

Table of Contents

Proletarian Dictatorship and Class Party

*Bordiga, Amadeo
1951*

Published as “Dittatura proletaria e partito di classe” in Battaglia Comunista, issues 3-5, in 1951. Translated into English in Communist Program no. 2 in 1976. From <https://www.marxists.org/archive/bordiga/works/1951/class-party.htm>.

1

Every class struggle is a political struggle (Marx).

A struggle which limits itself to obtaining a new distribution of economic gains is not yet a political struggle because it is not directed against the social structure of the production relations.

The disruption of the relations of production peculiar to a particular social epoch and the overthrow of the rule of a certain social class is the result of a long and often fluctuating political struggle. The key to this struggle is the question of the state: the problem of “who has power?” (Lenin).

The struggle of the modern proletariat manifests and extends itself as a political struggle with the formation and the action of the **class party**. The specific features of this party are to be found in the following thesis: the complete development of the industrial capitalist system and of bourgeois power which issued from the liberal and democratic revolutions, not only does not historically exclude but prepares and sharpens more and more the conflict of class interests and its development into civil war, into armed struggle.

2

The communist party, as defined by this historical foresight and by this program, accomplishes the following tasks as long as the bourgeoisie maintains power:

- a. it elaborates and propagates the theory of social development, of the economic laws which characterise the present social system of production relations, of class conflicts which arise from it, of the state and of the revolution;
- b. it assures the unity and historical persistence of the proletarian organisation. **Unity** does not mean the material grouping of the working class and seeming working class strata which, due to the very fact of the dominance of the exploiting class, are tinder for the influence of discordant political leaderships and methods of action. It means instead the close international linking-up of the vanguard elements who are fully orientated on the integral revolutionary line. **Persistence** means the continuous claim of the unbroken dialectical line which binds together the positions of critique and struggle successively adopted by the movement during the course of changing conditions;

- c. it prepares well in advance for the class mobilisation and offensive by appropriately employing every possible means of propaganda, agitation and action, in all particular struggles triggered off by immediate interests. This action culminates in the organisation of the illegal and insurrectional apparatus for the conquest of power.

When general conditions and the degree of organisational, political and tactical solidarity of the class party reach a point where the general struggle for power is unleashed, the party which has led the revolutionary class to victory through the social war, leads it likewise in the fundamental task of breaking and demolishing all the military and administrative organs which compose the capitalist state. This demolition also strikes at the network of organs, whatever they may be, which pretend to represent the various opinions or interests through the intermediary of bodies of delegates. The bourgeois class state must be destroyed whether it presents itself as the mendacious interclassist expression of the majority of citizens or as the more or less open dictatorship wielded by a government apparatus which pretends to fulfil a national, racial or social-popular mission; if this does not take place, the revolution will be crushed.

3

In the phase which follows the dismantling of the apparatus of capitalist domination, the task of the political party of the working class is as vital as ever because the class struggle – though dialectically inverted – continues.

Communist theory in regard to the state and the revolution is characterised above all by the fact that it excludes all possibility of adapting the legislative and executive mechanism of the bourgeois state to the socialist transformation of the economy (the social-democratic position). But it equally excludes the possibility of achieving by means of a brief violent crisis a destruction of the state and a transformation of the traditional economic relationships which the state defended up to the last moment (the anarchist position). It also denies that the constitution of a new productive organisation can be left to the spontaneous and scattered activity of groups of producers shop by shop or trade by trade (the syndicalist position).

Any social class whose power has been overthrown, even if it is by means of terror, survives for a long time within the texture of the social organism. Far from abandoning its hopes of revenge, it seeks to politically reorganise itself and to re-establish its domination either in a violent or disguised way. It has turned from a ruling class into a defeated and dominated one, but it has not instantly disappeared.

The proletariat – which in its turn will disappear as a class alongside all other classes with the realisation of communism – **organises itself as a ruling class (the Manifesto)** in the first stage of the post-capitalist epoch. And after the destruction of the old state, the new proletarian state is the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The precondition for going beyond the capitalist system is the overthrow of bourgeois power and the destruction of its state. The condition for bringing about the deep and radical social transformation which has to take place is a new proletarian state apparatus, capable of using force and coercion just as all other historical states.

The presence of such an apparatus does not characterise communist society but instead it characterises the stage of its construction. Once this construction is secured, classes and class rule will no longer exist. But the essential organ of class rule is the state – and the state can be nothing else. Therefore communists do not advocate the proletarian state as a mystical creed, an **absolute** or an **ideal** but as a

dialectical tool, a class weapon that will slowly wither away (Engels) through the very realisation of its functions; this will take place gradually, through a long process, as the social organisation is transformed from a system of coercion of men (as it has always been since the dawn of history) into a comprehensive, scientifically built network for the management of things and natural forces.

