

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL TO THE THEORETICAL AND POLITICAL FORMATION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTIES IN THEIR FIRST YEARS OF LIFE

1. In March 1919 was founded in Moscow the communist Third International. Since the 1st November 1914 Lenin, from his exile in Switzerland, had so outlined the role of the future new International:

«In the last third of XIX century and in the beginning of XX century the Second International has accomplished its part of useful preparatory work of organisation of proletarian masses in the course of the long "pacific" period of the cruellest capitalistic slavery and of the quickest capitalistic progress. It's up to the Third International the task of organizing the forces of the proletariat for the revolutionary assault against the capitalist governments, for the civil war against the bourgeoisie of all countries, for the political power, for the victory of socialism».

The Zimmerthal and Kienthal conferences against the imperialist war, the establishment of the «Zimmerthal Left» (whose Lenin was the chief animator with the launching of the revolutionary slogan «transformation of the imperialist war in civil war»), the powerful strikes against the war in the principal capitalist countries, the two revolutions of February and October 1917 in Russia, the German revolution of 1918, were the main stages through which was reached, in March 1919, the foundation congress of the Third International.

The Third International explicitly undertook the task of preserving the theoretical and political heritage of marxism from the degeneration and corruption which it had suffered in the epoch of the Second International.

Leninism was explicitly connected to the marxism of Marx and Engels, as it was, like that one, the product of an epoch of great revolutionary transformations, the new epoch of imperialism. Therefore the ideological struggle against all the tendencies that, within the working class, expressed a major or minor degree of ideological subordination of the proletariat to the imperialist bourgeoisie was seen as a fundamental component of class struggle and an integral part of the revolutionary action of the communist movement.

The chief task of the new communist International was to link together and solder the socialist revolutions in the advanced capitalist countries, the struggles of the peoples oppressed by the colonial domination, and the defense of the Soviet regime, as moments of an indivisible process, aiming to a last issue, the establishment of the international Soviet Republic.

2. In this article we intend to illustrate the fundamental contribution of orientation and guidance offered by the International - through the main theses and resolutions approved by its first Congresses (1919-1925) - to the communist parties in the years of their formation. We leave to speak directly those documents (of which we publish ample extracts), which have not a simple historical meaning, but are full of teachings for the communists of our time, mainly for the youngest generation of revolutionary workmen and workers who are approaching to communism.

In that first period of time the attention of the new International concentrated mainly on three great questions:

- The political break of the parties of the Third International with the reformism and opportunistic centrism of European Social Democracy.
- The united front tactic in advanced capitalist countries.
- The bolshevization of communist parties.

3. In its two first Congresses (1919, 1920) the International established with the greatest clearness the fundamental lines of demarcation which opposed the new communist parties to the old social democracy and to some anarcho-syndicalist and left-wing extremist tendencies about some

problems of crucial importance: the role of the party in the proletarian revolution; its relation with the soviets and the factory committees; the question of parliamentarism.

«The Communist Party is a part of the working class, and moreover its most advanced, most class-conscious and therefore its most revolutionary. [...] The concept of the party and that of the class must be kept strictly separate. [...] It is very possible that, under certain historical circumstances, the working class can become interspersed with numerous reactionary layers. The task of communism does not lie in accommodating to these backward parts of the working class, but in raising the whole of the working class to the level of the communist vanguard. The confusion of these two concepts party and class can lead to the greatest mistakes and confusion».

«The rise of the soviets as the basic historical form of the dictatorship by no means decreases the leading role of the Communist Party in the proletarian revolution. [...] Whoever suggests to the Communist Party that it should 'adapt' to the soviets, whoever sees a strengthening of the Party's 'proletarian character' in such an adaptation, is doing the Party and the soviets a highly questionable favour, and understands the significance neither of the soviets nor of the Party [...] the Communist Party must be built on the basis of an iron proletarian centralism.» (*Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution*, July 1920).

The necessity of establishing a strict and indissoluble bond with the life of the working class and, by means of it, with the great mass of the exploited in order to lead them in the decisive struggle against capitalism, is reflected in the instructions concerning the relation of the party with labour and trade-union movement:

«Where within the trades unions or outside of them organisations are formed in the factories, such as shop stewards, factory committees, etc., for the purpose of fighting against the counter-revolutionary tendencies of the trade union bureaucracy, to support the spontaneous direct action of the proletariat, there, of course, the Communists must with all their energy give assistance to these organisations. [...] The struggle of the factory committees against capitalism has for its immediate object workers' control over production. [...] And as any attempt on the part of workmen to exercise a control over the supplying of the factories with raw material, or to control the financial operations of the factory owners, will be met by the most energetic measures against the working class on the part of the bourgeoisie and the capitalist government, the struggle for workers' control over production must lead to the struggle for a seizure of power by the working class».

