Japan, was based upon castes and classes without a personal leader.

We can escape from the overwhelming tide of lies which gorges modern public opinion only if we relentlessly drive away both the fetish of the individual as a protagonist of history, meaning not only the ordinary person, the man in the street, but also the one in the centre of the stage, the Leader, the Great Man.

That we live in an epoch of self-government of the peoples, not even the simpletons believe...

But we are not in the hands of a few great men either. We are in the hands of a very few great class Monsters, of the greatest states of the world, machines of domination whose enormous power weighs upon everybody and everything. Their open accumulation of potential energies foreshadows, in all corners of the earth, the kinetic use of immense and crushing forces when the conservation of the present institutions will require it. And these forces will be unleashed without the slightest hesitation on any side in the face of civil, moral and legal scruples, those ideal principles which are croaked about from morning till night by the infamous, purchased, hypocritical propagandas.

IV. Proletarian Struggle and Violence

The first three parts of this article have briefly outlined the historical development of the class struggles up to present-day bourgeois society. They presented the perspective which Marxist socialism has long given on this subject but which nevertheless continues to be an object of deviation and confusion.

To clarify the question we made the fundamental distinction between energy in the potential state (energy which is capable of entering into action but is not yet acting) and energy in the actual or kinetic state (energy which has already been set into motion and is producing its various effects). We explained the nature of this distinction in the physical world and extended it in a very simple way to the field of organic life and human society.

The problem was then to identify this energy, i.e. violence and coercive force, in the events of social life. We have emphasised that this is operating not only when there is a brutal physical act against the human body such as physical restraint, beating, and killing, but also in that much larger field where the actions of individuals are coerced through the simple threat and under the penalty of violence. This coercion arises inseparably with the first forms of collective productive activity and thus of what is considered to be civilised and political society. Coercion is an indispensable factor in the development of the whole course of history and in the development of the successive institutions and classes. The question is not to exalt or condemn it, but to recognise and consider it in the context of the different historical epochs and the various situations.

The second section compared feudal society with bourgeois capitalist society. Its aim was to illustrate the thesis, which of course is not new, that the passage from feudalism to capitalism – an event fundamental in the evolution of the technology of production as well as in the evolution of the economy – has not been accompanied by a decrease in the use of force, violence, and social oppression.

For Marx, the capitalist form of economy and society is the most antagonistic that history has presented until now. In its birth, its development, and its resistance against its own destruction, capitalism reaches a level of exploitation, persecution, and human suffering unknown before. This level is so high in quality and quantity, in potential and mass, in severity and range and – if we translate it into the ethical-literary terms which are not ours – in ferocity and immensity, that it has reached the masses, the peoples, and the races of all corners of the earth.

Finally the third section dealt with the comparison between the liberal-democratic and the fascist-totalitarian forms of bourgeois rule, showing that it is an illusion to consider the first to be less oppressive and more tolerant than the second. If we take into consideration not violence as it is openly manifested, but instead the actual potential of the modern state apparatuses, that is to say their ability and capacity to resist all antagonistic, revolutionary assaults, we can easily substitute the blind common-place present-day attitude, one that rejoices because two world wars supposedly drove back the forces of reaction and tyranny, and replace it by the obvious and clear verification that the capitalist system has more than doubled its strength, a strength concentrated in the great state monsters and in the world Leviathan of class rule now being constructed. Our proof of this is not based on an examination of the juridical hypocrisy or of the written or oratorical demagogic of today, which anyway are more revolting than they were under the defeated regimes of the Axis powers. Instead it is based on the scientific calculation of the financial, military, and police forces, in the measurement of the frantic accumulation and concentration of private or public, but always bourgeois, capital.

In comparison to 1914, 1919, 1922, 1933, and 1943, the capitalist regime of 1947 weighs down more, always more, in its economic exploitation and in its political oppression of the working masses and of everyone and everything that crosses its path. This is true for the “Great Powers” after their totalitarian suppression of the German and Japanese state machines. It is also and no less true even for the Italian state: although defeated, derided, forced into vassalage, saleable and sold in all direction, it is nevertheless more armed with police and more reactionary now than under Giolitti and Mussolini, and it will be even more reactionary if it passes from the hands of De Gasperi¹ to those of the left parties.

Having summarised the first three parts, we must now deal with the question of the use of force and violence in the social struggle when these methods of action are taken up by the revolutionary class of the present epoch, the modern proletariat.

In the course of about a century, the method of class struggle has been accepted in words by so many and such various movements and schools that the most widely differing interpretations have clashed in violent polemics, reflecting the ups and downs and the turning points of the history of capitalism and of the antagonisms to which it gives rise.

The polemic has been clarified in a classic way in the period between World War I and the Russian Revolution. Lenin, Trotsky, and the left-wing communist groups² who gathered in Moscow’s International settled the questions of force, violence, the conquest of power, the state, and the dictatorship in a way we must consider as definitive on the theoretical and programmatic level.

Opposed to them were the countless deformations of social-democratic opportunism. It is not necessary to repeat our refutation of these positions but it is useful to simply recall some points which clarify the concepts which distinguish us. Moreover, many of these false positions, which were then trampled to the ground and which seemed to have been dispersed forever, have reappeared in almost identical forms in the working class movement today.

Revisionism pretended to show that the prediction of a revolutionary clash between the working class and the defensive network of bourgeois power was an obsolete part of the Marxist system. Falsifying and exploiting the Marxist texts (in this case a famous preface and letter of Engels)³ it maintained that the progress of military technology precluded any perspective of a victorious armed insurrection. It claimed instead that the working class would achieve power very shortly through legal and peaceful means due to the development and strengthening of working class unions and of parliamentary political parties.

Revisionism sought to spread throughout the ranks of the working class the firm conviction that it was not possible to overthrow the power of the capitalist class by force and, furthermore, that it was possible to realise socialism after conquering the executive organs of the state by means of a majority in the representative

¹ The Christian-Democratic Prime Minister in 1947 – Ed

² This expression refers to the left currents headed by Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg who struggled inside the Second International against revisionism and social-pacifism. During World War I and after the October revolution they were violently attacked by the social democrats and the centrists, notably Kautsky – Ed.

³ This refers to Engels’ introduction to a reedition of Marx’s “Class Struggles in France” in 1895. The leadership of the German Social Democratic Party censored Engels’ introduction so that it appeared as an apology of legality at all costs and a demonstration that insurrection was impossible. In spite of the fact that Engels protested this in a letter to Kautsky, the latter did not publish the original introduction. Engels was to die some months later. The original text was discovered only in 1925 – Ed.

institutions. Left Marxists were accused of a worship of violence, elevating it from a means to an end and invoking it almost sadistically even when it was possible to spare it and attain the same result in a peaceful way. But in the face of the eloquence of the historical developments this polemic soon unveiled its content. It was a mystique not so much of non-violence as it was an apology of the principles of the bourgeois order.