4

After the victory of the proletariat, the role of the state in relationship to social classes and collective organisations exhibits many fundamental differences as compared with its role in the history of the regimes that spring from the bourgeois revolution.

- a. Revolutionary bourgeois ideology, prior to its struggle and final victory, presented its future post-feudal state not as a class state but as a **peoples state** based on the abolition of every inequality before the law, which it presented to be sufficient to assure freedom and equality for all members of society.

Proletarian theory openly asserts that its future state will be a class state, i.e. a tool wielded by **one** class as long as classes exist. The other classes will be excluded from the state and outlawed in fact as well as in principle. The working class having achieved power “will share it with no one” (Lenin).

- b. After the bourgeois political victory and in keeping with a tenacious ideological campaign, constitutional charters or declarations of principles were solemnly proclaimed in the different countries as a basis and foundation of the state. They were considered as being immutable in time, a definitive expression of the at last discovered immanent rules of social life. From then on, the entire interplay of political forces was supposed to take place within the insuperable framework of these statutes.

During the struggle against the existing regime, the proletarian state is not presented as a stable and fixed realisation of a set of rules governing the social relationships inferred from an idealistic research into the nature of man and society. During its lifetime the working class state will continually evolve up to the point that it finally withers away: the nature of social organisation, of human association, will radically change according to the development of technology and the forces of production, and man's nature will be equally subject to deep alterations always moving away more and more from the beast of burden and slave which he was. Anything such as a codified and permanent constitution to be proclaimed after the workers revolution is nonsense, it has no place in the communist program. Technically, it will be convenient to adopt written rules which however will in no way be intangible and will retain an “instrumental” and temporary character, putting aside the facetiousnesses about social ethics and natural law.

- c. Having conquered and even crushed the feudal apparatus of power, the victorious capitalist class did not hesitate to use the force of the state to repress the attempts of counterrevolution and restoration. However the most resolute terroristic measures were justified as being directed not against the class enemies of capitalism but against the **betrayers** of the people, of the nation, of the country, and of civil society, all these hollow concepts being identified with the state itself and, as a matter of fact, with the government and the party in power.

The victorious proletariat, by using its state in order to “crush the unavoidable and desperate resistance of the bourgeoisie” (Lenin) will strike at the old

rulers and their last supporters every time they oppose, in a logical defence of their class interests, the measures intended to uproot economic privilege. These social elements will keep an estranged and passive position **vis-à-vis** the apparatus of power: whenever they try to free themselves from the passivity imposed upon them, material force will subdue them. They will share no “social contract”, they will have no “legal or patriotic duty”. As veritable social prisoners of war (as in fact were the former aristocrats and clergymen for the Jacobean bourgeoisie) they will have nothing to **betray** because they will not be requested to take any ridiculous oath of allegiance.

- d. The historical glitter of the popular assemblies and democratic gatherings hardly disguised the fact that, at its birth, the bourgeois state formed armed bodies and a police force for the internal and external struggle against the old regime and quickly substituted the guillotine for the gallows. This executive apparatus was charged with the task of administering legal force both on the great historical level and against isolated violations of the rules of appropriation and exchange characteristic of the economy founded on private property. It acted in a perfectly natural manner against the first proletarian movements which threatened, even if only instinctively, the bourgeois form of production. The imposing reality of the new social dualism was hidden by the game of the “legislative” apparatus which claimed to be able to bring about the participation of all citizens and all the opinions of the various parties in the state and in the management of the state with a perfect equilibrium and within an atmosphere of social peace.

The proletarian state, as an open class dictatorship, will dispose of all distinctions between the executive and legislative levels of power, both of which will be united in the same organs. The distinction between the legislative and executive is, in effect, characteristic of a regime which conceals and protects the dictatorship of one class under an external cloak which is multi-class and **multi-party**. “The Commune was a working, not a parliamentary body” (Marx).

- e. The bourgeois state in its classical form – in coherence with an individualist ideology which the theoretical fiction universally extends to all citizens and which is the mental reflection of the reality of an economy founded on the monopoly of private property by one class – refused to allow any intermediate body other than elective constitutional assemblies to exist between the isolated individual subject and the legal state centre. Political clubs and parties that had been necessary during the instructional stage were tolerated by it by virtue of the demagogic assertion of free thought and on the condition that they exist as simple confessional groupings and electoral bureaux. In a later stage the reality of class repression forced the state to tolerate the association of economic interests, the labour unions, which it distrusted as a “state within the state”. Finally, unions became a form of class solidarity adopted by the capitalists themselves for their own class interests and aims. Moreover, under the pretext of **legally recognising** the labour unions, the state undertook the task of absorbing and sterilising them, thus depriving them of any autonomy so as to prevent the revolutionary party from taking their leadership.