« The factory committees cannot be substituted for the trades unions. During the process of struggle they may form unions outside the limits of single factories and trades, according to the branches of production, and create a general apparatus for the direction of the struggle. The trades unions are already now centralised fighting organs, although they do not embrace such wide masses of workers as the factory committees can, these latter being loose organisations which are accessible to all the workers of a given enterprise. The division of tasks between the shop committees and the industrial unions is the result of the historical development of the social revolution. » (*Theses on the Trade Union Movement and Factory Committees*, August 1920).

A fundamental point in the struggle for the proletarian dictatorship in the form of soviet power was the critique of the bourgeois parliament and the inquiry of the possibility of take advantage of its use, under a series of conditions:

« Consequently communism denies parliamentarism as a form of the society of the future. It denies it as a form of the class dictatorship of the proletariat. It denies the possibility of taking over parliament in the long run; it sets itself the aim of destroying parliamentarism.».

« 'Anti-parliamentarism' on principle, in the sense of absolute and categorical rejection of participation in elections and revolutionary parliamentary activity, is therefore a naive, childish doctrine below any criticism [...] In this way the Communist Party, which recognises the necessity of participating in the elections not only to the central parliament, but also to the organs of local self-government and work in these institutions as a general role, must resolve this problem concretely, starting from the specific peculiarities of any given moment. A boycott of elections or of

parliament and withdrawal from the latter is mainly permissible when the preconditions for the immediate transition to the armed struggle and the seizure of power are already present.» (*Theses on the Communist Parties and Parliamentarism*, August 1920).

But the decisive question for the birth of the new communist parties was the complete acceptance of the marxist and leninist conception of proletarian dictatorship, against the theory and practice of reformism and against all the variants of centrist opportunism. Besides the *Platform* approved by the 1st foundation Congress, the basic document was the *Thesis and Report on Bourgeois Democracy and the Dictatorship of Proletariat*, directly elaborated by Lenin and approved by the 2nd Congress.

«The conquest of political power by the proletariat means the destruction of the political power of the bourgeoisie. [...] The victory of the proletariat is guaranteed by the disruption of the enemy's power and the organisation of proletarian power. The bourgeois state apparatus has to be shattered and a proletarian state machine constructed» (*The Platform of Communist International*, march 1919).

«History teaches us that no oppressed class ever did, or could, achieve power without going through a period of dictatorship, i.e., the conquest of political power and forceable suppression of the resistance always offered by the exploiters—the resistance that is most desperate, most furious, and that stops at nothing. [...] That is why the present defence of bourgeois democracy under the cover of talk about “democracy in general”, and the present howls and shouts against proletarian dictatorship under the cover of shouts about “dictatorship in general”, are an outright betrayal of socialism. They are, in fact, desertion to the bourgeoisie, denial of the proletariat's right to its own, proletarian revolution

[...] all Socialists have expressed the idea formulated with the greatest scientific precision by Marx and Engels, namely, that the most democratic bourgeois republic is no more than a machine for the suppression of the working class by the bourgeoisie, for the suppression of the working people by a handful of capitalists.

[...] The main thing that Socialists fail to understand—which constitutes their shortsightedness in matters of theory, their subservience to bourgeois prejudices, and their political betrayal of the proletariat—is that in capitalist society, whenever there is any serious aggravation of the class struggle intrinsic to that society, there can be no alternative but the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie or the dictatorship of the proletariat. Dreams of some third way are reactionary, petty-bourgeois limitations» (*Thesis and Report on Bourgeois Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, march 1919).

For the birth of the new communist parties was an absolute necessity that the ideological and political break with reformism and centrist opportunism (Turati, Modigliani, MacDonald, Longuet, Kautsky, Hilferding, Serrati, etc.) should match, in the old socialist parties, with some practical and organisational inner measures, which were included in the famous *21 conditions of admission to the Communist International*. Two of the more meaningful were the 15th and 21th:

«Parties that have still retained their old social democratic programmes have the obligation of changing those programmes as quickly as possible and working out a new communist programme corresponding to the particular conditions in the country and in accordance with the decisions of the Communist International».

«Those members of the party who object in principle to the conditions and theses put forward by the Communist International are to be expelled from the Party».