After the armed revolution triumphed in Leningrad over the resistance of both the Czarist regime and the Russian bourgeois class, the argument that it was not possible to conquer power with arms changed into the argument that it must not be done, even if it is possible. This was combined with the idiotic preaching of a general humanitarianism and social pacifism which of course repudiates the violence utilised for the victory of the working class revolutions, but does not denounce the violence used by the bourgeoisie for its historical revolutions, not even the extreme terroristic manifestations of this violence. Moreover, in all the controversial debates, in historical situations which were decisive for the socialist movement, when the right contested the propositions of direct action, it admitted that it would have agreed with the necessity of resorting to insurrection if it were for other objectives. For example, the Italian reformist socialists in May 1915 opposed the proposal for a general strike at the moment of war mobilisation, using ideological and political arguments in addition to a tactical evaluation of the relation of forces; but they admitted that if Italy intervened in the war on the side of Austria and Germany they would call the people to insurrection.

In the same way, those who theorise the "utilisation" of legal and democratic ways are ready to admit that popular violence is legitimate and necessary when there is an attempt from above to abolish constitutional rights. But in such a case how can it be explained that the development of military technology in the hands of the state is no longer an insurmountable obstacle? How can it be foreseen, in the event of a peaceful conquest of the majority, that the bourgeoisie will not use those military means in order to maintain power? How can the proletariat in these situations victoriously use the violence which is criticised and condemned as a class means? The social democrats cannot answer this because in doing so they would be obliged to confess that they are pure and simple accomplices in preserving bourgeois rule.

A system of tactical slogans such as theirs can in fact be reconciled only with a clearly anti-Marxist apology of bourgeois civilisation which precisely is the essence of the politics of those parties which have risen from the deformed trunk of anti-fascism.

The social-democratic thesis contends that the last historical situation where the recourse to violence and forms of civil war was necessary was precisely that situation which enabled the bourgeois order to rise from the ruins of the old feudal and despotic regimes. With the conquest of political liberties an era of civilised and peaceful struggles is supposedly opened in which all other conquests, such as economic and social equality, can be realised without further bloody conflicts.

According to this ignoble falsification, the historical movement of the modern proletariat and socialism are no longer the most radical battle of history. They are no longer the destruction of an entire world down to its foundations, from its economic framework and its legal and political system to its ideologies still impregnated with all the lies transmitted by previous forms of oppression and still poisoning even the very air we breathe.

Socialism is reduced to a stupid and irresolute combination of supposed legal and constitutional conquests by which the capitalist form has pretendedly enriched and

enlightened society and vague social postulates which can be grafted and transplanted onto the trunk of the bourgeois system.

Marx measured the irresistible and increasing pressures in the social depths which will cause the mantle of the bourgeois forms of production to explode, just as geological cataclysms break the crust of the planet. His formidable historical vision of social antagonisms is replaced by the contemptible deception of a Roosevelt who adds to the short list of bourgeois liberties those of freedom from fear and freedom from need, or of a Pius XII who, after blessing once again the eternal principle of property in its modern capitalist form, pretends to weep over the abyss which exists between the poverty of the multitude and the monstrous accumulations of wealth.

Lenin's theoretical restoration of the revolutionary doctrine re-established the definition of the state as a machine which one social class uses to oppress other classes. This definition above all is fully valid for the modern bourgeois, democratic, and parliamentary state. But as a crowning point of the historical polemic, it must be made clear that the proletarian class force cannot take over this machine and use it for its own purposes; instead of conquering it, it must smash it and break it to pieces.

The proletarian struggle is not a struggle that takes place within the state and its organs but a struggle outside the state, against it, and against all its manifestations and forms.

The proletarian struggle does not aim at seizing or conquering the state as if it were a fortress which the victorious army seeks to occupy. Its aim instead is to destroy it and to raze its defeated defences and fortifications to the ground.

Yet after the destruction of the bourgeois state a form of political state becomes necessary, i.e. the new organised class power of the proletariat. This is due to the necessity of directing the use of an organised class violence by means of which the privileges of capital are rooted out and the organisation of the freed productive forces in the new, non-private, non-commodity communist forms is made possible.

Consequently it is correct to speak of the conquest of power, meaning a non-legal, non-peaceful, but violent, armed, revolutionary conquest. It is correct to speak of the passage of power from the hands of the bourgeoisie to those of the proletariat precisely because our doctrine considers power not only authority and law based on the weight of the tradition of the past but also the dynamics of force and violence thrust into the future, sweeping away the barriers and obstacles of institutions. It would not be exact to speak of the conquest of the state or the passage of the state from the administration of one class to that of another precisely because the state of a ruling class must perish and be shattered as a condition for the victory of the formerly subjected class. To violate this essential point of Marxism, or to make the slightest concession to it (for instance allowing the possibility that the passage of power can take place within the scope of a parliamentary action, even one accompanied by street fighting and battles, and by acts of war between states) leads to the utmost conservatism. This is because such a concession is tantamount to conceding that the state structure is a form which is opened to totally different and opposed contents and therefore stands above the opposing classes and their historical conflict. This can only lead to the reverential respect of legality and the vulgar apology for the existing order.

It is not only a question of an error of scientific evaluation but also of a real degenerative historical process which took place before our eyes. It is this process which has led the ex-communist parties down hill, turning their backs on Lenin's

theses and arriving at the coalition with the social-democratic traitors, the “worker’s government”, and then the democratic government, that is to say a direct collaboration with the bourgeoisie and at its service.

With the unequivocally clear thesis of the destruction of the state, Lenin re-established the thesis of the establishment of the proletarian state. The second thesis does not please the anarchists who, though they had the merit of advancing the first, had the illusion that immediately after bourgeois power was smashed society could dispense with all forms of organised power and therefore with the political state, that is to say with a system of social violence. Since the transformation of the economy from private to socialist cannot be instantaneous, it follows that the elimination of the non-labouring class cannot be instantaneous and cannot be accomplished through the physical elimination of its members. Throughout the far from brief period during which the capitalist economic forms persist while constantly diminishing, the organised revolutionary state must function, which means – as Lenin unhypocritically said – maintaining soldiers, police forces, and prisons.

With the progressive reduction of the sector of the economy still organised in private forms, there is a corresponding reduction of the area in which it is necessary to use political coercion, and the state tends to progressively disappear.