Labour unions will still be present in the proletarian state in so far as there still remains employers or at least impersonal enterprises where the workers remain wage earners paid in money. Their function will be to protect the standard of living of the working class, their action being parallel on this point to that of the party and the state. Non-working class unions will be forbidden. Actually, on the question of distribution of income between the working class and the non-

proletarian or semi-proletarian classes, the worker's situation could be threatened by considerations other than the superior needs of the general revolutionary struggle against international capitalism. But this possibility, which will long subsist, justifies the unions' secondary role in relation to the political communist party, the international revolutionary vanguard, which forms a unitary whole with the parties struggling in the still capitalist countries and as such leads the proletarian state.

The proletarian state can only be "animated" by a single party and it would be senseless to require that this party organise in its ranks a statistical majority and be supported by such a majority in "popular elections" – that old bourgeois trap. One of the historical possibilities is the existence of political parties composed in appearance by proletarians, but in reality influenced by counterrevolutionary traditions or by foreign capitalisms. This contradiction, the most dangerous of all, cannot be resolved through the recognition of formal rights nor through the process of voting within the framework of an abstract "class democracy". This too will be a crisis to be liquidated in terms of relationships of force. There is no statistical contrivance which can ensure a satisfactory revolutionary solution; this will depend solely upon the degree of solidity and clarity reached by the revolutionary communist movement throughout the world. A century ago in the West, and fifty years ago in the Czarist Empire, Marxists rightly argued against the simple-minded democrats that the capitalists and proprietors are a minority, and therefore the only true government of the majority is the government of the working class. If the word democracy means power of the majority, the democrats should stand on our class side. But this word both in its literal sense ("power of the people") as well as in the dirty use that is more and more being made of it, means "power belonging not to one but to all classes". For this historical reason, just as we reject "bourgeois democracy" and "democracy in general" (as Lenin also did), we must politically and theoretically exclude, as a contradiction in terms, "class democracy" and "workers' democracy".

The dictatorship advocated by marxism is necessary because it cannot be unanimously accepted and furthermore it will not have the naiveté to abdicate for lack of having a majority of votes, if such a thing were ascertainable. Precisely because it declares this it will not run the risk of being confused with a dictatorship of men or groups of men who take control of the government and substitute themselves for the working class. The revolution requires a dictatorship, because it would be ridiculous to subordinate the revolution to a 100% acceptance or a 51% majority. Wherever these figures are displayed, it means that the revolution has been betrayed.

In conclusion the communist party will rule alone, and will never give up power without a physical struggle. This bold declaration of not yielding to the deception of figures and of not making use of them will aid the struggle against revolutionary degeneration.

In the higher stage of communism – a stage which does not know commodity production, money nor nations and which will also witness the death of the state – labour unions will be deprived of their "reason to be". The party as an organisation for combat will be necessary as long as the remnants of capitalism survive in the world. Moreover, it may always have the task of being the depository and propagator of social doctrine, which gives a general vision of the development of relationships between human society and material nature.

5

The marxist conception, that of substituting parliamentary assemblies with working bodies, does not lead us back into “economic democracy” either, i.e. into a system which would adapt the state organs to the workplaces, to the productive or commercial units, etc., while excluding from any representative function the remaining employers and the individuals still owning property. The elimination of the employer and the proprietor only defines half of socialism; the other half, the most significant one, consists of the elimination of **capitalist economic anarchy** (Marx). As the new socialist organisation emerges and develops with the party and the revolutionary state in the foreground, it will not limit itself to striking only the former employers and their flunkies but above all it will redistribute the social tasks and responsibilities of individuals in quite a new and original way.

Therefore the network of enterprises and services such as they have been inherited from capitalism will not be taken as the basis of an apparatus of so-called “sovereignty”, that is of the delegation of powers within the state and up to the level of its central bodies. It is precisely the presence of the single-class state and of the solidly and qualitatively unitary and homogeneous party which offers the maximum of favourable conditions for a reshaping of social machinery that be driven as little as possible by the pressures of the limited interests of small groups and as much as possible by general data and by their scientific study in the interests of the collective welfare. The changes in the productive mechanism will be enormous; let us only think of the program for reversing the relationships between town and country, on which Marx and Engels insisted so much and which is the exact antithesis to present trends in all countries.