4. One of the principal tasks committed by the International to its national sections in the 3°, 4° and 5° Congresses (1921, 1922, 1924) was the conquest of the masses. The International realistically observed that, even after the birth of the communist parties, the majority of the working class was still under the hegemony of the Social Democracy. Therefore it was necessary to elaborate a suitable tactic which, beginning from the concrete experience of the struggles of the

proletarian masses, was able to remove from the reformist hegemony the majority of the working class, urging it to accept the political leading of the communists as a leading in conformity of the basic work-and-life interests of the workers. This tactic was the proletarian united front tactic, which the International widely developed in those years, fighting at the same time against its opportunistic interpretations.

«At the present moment the most important task of the Communist International is to win a dominant influence over the majority of the working class [...] Even in the first twelve months following its foundation the Communist International repudiated sectarian tendencies and demanded that all affiliated parties, however small, should work in the trade unions in order to defeat the reactionary union bureaucracy from within and transform the unions into revolutionary mass proletarian organisations that could further the proletarian struggle.

[...] «The Communist Parties must put forward demands expressing the immediate needs of the working class. The Communists must organise mass campaigns to fight for these demands regardless of whether they are compatible with the continuation of the capitalist system [...] As more and more people are drawn into the struggle around these demands and as the needs of the masses come into conflict with the needs of capitalist society, the working class will come to realise that if it wants to live, capitalism will have to die. This realisation will be the main motivation in their struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat. » (Third Congress, *On tactics*, July 1921).

The attention of the Third International was always turned to the main features of the united front, to the method of accomplishing it widely, in a neither restricted nor formal way, in order to addressing to the workers who still refer to reformist parties or are influenced by them.

«The united front tactic is simply an initiative whereby the Communists propose to join with all workers belonging to other parties and groups and all unaligned workers in a common struggle to defend the immediate, basic interests of the working class against the bourgeoisie. [...] The real success of the united front tactic depends on a movement “from below”, from the rank-and-file of the working masses. Nevertheless, there are circumstances in which Communists must not refuse to have talks with the leaders of the hostile workers’ parties, providing the masses are always kept fully informed of the course of these talks. During negotiations with these leaders the independence of the Communist Party and its agitation must not be circumscribed. Obviously, the united front tactic has to be applied differently in different countries, according to the concrete conditions.» (Fourth Congress, *Theses on Comintern Tactics*, december 1922).

In front of some weak or wrong interpretations of the united front tactic and of its revolutionary political exit, the Congress of the International intervened with the greatest clearness in order to avoid confusions and unmask the bourgeois agents in the labour movement.

«United front tactics are only a method of agitation and of revolutionary mobilization of the masses over a period of time... Any attempt to interpret it as a tactical political alliance with the counter-revolutionary social-democrats is a form of opportunism that is rejected by the Comintern».

«The slogan of a workers’ and peasants’ government was and is formulated by the Comintern as a deduction from the united front tactics as defined above. Opportunist elements in the Comintern tried to distort this slogan too by interpreting it as a “government within the bourgeois-democrat framework” and a political alliance with social-democracy. The fifth world Congress emphatically rejects this interpretation. [...] The formula workers’ and peasants’ government, derived from the experience of the Russian revolution, was and can be nothing but a method of agitation and mobilization of the masses for the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of Soviet power» (Fifth Congress, *Theses on tactics*, July 1924).

5. Alcuni anni dopo la fondazione della Terza Internazionale, si palesò in modo sempre più stringente la necessità di trasformare i partiti comunisti in autentici partiti bolscevichi. La loro bolscevizzazione non doveva essere intesa nel senso di un meccanico trasferimento dell’esperienza russa in quella degli altri partiti comunisti (errore dal quale già Lenin aveva messo in guardia), ma

nell'assimilazione di quei tratti dell'esperienza russa che - come lo stesso Lenin aveva affermato ne *L'estremismo malattia infantile del comunismo* - avevano "un significato internazionale". Ciò avrebbe consentito non solo di sviluppare e rafforzare le diverse sezioni nazionali dell'Internazionale, ma anche di correggere un certo numero di errori e di deviazioni di destra e di «sinistra» - sul piano teorico, politico e organizzativo - che si erano manifestate nei primi anni di vita dei partiti comunisti. Il documento più organico col quale l'Internazionale esercitò, su quei problemi, la sua importante funzione di orientamento e di guida furono le *Tesi del V Plenum sulla bolscevizzazione dei partiti comunisti* (aprile 1925), di cui riportiamo alcune parti essenziali.