The points which we have recalled here in a schematic way are enough to demonstrate how both a magnificent polemical campaign ridiculing and crushing its opponents and, above all, how the greatest event up to now in the history of the class struggle have brought out in all their clarity the classical theses of Marx and Engels, the Communist Manifesto, and the conclusions which have been drawn from the defeat of the Paris Commune. These are the theses of the conquest of political power, the proletarian dictatorship, the despotic intervention in the bourgeois relationships of production, and the final withering away of the state. The right of speaking of historical confirmations parallel to the brilliant theoretical construction seems to cease when this last phase is attained since we have not yet witnessed – in Russia or anywhere else – the process of the withering away, the dying down of itself, the dissolving away (Auflösung in Engels) of the state. The question is important and difficult since a sound dialectic can demonstrate nothing with certainty on the basis of a more or less brilliant series of spoken or written words. Conclusions can only be based on facts.

The bourgeois states, in whatever atmospheres and ideological climates, inflate in a more and more terrible way before our eyes. The only state which [in 1947 – Ed.] is presented, through tremendous propaganda, as a working class state, expands its apparatus and its bureaucratic, legal, police, and military functions beyond all limits.

So it is not surprising that the prediction of the shrivelling up and elimination of the state, after it has fulfilled its decisive role in the class struggle, is greeted with a widespread scepticism.

Common opinion seems to say to us: “You can always wait, you who theorise even red dictatorships! The state organ, like a tumour in the body of society, will not regress and will instead invade all its tissues and all its innermost recesses until suffocating it”. It is this commonplace attitude which encourages all the individualist, liberal, and anarchist ideologies, and even the old and new deformed hybrids between the class method and the liberal one, all of which are served to us by socialisms based on nothing less than the personality and on the plenitude of its manifestation.

It is quite remarkable that even the few groups in the communist camp which reacted to the opportunist degeneration of the parties of the now dissolved

International of Moscow, tend to display a hesitation on this point. In their preoccupation with fighting against the suffocating centralisation of the Stalinist bureaucracy, they have been led to cast doubts on the Marxist principles re-established by Lenin, and they reveal they believe that Lenin – and along with him all the revolutionary communists in the glorious period of 1917-20 – were guilty of an idolisation of the state.

We must firmly and clearly state that the current of the Italian Marxist left, with which this review is linked, does not have the slightest hesitation or repentance on this point. It rejects any revision of Marx and Lenin's fundamental principle that the revolution, as it is a violent process par excellence, is thus a highly authoritarian, totalitarian, and centralising act.

Our condemnation of the Stalinist orientation is not based on the abstract, scholastic, and constitutionalist accusation that it committed the sinful acts of abusing bureaucratism, state intervention, and despotic authority. It is based instead on quite different evaluations, i.e. the economic, social, and political development of Russia and the world, of which the monstrous swelling of the state machine is not the sinful cause but the inevitable consequence.

The hesitation about accepting and defending the dictatorship is rooted not only in vague and stupid moralising about the pretended right of the individual or the group not to be pressured by or forced to yield to a greater force, but also in the distinction – undoubtedly very important – made between the concept of a dictatorship of one class over another and the relationships of organisation and power within the working class which constitutes the revolutionary state.

With this point we have reached the aim of the present article. Having restated the basic facts in their correct terms, we of course do not pretend to have exhausted these questions, which is something that only history can do (as we consider it to have done with the question of the necessity of violence in the conquest of power). The task of the party's theoretical work and militancy is something other: it is to avoid, in the search for a solution to these questions, the unconscious utilisation of arguments which are dictated or influenced by enemy ideologies, and thus by the interests of the enemy class.

Dictatorship is the second and dialectical aspect of revolutionary force. This force, in the first phase of the conquest of power, acts from below and concentrates innumerable efforts in the attempts to smash the long-established state form. After the success of such an attempt, this same class force continues to act but in an opposite direction, i.e. from above, in the exercise of power entrusted to a new state body fully constituted in its whole and its parts and even more robust, more resolute and, if necessary, more pitiless and terroristic than that which was defeated.

The outcries against the call for the proletarian dictatorship (a claim that even the politicians of the iron Moscow regime are hypocritically hiding today) as well as the cries of alarm against the pretended impossibility of curbing the lust for power and consequently for material privilege on the part of the bureaucratic personnel crystallised into a new ruling class or caste, all this corresponds to the vulgar and metaphysical position which treats society and the state as abstract entities. Such a position is incapable of finding the key to problems through an investigation into the facts of production and into the transformation of all relationships, which the collision between classes will give birth to.

Thus it is a banal confusion to equate the concept of dictatorship that we Marxists call for, with the vulgar conception of tyranny, despotism, and autocracy. The

proletarian dictatorship is thus confused with personal power, and on the basis of the same stupidities, Lenin is condemned just like Hitler, Mussolini, or Stalin.

We must remember that the Marxist analysis completely disclaims the assertion that the state machines act under the impulse of the will of these contemporary "Duces". These "Duces" are nothing but chessmen, having only symbolic importance, which are moved on the chessboard of history by forces from which they cannot escape.

Furthermore we have shown many times that the bourgeois ideologists do not have the right to be shocked by a Franco, a Tito, or the vigorous methods used by the states which present them as their leaders, since these ideologists do not hesitate to justify the dictatorship and terror to which the bourgeoisie resorted precisely in the period following its conquest of power. Thus no right-minded historian classifies the dictator of Naples in 1860, Giuseppe Garibaldi, as a political criminal but on the contrary exalts him as a true champion of humanity.

The proletarian dictatorship, therefore, is not manifested in the power of a man, even if he has exceptional personal qualities.

Does this dictatorship then have as its acting agent a political party which acts in the name and in the interests of the working class? Our current answers this question, today as well as at the time of the Russian Revolution, with an unconditional "yes".

Since it is undeniable that the parties which pretend to represent the proletarian class have undergone profound crises and have repeatedly broken up or undergone splits, our decidedly affirmative answer raises the following question: is it possible to determine which party has in effect such a revolutionary prerogative, and what criterion is to be used to determine it? The question is thus transferred to the examination of the relationship between the broad class base and the more limited and well defined organ which is the party.

In answering the questions on this point we must not lose sight of the distinctive characteristic of the dictatorship. As is always the case with our method, before concrete historical events reveal the positive aspects of this dictatorship, we shall define it by its negative aspect.

A regime in which the defeated class still exists physically and constitutes from a statistical viewpoint a significant part of the social agglomerate but is kept outside of the state by force, is a dictatorship. Moreover this defeated class is kept in conditions which make it impossible to attempt a reconquest of power because it is denied the rights of association, propaganda, and the press.

It is not necessary to determine from the start who maintains the defeated class in this strict state of subjugation: the very course of the historical struggle itself will tell us. Provided that the class we fight is reduced to this state of a social minority, undergoing this social death pending its statistical one, we will admit for a moment that the acting agent can be either the entire victorious social majority (an extreme hypothesis which is unrealisable), or a part of that majority, or a solid vanguard group (even if it is a statistical minority), or finally, in a brief crisis, even a single man (another extreme hypothesis, which was close to being realised in only one historical example – that of Lenin, who in April 1917, alone against the entire Central Committee and the old Bolsheviks, was able to read in advance in the march of events and to determine in his theses the new course of the history of the party and of the revolution, just as in November he had the Constituent Assembly dissolved by the Red Guard).