Therefore, the network modelled after the work place is an inadequate expression which repeats the old Proudhonist and Lassalleen positions that Marxism long ago rejected and surpassed.

6

The definition of the type of links between the organs of the class state and its base depends first of all upon the results of historical dialectics and cannot be deduced from “eternal principles”, from “natural law”, or from a sacred and inviolable constitutional charter. Any further details in this regard would be mere utopia. There is not a grain of utopianism in Marx, Engels stated. The very idea of the famous delegation of power by the isolated individual (elector) thanks to a platonic act emanating from his freedom of opinion must be left to the foggy realms of metaphysics; opinions in actuality are but a reflection of material conditions and social forms, and power consists of the intervention of physical force.

The negative characterisation of the proletarian dictatorship is clearly defined: the bourgeois and semi-bourgeois will no longer have political rights, they will be prevented by force from gathering in groups of common interests or in associations for political agitation; they will never be allowed to vote, elect, or delegate others to any post or function whatsoever. But even the relationship between the worker – a recognised and active member of the class in power – and the state apparatus will no longer retain that fictitious and deceitful characteristic of a **delegation** of power, of a representation through the intermediary of a **deputy**, an election ticket, or by a party. Delegation means in effect the renunciation to the possibility of direct action. The pretended “sovereignty” of the democratic right is but an abdication, and in most cases it is an abdication in favour of a scoundrel.

The working members of society will be grouped into local territorial organs according to their place of residence, and in certain cases according to the displacements imposed by their participation in a productive mechanism in full transformation. Thanks to their uninterrupted and continuous action, the participation of all active social elements in the mechanism of the state apparatus, and therefore in the management and exercise of class power, will be assured. To sketch these mechanisms is impossible before the class relationships from which they will spring have been concretely realised.

7

The Paris Commune established as most important principles (see Marx, Engels, Lenin) that its members and officials would be subject to recall at any time, and that their salary would not exceed the wage of an average worker. Any separation between the producers on the periphery and the bureaucrats at the centre is thus eliminated by means of systematic rotations. Civil service will cease being a **career** and even a **profession**. No doubt, when put into practice, these controls will create tremendous difficulties, but it was long ago that Lenin expressed his contempt for all plans of revolutions to be carried out **without difficulties!** The inevitable conflicts will not be completely resolved by drawing up piles of rules and regulations: they will constitute a historical and political problem and will express a real relationship of forces. The Bolshevik revolution did not stop in front of the Constituent Assembly but dispersed it. The workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils had risen. This new type of state organs which burst forth in the blaze of the social war (and were already present in the revolution of 1905) extended from the village to the entire country through a network of territorial units; their formation did not answer to any of the prejudices about the "rights of man" or the "universal, free, direct and secret" suffrage!

The communist party unleashes and wins the civil war, it occupies the key positions in a military and social sense, it multiplies its means of propaganda and agitation a thousand-fold through seizing buildings and public establishments. And without losing time and without procedural whims, it establishes the "armed bodies of workers" of which Lenin spoke, the red guard, the revolutionary police. At the meetings of the Soviets, it wins over a majority to the slogan: "All power to the Soviets!". Is this majority a merely legal, or a coldly and plainly numerical fact? Not at all! Should anyone – be he a spy or a well-intentioned but misled worker – vote for the Soviet to renounce or compromise the power conquered thanks to the blood of the proletarian fighters, he will be kicked out by his comrades' rifle butts. And no one will waste time with counting him in the "legal minority", that criminal hypocrisy which the revolution can do without and which the counterrevolution can only feed upon.

8

Historical facts different from those of Russia in 1917 (i.e. the recent collapse of feudal despotism, a disastrous war, the role played by opportunist leaders) could create, while remaining on the same fundamental line, different practical forms of the basic network of the state. From the time the proletarian movement left utopianism behind, it has found its way and assured its success thanks not only to the real experience of the present mode of production and the structure of the present state, but also to the experience of the strategic mistakes of the proletarian revolution, both on the battlefield of the "hot" civil war where the Communards of 1871 gloriously fell and on the "cold" one which was lost between 1917 and 1926 – this last was the great battle

of Russia between Lenin's International and world capitalism supported in the front lines by the miserable complicity of all the opportunists.

Communists have no codified constitutions to propose. They have a world of lies and constitutions – crystallised in the law and in the force of the dominant class – to crush. They know that only a revolutionary and totalitarian apparatus of force and power, which excludes no means, will be able to prevent the infamous relics of a barbarous epoch from rising again – only it will be able to prevent the monster of social privilege, craving for revenge and servitude, from raising its head again and hurling for the thousandth time its deceitful cry of **Freedom!**