On theory

«Ogni deviazione dal leninismo equivale a una deviazione dal marxismo. Non meno decisamente debbono essere combattute tutte le deviazioni dal leninismo nel campo della cosiddetta "teoria pura", della filosofia, della teoria dell'economia politica, ecc. L'insufficiente apprezzamento della teoria che si è potuto rilevare in parecchi partiti costituisce il maggior ostacolo a una bolscevizzazione dei partiti dell'Internazionale comunista. A "tolerant" attitude towards theoretical deviations, etc. makes genuine bolshevization impossible...Mastery of the theory of Leninism is essential to successful bolshevization.

Trotskyism is a particular dangerous deviation from Leninism; it is a variety of menshevism combining "European" opportunism with "left-radical" phrases which frequently conceal its politically passive character».

On the Trade Union work

«Deviations in communist trade union work involve the greatest danger for the cause of bolshevization of the parties. Throughout the capitalist world trade unions are the most important form of the mass organization of the proletariat. ...Without any doubt, the greatest value have other forms of mass organization (factory councils and similar), that surely have a great revolutionary future, but only recently these new forms of mass organization begin to earn a general recognition of broad masses of workers. On the other hand, these forms of mass organization of the proletariat, like councils, are only possible at the beginning of the revolution...

... Work in the existing social-democrat and other (yellow, national-socialist, confessional and fascist) trade union in a most important and integral part of bolshevization, to which a hundred times more attention than before must be devoted...

... Communist will increase their influence and gain authority among the working masses by backing all immediate demands for higher wages and the eight-hour day, by conducting a fight against unemployment, etc., by placing themselves courageously at the head of all conflicts with the employers...».

On the question of the allies of the proletariat

«It is a basic task of Leninism to provide a precise and concrete answer to the question, what intermediate strata at any given stage of revolutionary development are capable of becoming allies of the proletariat, what are the demands which in the given situation will unite them with the proletariat [...] By and large Leninism divide the petty bourgeoisie into three groups: certain strata of the petty bourgeoisie can and must be won as direct allies, if only temporarily; other strata we must manage and neutralize; a third group (the upper ranks of the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie) will inevitably have to be fought outright ».

On question of organization and the problem of Party Cadres

«The basic form of organization of every bolshevick party is the party cell in the factory....
«The old organisational principle, derived from the Social Democracy, according to which the party is built on the basis of electoral constituencies for the needs of parliamentary elections is

unacceptable for the communists. A true bolshevik party can't exist if the basis of its organisation is not the factory cell.

«One of the more important tasks in every communist party is the most careful selection of the leading cadres, who must be drawn from the mass of the vanguard workers who distinguished themselves on account of their energy, knowledge, ability and dedication to the party. [...] The communist organizer and cadre worker must have nothing in common with the social-democratic functionaries and «responsible employees». The communist organizer and cadre worker [...] must live and work among the masses in the factory or mine. [...] For the leading organs of the party, to assume more and more a worker character is an immediate task».

It's necessary «to stimulate the entire party mass, securing the co-operation of all the lower party bodies and cells in the political and organizational life of the party, and arousing the initiative of the workers in the party». At the same time, «iron proletarian discipline is one of the most important pre-conditions of bolshevization. Parties which carry on their banner “Dictatorship of the Proletariat” must realize that there can be no talk of a victorious proletarian dictatorship without the strictest internal discipline founded on ideological unanimity».

6. These precious teachings of the Third International retain their validity after its dissolution because they are the principles that inspire the proletarian internationalism of our time, the theoretical, political and organizational fundamentals that lead the action of the parties who gather under the flags of the International Conference of Marxist-Leninist Parties and Organisations. The ICMLPO is an irreplaceable point of ideological, political and organisational reference and orientation for the new young levies of communists who are rising all over the world, in the perspective of the new proletarian revolutions that will originate from the haedlong crisis of capitalistic society.

The history proves the unbreakable necessity of establishing and reinforcing a center of direction of the proletarian revolutionary forces; the necessity of a powerful spur to the rupture with opportunism and to the construction of communist parties in various countries, to their effective action in the struggle for the power, to their coordination at international level. Consequently, may be regarded as communist parties only the parties and organisations who run their activity in a strict connection with the struggle and efforts of the Marxist-Leninist international movement.

We conclude this article remembering what rightly said the Third International:

: *«A bolshevick is not one who joins the party at the height of the revolutionary flood, but one who knows how to go on for years, if necessary for decades, building up the party even when the tide is ebbing and revolutionary developments slows down».*

Communist Platform (of Italy)