As the Marxist method is not a revelation, a prophecy, or a scholasticism, it achieves first of all the understanding of the way in which the historical forces act and determines their relationships and their collisions. Then, with theoretical research and practical struggle continuing, it determines the characteristics of the manifestation of these forces and the nature of the means by which they act.

The Paris Commune has confirmed that the proletarian forces must smash the old state instead of entering it and taking it over; its means must not be legality but insurrection.

The very defeat of the proletariat in that class battle and the October victory at Leningrad have shown that it is necessary to organise a new form of armed state whose "secret" is in the following: it denies political survival to the members of the defeated class and to all its various parties.

Once this decisive secret has been drawn from history, we still have not clarified and studied all the physiology and the dynamics of the new organ that has been produced. Unfortunately an extremely difficult area, its pathology, remains open.

Above all else the determining negative characteristic is the exclusion of the defeated class from the state organ (regardless of whether or not it has multiple institutions: the representative, executive, judicial and bureaucratic). This radically distinguishes our state from the bourgeois state which pretends to welcome all social strata in its bodies.

Yet this change cannot seem absurd to the defeated bourgeoisie. Once it succeeded in bringing down the old state based on two orders – the nobility and the clergy – it understood that it had made a mistake by only demanding to enter as the Third Estate in the new state body. Under the Convention and under the Terror it chased the aristocrats out of the state. It was easy for it to historically close up the phase of open dictatorship since the privileges of the two orders which were based on legal prerogatives rather than on the productive organisation could rapidly be destroyed and thereby the priest and the noble could rapidly be reduced to simple ordinary citizens.

In this article we have defined what fundamentally distinguishes the historical form of the proletarian dictatorship. In the next article of this series we will examine the relationship between the various organs and institutions through which the proletarian dictatorship is exercised: the class party, workers councils, unions, and factory councils.

In other words we will conclude by discussing the problem of the so-called proletarian democracy (an expression utilised by some texts of the Third International but which it would be good to eliminate) which is supposedly to be instituted after the dictatorship has historically buried bourgeois democracy.

V. The Degeneration of the Proletarian Power in Russia and the Question of the Dictatorship

The difficult problem of the degeneration of the proletarian power can be summarised briefly. In a large country the working class conquered power following the program which called for armed insurrection and the annihilation of all influence of the defeated class through pressure of the proletarian class dictatorship. In the other countries of the world, however, the working class either did not have the strength to initiate the revolutionary attack or else was defeated in the attempt. In these countries, power remained in the hands of the bourgeoisie, and production and exchange continued according to the laws of capitalism which dominated all the relationships of the

world market.

In the country where the revolution triumphed, the dictatorship held firm politically and militarily against every counter-attack. It brought the civil war to a close in a few short and victorious years, and foreign capitalism did not engage in a general action to crush it.

A process of internal degeneration of the new political and administrative apparatus began to develop however. A privileged circle began to form, monopolising the advantages and posts in the bureaucratic hierarchy while continuing to claim to represent the interests of the great labouring masses.

In the other countries, the revolutionary working class movement, which was intimately linked to this same political hierarchy, not only did not succeed in the victorious overthrow of the bourgeois states, but progressively lost and distorted the whole sense of its own action by pursuing other non-revolutionary objectives.

This terrible problem in the history of the class struggle gives rise to a crucial question: how can such a double catastrophe be prevented? The question actually is badly posed. For those who follow the determinist method the question actually is one of determining the true characteristics and laws of this degenerative process, in order to establish when and how we can recognise the conditions which would allow us to expect and pursue a revolutionary course free from this pathological reversion.

Here we will not concern ourselves with refuting those who deny the existence of such a degeneration and who maintain that in Russia there is a true revolutionary working class power, an actual evolution of the economic forms towards communism, and a coordination with the other proletarian parties of the world which will actually lead to the overthrow of world capitalism.

Nor will we concern ourselves here with a study of the socio-economic aspects of the problem, for this would necessitate a detailed and careful analysis of the mechanism of production and distribution in Russia and of the actual relationships which Russia has with foreign capitalist economies.

Instead, at the end of this historical exposition on the question of violence and force, we will respond to those who claim that such an oppressive and bureaucratic degeneration is a direct consequence of infringing and violating the cannons and principles of elective democracy.

This democratic critique has two aspects, with the less radical being in fact the more insidious. The first is overtly bourgeois and is directly linked to the entire world campaign to defame the Russian Revolution. This campaign, which has been going on since 1917, has been led by all the liberals, democrats and social democrats of the world who have been terrorised as much by the magnificent and courageous theoretical proclamation of the method of the proletarian dictatorship as by its practical application.

After everything that has been said we will consider this first aspect of the democratic lamentation to have been refuted. The struggle against it, however, still remains of primary importance today since the conformist demand of what Lenin called "democracy in general" (and which in the basic communist works represents the dialectical opposite, the antithesis of the revolutionary position) is still disgustingly paraded by the very parties who claim to be linked to the present regime in Russia. This very regime, although making dangerous and condemnable concessions to the bourgeois democratic mechanism at home in the area of formal rights, not only continues to be but becomes increasingly a strictly totalitarian and police state.

Therefore we can never insist enough on our critique of democracy in all the historical forms in which it has appeared until now. Democracy has always been an internal method of organisation of the oppressor class, whether this class is old or new. It has always been a technique, whether old or new, that is utilised in the internal relations among the elements and groups of the exploiting class. In the bourgeois revolutions it was also the necessary and vital environment for the emergence of capitalism.

The old democracies were based on electoral principles, assemblies, parliaments or councils. While deceitfully pretending that their aim was to realise a well-being for all and the extension of the spiritual or material conquests to all of society, their actual function was to enforce and maintain the exploitation of a mass of heathens, slaves and helots, of whole peoples who had been oppressed because they were less advanced or less war-like, and of a whole mass who had been excluded from the temple, the senate, the city and the assemblies.

We can see the reality of the multitude of banal theories based on the principle of egalitarianism: it is the compromise, agreement, and conspiracy among the members of the privileged minority to the detriment of the lower classes. Our appraisal of the modern democratic form, which is based on the holy charter of the British, French, and American revolutions, is no different. Modern democracy is a technique which provides the best political conditions for the capitalist oppression and exploitation of the workers. It replaces the old network of feudal oppression by which capitalism itself was suffocated, but only to exploit in a way which is new and different, but no less intense or extensive.

Our interpretation of the present totalitarian phase of the bourgeois epoch is fundamental in regard to this point. In this phase the parliamentary forms, having played out their role, tend to disappear and the atmosphere of modern capitalism becomes anti-liberal and anti-democratic. The tactical consequence of this correct evaluation is that any call to return to the old bourgeois democracy characteristic of rising capitalism is opposed to the interests of the working class; it is reactionary and even "anti-progressive".

We will now take up the second aspect of the democratic critique. This aspect is not inspired by the dogmas of an inter-class and above-class democracy but instead says basically the following: it is well and good to establish the proletarian dictatorship and to do away with any scruples in the repression of the rights of the defeated bourgeois minority; however once the bourgeoisie in Russia was deprived of all rights, the degeneration of the proletarian state occurred because the rules of representation were violated "within" the working class. If an elective system truly functioning according to the majority principle had been established and respected in the base organisations of the proletariat (the soviets, the unions and the political party), with every decision made on the basis of the numerical outcome of a "truly free" vote, then the true revolutionary path would have been automatically maintained and it would have been possible to ward off any degeneration and any danger of the abusive, suffocating domination by the ignoble "Stalinist clique".

At the heart of this widely accepted viewpoint is the idea that each individual, solely due to the fact that he or she belongs to an economic class (i.e. that he finds himself in particular relationships in common with many others with respect to production) is consequently predisposed to acquire a clear class "consciousness", in other words to acquire that body of ideas and understandings which reflect the interests, the historical path and the future of his class. This is a false way of understanding Marxist determinism because the formation of consciousness is something which,

although certainly linked to the basic economic conditions, lags behind them at a great distance in time and has a field of action that is much more restricted.

For example, many centuries before the development of the historical consciousness of the bourgeois class, the bourgeois, the tradesman, the banker, and the small manufacturer existed and fulfilled essential economic functions, but had the mentality of servants and accomplices of the feudal lords. A revolutionary tendency and ideology slowly formed among them however and an audacious minority began to organise itself in order to attempt to conquer power.

Just as it is true that some members of the aristocracy fought for the bourgeois revolution, it is also true that there were many members of the bourgeoisie who, after the conquest of power in the great democratic revolutions, not only retained a way of thinking but also a course of action contrary to the general interests of their own class, and militated and fought with the counter-revolutionary party.

Similarly, while the opinions and consciousness of the worker are formed under the influence of his or her working and material living conditions, they are also formed in the environment of the whole traditional conservative ideology in which the capitalist world envelopes the worker.

This conservative influence is becoming increasingly stronger in the present period. It is not necessary to list again the resources which are available not only for the systematic organisation of propaganda through modern techniques, but also for the actual centralised intervention in economic life through the adoption of numerous reformist measures and state intervention which are intended to satisfy certain secondary needs of the workers and which in fact often have a concrete effect on their economic situation.

For the crude and uneducated masses, the old aristocratic and feudal regimes needed only the church to fabricate servile ideologies. They acted on the rising bourgeoisie, however, primarily through their monopoly over the school and culture. The young bourgeoisie was consequently compelled to sustain a great and complex ideological struggle which the literature presents as a struggle for the freedom of thought but which in fact concerned the superstructure and a fierce conflict between two forces who were organised to defeat one another.

Today world capitalism in addition to the church and schools, disposes of an endless number of other forms of ideological manipulation and countless methods for forming a so-called "consciousness".

It surpasses the old regimes, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in the fabrication of falsehoods and deceits. This is true not only in that it broadcasts the most absurd doctrines and superstitions but also in that it informs the masses in a totally false way about the countless events in the complexity of modern life.

In spite of this tremendous arsenal of our class enemy we have always maintained that within the oppressed class an antagonistic ideology and doctrine would form and would achieve a greater and greater clarity as the economic development itself sharpens the conflict between the productive forces and the relations of production and as the fierce struggle between different class interests spreads. This perspective is not founded on the argument that given the fact that the proletarians outnumber the bourgeois, the sum total of their individual views and conceptions would prevail over that of the enemy due to their greater numerical weight.

We have always maintained that this clarity and consciousness is not realised in an amorphous mass of isolated individuals. It is realised instead in organisations which emerge from the undifferentiated mass, in resolute minorities who join

together beyond national boundaries following the line of the general historical continuity of the movement. These minorities assume the function of leading the struggle of the masses; the greater part of the masses on the other hand are pushed into this struggle by economic factors well before they develop the same strength and clarity of ideas that is crystallised in the guiding party.

This is why a count of the votes cast by the entire working class mass (supposing such a thing were possible) would not exclude an outcome favourable to the counter-revolution even in a situation which would be conducive to a forward advance and a struggle under the leadership of the vanguard minority. Even a general and widespread political struggle which ends with the victorious conquest of power is not sufficient for the immediate elimination of the whole complex of traditional influences of bourgeois ideology. The latter not only continues to survive throughout the whole social structure within the country of the victorious revolution itself, but continues to act from outside with a massive deployment of all the modern means of propaganda of which we have spoken before.

It is, of course, of great advantage to break the state machinery, to destroy all the old structures for the systematic fabrication of bourgeois ideology (such as the church, the school and other countless associations) and to take control over all the major means of diffusing ideas, such as the press, the radio, the theatre, etc. However all this is not enough. It must be completed by a socio-economic condition: the rapid and successful eradication of the bourgeois form of production. Lenin was well aware that the necessity of permitting the continued existence (and in a certain sense the flourishing) of the family management of the small peasant farms meant that a whole area would be left open to the influence of the selfish and mercantile bourgeois psychology, to the anti-revolutionary propaganda of the priest, and in short to the play of countless counter-revolutionary superstitions. The unfavourable relationship of forces, however, left no other choice. Only in conserving the force, strength and firmness of the armed power of the industrial proletariat was it possible to make use of the revolutionary impetus of the peasant allies against the shackles of the agrarian feudal regime and at the same time guard against the danger of a possible revolt by the middle peasants, such as occurred during the civil war under Denikin and Kolchak.

The erroneous position of those who want to see the application of arithmetic democracy within the working class, or within certain class organisations, can thus be traced back to a false appreciation of Marxist determinism.

We have already shown that it is incorrect to believe that in each historical period each of the opposing classes has corresponding groups which profess theories opposed to the other classes. Instead the correct thesis is that in each historical epoch the doctrinal system based on the interests of the ruling class tends to be professed by the oppressed class, much to the advantage of the former. He who is a slave in the body is also a slave in the mind. The old bourgeois lie is precisely to pretend that we must begin with the liberation of the intellect (a method which leads to nothing and costs nothing for the privileged class), while instead we must start with the physical liberation of the body.

It is also erroneous to establish the following progression of determinisms with respect to the famous problem of consciousness: influence of economic factors, class consciousness, class action. The progression instead is the reverse: influence of economic factors, class action, class consciousness. Consciousness comes at the end and, in general, after the decisive victory. Economic necessity unites and focuses the pressure and energy of all those who are oppressed and suffocated by the forms of a given

productive system. The oppressed react, they fight, they hurl themselves against these forms. In the course of this clash and this battle they increasingly develop an understanding of the general conditions of the struggle as well as its laws and principles, and a clear comprehension of the program of the class struggle develops.

For decades we have been reproached for wanting a revolution carried out by those who are unconscious.

We could have responded that provided that the revolution sweeps away the mass of horrors created by the bourgeois regime and provided that the terrible encirclement of the productive masses by bourgeois institutions which oppress and suffocate them is broken, then it would not bother us in the least if the decisive blows were delivered even by those who are not yet conscious of the aim of the struggle.

Instead, we left Marxists have always clearly and emphatically insisted on the importance of theory in the working class movement, and we consequently have constantly denounced the absence of principles and the betrayal of these by the right opportunists. We have always maintained the validity of the Marxist conception which considers the proletariat even as the true inheritor of modern classical philosophy. Let us explain. The struggle of the bourgeois usurers, colonial settlers and merchants was paralleled by an attack by the critical method against the dogmas of the church and the ideology of the authority of divine right; there was a revolution which appeared to be completed in natural philosophy before it was completed in society. This resulted from the fact that, of those forms which had to be destroyed in order for the capitalist productive forces to develop, not the least difficult to break down was the scholastic and theocratic ideological system of the middle ages. However, after its political and social victory, the bourgeoisie became conservative. It had no interest in directing the weapon of the critique, which it had used against the lies of Christian cosmology, to the area of the much more pressing and human problem of the social structure. This second task in the evolution of the theoretical consciousness of society fell to a new class which was pushed by its own interests to lay bare the lies of bourgeois civilisation. This new class, in the powerful dialectical vision of Marx, was the class of the "wretched artisans", excluded from culture in the middle ages and supposedly elevated to a position of legal equality by the liberal revolution; it was the class of manual labourers of big industry, uneducated and all but illiterate.

The key to our conception lies precisely in the fact that we do not consider the seat of consciousness to be the narrow area of the individual person and that we well know that, generally speaking, the elements of the mass who are pushed into struggle cannot possess in their minds the general theoretical outlook. To require such a condition would be purely illusory and counter-revolutionary. Neither does this task of elaborating the theoretical consciousness fall to a band or group of superior individuals whose mission is to help humanity. It falls instead to an organism, to a mechanism differentiated within the mass, utilising the individual elements as cells that compose the tissue and elevating them to a function made possible only by this complex of relationships. This organism, this system, this complex of elements each with its own function, (analogous to the animal organism with its extremely complicated systems of tissues, networks, vessels, etc.) is the class organism, the party, which in a certain way defines the class faced with itself and gives the class the capacity to make its own history.

This whole process is reflected in the most diverse ways with respect to the different individuals who statistically belong to the class. To be more specific, we are not surprised to find side by side in a given situation the revolutionary and conscious worker, the worker who is still a total victim of the conservative political influences

and who perhaps even marches in the ranks of the enemy, the worker who follows the opportunist currents of the movement, etc.

And we would have no conclusions to automatically draw from a vote among the working class that would indicate the following of each of these various positions – assuming that such a vote was actually possible.

It is only too well established that the class party, both before and after the conquest of power, is susceptible of degeneration in its function as a revolutionary instrument. It is necessary to search both for the causes of this serious phenomenon of social pathology and for the means to fight it. However it only follows from what has been said above that the method of voting cannot guarantee the correctness of the Party's orientation and directives, regardless of whether this voting is done by militants of the party or by a much wider circle encompassing the workers who belong to the unions, the factory organisations or even the representative organs of a political nature, such as the soviets or workers councils.

The history of the working class movement shows concretely that such a method has never led to any good and has never prevented the disastrous victories of opportunism. In all the conflicts between tendencies within the traditional socialist parties before World War I, the right-wing revisionists always argued against the radical Marxists of the left that they (the right wing) were much more closely tied to the wide strata of the working class than the narrow circle of the leadership of the political party. The opportunist currents had their main support in the parliamentary leaders of the party who disobeyed the party's political directives and demanded a free hand to collaborate with the bourgeois parties. They did so under the pretext that they had been elected by the mass of proletarian voters who far outnumbered the proletarians who belonged to the party and elected the party's political leadership. The union leaders who belonged to the party practised the same collaboration on the union level as the parliamentary leaders did on the political level. They refused the discipline of the class party, using the justification that they represented all the unionised workers who greatly outnumbered the party's militants. In their haste to ally with capitalism (something which culminated in their support for the first imperialist war) neither the parliamentary possibilists nor the union bureaucrats hesitated, in the name of the workerism and labourism they proudly flaunted, to deride those groups who brought forwards the true class politics within the party and to brand these groups as intellectuals and sometimes even as non-proletarians.

The history of Sorelian syndicalism also shows that the method of direct representation of the rank and file worker does not have left results and does not lead to the preservation of a truly revolutionary orientation. At a certain period this school of anarcho-syndicalism had seemed to some to be a true alternative to the degeneration of the social-democratic party which had taken the road of renouncing direct action and class violence. The Marxist groups which later converged in the Leninist reconstruction of the Third International rightly criticised and condemned this seemingly radical orientation. They denounced it for abandoning the only unifying class method which could surmount the narrowness of the individual trade and of the everyday conflicts limited to economic demands. Even if physically violent means of struggle were used, this orientation leads to the denial of the position of revolutionary Marxism, because for Marxism every class struggle is a political struggle and the indispensable instrument of this struggle is the party.

The justness of this theoretical polemic was confirmed by the fact that even revolutionary syndicalism sank in the crisis of the war and passed into the ranks of social patriotism in the various countries.

Now, in regards to the action of the party after the revolutionary victory, we will turn to the major episodes of the Russian Revolution which shed the greatest light and provide us with the best experience.

We reject the critique which claims that the disastrous degeneration of Leninist revolutionary politics into the present Stalinist policies was brought about in the beginning by the excessive predominance of the party and its central committee over the other working class organisations. We reject the illusory viewpoint that the whole degenerative process could have been contained if a vote among the various base organisations had been used as the means to decide both the make-up of the hierarchy and the major changes in the politics of the proletarian state. The problem of the degeneration cannot be comprehended without connecting it to the question of the socio-economic role of the various working class organs in the process of the destruction of the old economy and of the construction of the new.

Unions undoubtedly constitute and for a long period have constituted a basic area of struggle in the development of the revolutionary energy of the proletariat. But this has been possible with success only when the class party has carried on a serious work within the unions in order to shift the concentration of energy from narrow intermediate objectives to general class aims. The trade union, even as it evolved into the industrial union, finds limits to its dynamic because within it there exist different interests between the various categories and groups of workers. There are even greater limits to its action as capitalist society and the capitalist state pass through the three successive historical phases: the prohibition of trade organisations and strikes; the toleration of autonomous trade organisations; and finally the conquest of the trade unions and their imprisonment in the bourgeois system.

Even under a solidly established proletarian dictatorship, the union cannot be considered as an organ which represents the workers in a fundamental and stable way. In this social period conflicts between the various trades in the working class can still exist. The basic point is that the workers only have reason to make use of the union as long as the working class power is compelled to tolerate, in certain sections, the temporary presence of employers; with the disappearance of the latter due to the advance of socialist development, all content of union action is lost. Our conception of socialism is not the substitution of the state boss for the private boss. However if the relationship were such in the transition period, then in the supreme interests of revolutionary politics it could not be admitted as a principle that the employer state must always give in to the economic pressure of the workers' unions.

We won't go further in this involved analysis, for at this point we have already sufficiently explained why we left Communists do not admit that the unionised mass would be allowed to exert an influence on revolutionary politics through a majority vote.

Now let us consider the factory councils. We must remember that this form of economic organisation, which at first appeared to be much more radical than the union, went on to lose always more its pretence of revolutionary dynamism; today the idea of factory councils is common to all political currents, even the fascists. The conception of factory councils as an organisation which participates first in the supervising and later the management of production, and in the end which is capable of taking over, factory by factory, the management of production in its totality, has proved to be totally collaborationist. It has proved to be another way, no less effective than the old syndicalism, of preventing the masses from being channelled in the direction of the great united and centralised struggle for power. The polemic surrounding this question caused a great stir in the young Communist parties when the Russian

Bolsheviks were compelled to take firm and even drastic measures to combat the workers' tendency towards autonomous technical and economic management of the factories in which they worked. Such an autonomous management not only impeded the realisation of a true socialist plan but also had the danger of seriously harming the efficiency of the productive machinery – something the counter-revolutionaries were counting on. In fact the factory council, even more so than the union, can act as an exponent of very narrow interests which can come into conflict with the general class interests.

Consequently the factory councils also cannot be considered as a basic and definitive organ of the working class state. When a true communist economy is established in certain sectors of production and circulation – that is to say when we have gone far beyond the simple expulsion of the capitalist owner from industry and the management of the enterprise by the state – then it will be precisely an economy based on autonomous enterprises which have to have disappeared. Once we have gone beyond the mercantilist form of production, the local plant will only be a technical node in the great network guided rationally by a unitary plan. The firm will no longer have a balance sheet of income and expenditures; consequently it will no longer be a firm at all and the producer will no longer be a wage labourer. Thus the factory council, like the union, has natural limits of functioning which prevent it from being, up to the end the real field for class preparation where the proletariat can build its will and capacity to struggle until it completely achieves its final goal. This is the reason why these economic organisations cannot be a body which oversees the party holding state power and which judges whether or not the party has strayed from the basic historical path.

It remains for us to examine the new organisations which were brought to life by the Russian Revolution. These were the workers, peasants and, at the beginning, soldiers soviets.

Some claimed that this system represented a new proletarian constitutional form counterposed to the traditional constitutional forms of the bourgeois state. The soviet system reached from the smallest village to the highest bodies of the state through successive horizontal strata. Furthermore it had the two following characteristics: 1) it excluded all elements of the old propertied classes, in other words it was the organisational manifestation of the proletarian dictatorship, and 2) it concentrated all representative, executive and, in theory, even judicial powers in its nerve centres. It has been said that because of these characteristics the soviet system is a perfect mechanism of internal class democracy which, once discovered, would eclipse the traditional parliaments of bourgeois liberalism.

However, since the emergence of socialism from its utopian phase, every Marxist has known that the invention of a constitutional form is not enough to distinguish the great social forms and the great historical epochs. The constitutional structures are transitory reflections of the relationship of forces; they are not derived from universal principles from which we could deduce an inherent mode of state organisation.

Soviets in their essence are actual class organisations and are not, as some believed, conglomerations of trade or craft organisations. Consequently they do not suffer from the narrowness of the purely economic organisation. For us their importance lies above all in the fact that they are organs of struggle. We do not try to view them in terms of ideal structural models but in terms of the history of their real development.

Thus it was a decisive moment in the Russian Revolution when, shortly after the election of the Constituent Assembly, the soviets rose up against the latter as its

dialectical opposite and Bolshevik power dissolved the parliamentary assembly by force. This was the realisation of the brilliant historical slogan "All Power to the Soviets".

However, all this was not sufficient for us to accept the idea that once such a form of class representation is born (and leaving aside here the fluctuations, in every sense, of its representative composition which we are not able to examine here), a majority vote, at whatever moment and turn in the difficult struggle waged by the revolution both domestically and externally is a reliable and easy method for solving every question and even avoiding the counter-revolutionary degeneration.

We must admit that the soviet system, due to the very complexity of its historical evolutionary cycle (which incidentally must end in the most optimistic hypothesis with the disappearance of the soviets along with the withering away of the state), is susceptible of falling under counter-revolutionary influence just as it is susceptible of being a revolutionary instrument. In conclusion, we do not believe that there is any constitutional form which can immunise us against such a danger – the only guarantee, if any, lies in the development of the domestic and international relations of social forces.

Since we want to establish the supremacy of the party, which includes only a minority of the class, over the other forms of organisation, it could be possible for someone to object that we seem to think that the party is eternal, in other words that it will survive the withering away of the state of which Engels spoke.

Here we do not want to go into a discussion on the future transformation of the party. Just as the state, in the Marxist definition, withers away and is transformed, from a political apparatus of coercion, into a large and always more rational technical administration, so the party evolves into a simple organisation for social research and study corresponding to the large institutions for scientific research in the new society.

The distinctive characteristic of the party follows from its organic nature. One does not join the party because one has a particular position in the economic or social structure. No one is automatically a party militant because he is a proletarian, a voter, a citizen, etc.

Jurisprudents would say that one joins the party by free individual initiative. We Marxists say otherwise: one joins the party always due to factors born out of relationships of social environment, but these factors can be linked in a more general way to the characteristics of the class party, to its presence in all parts of the world, to the fact that it is made up of workers of all trades and enterprises and, in principle, even of those who are not workers, and to the continuity of its work through the successive stages of propaganda, organisation, physical combat, seizure of power, and the construction of a new order.

Out of all the proletarian organisations, it is consequently the political party which least suffers from those structural and functional limits which enable the anti-proletarian influences – the germs which cause the disease of opportunism – to force their way in. We have said many times, though, that this danger also exists for the party. The conclusion that we draw is not that it can be warded off by subordinating the party to the other organisations of that class which the party represents – a subordination which is often demanded under false pretexts, other times simply out of naivety with the reason that a greater number of workers belong to other class organisations.

Our conception of this question also concerns the supposed necessity of internal party democracy. We do not deny that there unfortunately have been numerous and disastrous examples of errors committed by the central leadership of the communist parties. However can these errors be avoided through computing the votes of the rank and file militants?

We do not attribute the degeneration which took place in the Communist Party to the fact that the assemblies and congresses of the militants had little voice with respect to the initiatives taken by the centre.

At many historical turning points we have seen the rank and file smothered by the centre for counter-revolutionary purposes. To this end even the instruments of the state machine, including the most brutal, have been employed. But all this is not the origin of the degeneration of the party but an inevitable manifestation of it, a sign that the party has yielded to counter-revolutionary influences.

The position of the Italian Communist Left on what we could call "the question of revolutionary guarantees" was first of all that no constitutional or contractual provision can protect the party against degeneration even though the party, as opposed to the other organisations we have studied, has the characteristics of a contractual organisation (and we use the term not as it is used in jurisprudence nor even as it was used by J.J. Rousseau). At the base of the relationship between the militant and the party there is an obligation which, in order to rid ourselves of the undesirable adjective "contractual", we can simply call a dialectical obligation. The relationship is double and flows in two directions: from the centre to the base and from the base to the centre. If the action of the centre goes in accordance with the good functioning of the dialectical relationship, it is met by healthy responses from the base.

The celebrated problem of discipline thus consists in establishing a system of limits for the base which is the proper reflection of the limits set for the action of the leadership. Consequently we have always maintained that the leadership must not have the right, in the great turning points in the political situation, to discover, invent and impose pretendedly new principles, new formulations and new guidelines for the action of the party. These sudden shifts make up the history of opportunism. When such a crisis occurs (and this can happen precisely because the party is not an immediate and automatic organisation) it is followed by an internal struggle, the formation of tendencies, and splits. In such a case these are useful developments, just as a fever, for freeing an organism of disease. Nevertheless, "constitutionally" they cannot be accepted, encouraged or tolerated.

There is no rule or recipe for preventing the party from falling into the crisis of opportunism or for preventing it from necessarily reacting by forming factions. However we have the experience of many decades of proletarian struggle which enables us to establish some necessary, optimum conditions of which the research, the defence and the realisation must be the constant task for our movement. We conclude by laying down the most important of these.

1. The party must defend and advocate all the clarity and continuity of the communist doctrine throughout its successive historical applications. It must not tolerate the proclamation of principles which are in even partial conflict with its theoretical cornerstones.
2. In every historical situation the party must openly proclaim the complete content of its economic, social, and political program, above all in regards to the question of power, its conquest by means of armed force, and its exercise through dictatorship. Those dictatorships which degenerate into regimes of privileges for a small

circle of bureaucrats have always been accompanied by hypocritical ideological proclamations that are masked behind basically populist slogans, sometimes democratic, sometimes nationalist in nature, and by the pretension of having the support of the popular masses. The revolutionary communist party on the other hand does not hesitate to declare its intention of attacking the state and its institutions and of holding the defeated class under the despotic weight of the dictatorship, even when it admits that only an advanced minority of the oppressed class has reached the point of understanding these necessities of the struggle. "Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims" (the Manifesto). Only renegades pride themselves on a supposed ability to attain these aims while cleverly hiding them.

3. The party must observe a strict organisational rigor: it does not accept the idea of increasing its ranks by making compromises with groups or grouplets, or worse still of bargaining to win over the membership of the rank and file by making concessions to alleged leaders.
4. The party must work to instil clear historical understanding of the antagonistic nature of the struggle. Communists demand the initiative of attack against a whole world of rules and regulations, and traditions. They know that they constitute a danger for the privileged classes. They call the masses to the offensive and not to the defensive against the pretended danger of losing supposed gains and improvements won under capitalism. Communists do not lend and lease their party for causes not their own and for non-proletarian objectives such as liberty, country, democracy and other such lies. "Proletarians have nothing to loose but their chains".
5. Communists renounce the whole gamut of tactical expedients which were advocated under the pretext of hastening the process of winning over large strata of the masses to the revolutionary program. Such expedients are the political compromise, the alliance and united front with other parties, and the various slogans concerning the state which were used as substitutes for the dictatorship of the proletariat (such as workers' and peasants' government, progressive democracy).

Communists recognise, historically, that the use of these tactical means is one of the main factors which hastened the decomposition of the proletarian movement and communist soviet rule. They maintain that those who deplore the opportunist syphilis of the Stalinist movement but who at the same time champion the tactical weapons of the opportunist enemy are more dangerous than the Stalinists themselves.

Postscript

The work Force, Violence, and Dictatorship in the Class Struggle, which we have published in five parts, deals with the questions of the use of force in social relationships and the characteristics of the revolutionary dictatorship according to the correct Marxist interpretation. We did not intentionally go into the question of the organisation of the class and the party, however in the final part of the discussion on the causes of the degeneration of the dictatorship, we were led straight to this point since many people have attributed the degeneration to errors in internal organisation and to the violation of a democratic and elective process within both the party and the other class organisations.

In refuting this thesis, however, we have neglected to mention an important polemic which took place in the Communist International in 1925-26 on the subject of changing the organisational base of the Communist Party to factory cells or factory

nuclei. The Italian Left was practically alone in resolutely opposing this change and in insisting that the organisational base must remain territorial.

This position was exhaustively expounded at the time, however the central point was this: the organic function of the party, a function which no other organisation can fulfil, is to lead the struggle from the level of the individual economic struggle on the local and trade basis to the united, general proletarian class struggle which is social and political. Such a task, consequently, cannot be seriously undertaken by an organisational unit which includes only workers of the same trade or concern. This milieu will only be receptive to narrow trade interests, the central directives of the party will seem as something coming from above, something foreign, and the party officials will never meet with the rank and file on an equal footing and in a certain sense they will no longer belong to the party since they are not employed by a concern.

Territorial groups by nature, however, place workers of every trade and workers employed by different employers on the same level as the other militants from social strata which are not strictly proletarian – and the party openly accepts the latter as rank and file members, and initially only as rank and file members, if necessary keeping them in quarantine for some time before calling them, if such a thing is warranted, to organisational positions.

It had been claimed that the factory cell would provide a closer link between the party organisation and the great masses. However we demonstrated at the time that the concept of factory cells contained the same opportunist and demagogic defects as right-wing workerism and Labourism and counterposed the party officials to the rank and file in a true caricature of Lenin's conception of professional revolutionaries.

The Left replaced the idiotic majoritary criterion, which is copied after bourgeois democracy, with a higher, dialectical criterion which hinges everything on the solid link of both the rank and file militants and the leadership to the strict and obligatory continuity of theory, program and tactics. It rejected any idea of demagogically wooing those wide layers of the masses which are so easily manoeuvrable. The Left's conception of the organisation of the party is, in reality, the only one which can provide protection against the bureaucratic degeneration of the leading strata of the party and against the suffocation of the party's rank and file by the leadership, both of which lead to a situation where the enemy class gains a devastating influence.