

1 The origins (1912-1926)

All the lefts of the social democratic parties emerged from the 2nd International. Faced with the reformist current represented by Bernstein, Jaurès, Turati, Renner, etc., the Marxist current developed very late. It was more a left opposition tendency than a real fraction organised internationally within the International. At the beginning of the century, the revolutionary current was organised on a national basis. First in Russia and Bulgaria in 1903 with the Bolsheviks and the *Tesniki*, then in 1909 with Gorter and Pannekoek's new party in Holland. In the German SPD, the respected and admired guide of the International, Rosa Luxemburg's current — even though it had created a party, the SDKPiL, in Poland — was not organised as a fraction. Although the left current had long been denouncing the “opportunist danger”, it only began to organise internationally during the World War.

Partly due to the national development of capitalist states, the 2nd International was constituted as a federation of national sections, without any truly centralised organisation on a world scale. The International Bureau, established in Brussels under the authority of Camille Huysmans, had the task of co-ordinating the sections, rather than of providing them with a political direction. It was only with the 3rd International that for the first time in the history of the workers' movement, an international organisation appeared before some of its national sections were formed.

The development of the reformist current, and the weakness of the intransigent Marxist tendencies, were not fortuitous. The prodigious development of capitalism after 1870 had made it possible for large sections of the workers' movement to believe that the struggle for reforms, and the real improvements in working class living standards in the advanced countries, made the proletarian revolution no longer

necessary in these states — and still less world-wide. As long as the proletariats of the different countries were not confronted with the reality of a world war and a world crisis, the world proletarian movement seemed like a utopia, the invention of a few high-flown minds. The Italian workers' movement did not escape these general characteristics.

The birth of the Italian Socialist Party

Up until 1870, the Italian socialist movement remained very weak. At this point, there were no more than 9,000 industrial enterprises and 400,000 wage-earners in the country. In 1871, Engels, who was nominated as the International Workingmen's Association's (IWA) secretary for Italian affairs, counted only 750 members in the Italian section of the International ('Federazione degli Operai'). The following year, a split between Mazzinists and socialists further weakened the workers' party. The development of anarchism, which was a characteristic of the backward countries, and the government's dissolution of the Italian section of the IWA in 1874, almost reduced the proletarian socialist movement to zero. The Bakuninists dominated the local insurrections which they fomented in Romany in 1874 and Beneventino in 1877.

It was only in 1881 that the organised socialist current re-emerged, with the foundation of the 'Revolutionary Socialist Party of Romany' on the initiative of Andrea Costa. Its programme was based on revolutionary Marxism:

The RSP of Romany is and can only be revolutionary. The revolution is above all a violent material insurrection by the multitudes against the obstacles which the existing institutions put in the way of the affirmation and realisation of the popular will.

This is why the revolution is above all the temporary dictatorship of the labouring classes, i.e. the accumulation of all social

*power (economic, political, military) in the hands of the insurgent workers with the aim of destroying the obstacles which the old order of things puts up against the installation of the new; of defending, provoking, and propagating the revolution; of realising the expropriation of private persons and establishing collective property and the social organisation of labour.*¹

A year later, this party united with the 'Partito Operaio', born in Milan around Turati. The latter was a "workerist" party, which only accepted waged workers as members; hostile to all programmes and all ideology, it abstained from elections. Its members included Lazzari, a typographic worker, and the theoretician, Benedetto Croce. There was no distinction between the party and the unions that adhered to it, such as the 'fight del lavoro'. However, this party was intransigently internationalist: during the Ethiopian war, Costa proclaimed: "Not a man, not a penny for the adventures in Africa". In 1886, Cafiero translated Capital, and despite the dissolution of the party, the *Rivista Italiana del Socialismo* was published. In 1889, the first translation of the *Communist Manifesto* appeared, and in 1891, the publication *Critica Sociale*.

The proletariat's increasing numbers and the development of the class struggle among the agricultural workers, led to the constitution of the first trade union centres (camere de lavoro) and in 1892, to the foundation of the Italian Socialist Party in Genoa.

This foundation was extremely important because it involved the separation between socialists and anarchists. But the new party was formed on a reformist basis, calling for "struggle by trade", "the widest struggle aiming at the conquest of public powers" and "the management of production", without any mention of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Henceforward, the party was to participate in elections, but at the Bologna congress, it envisaged the possibility of electoral alliances. Nonetheless, the party evolved slowly towards the basic positions of socialism: in Florence, in 1896, it rejected the idea of the organisation adhering to economic and electoral associations, recommending only individual membership.

Very quickly, the PSI had to pass the acid test. Dissolved in 1894 by the Crispi government's 'anti-socialist laws', the party still underwent a definite development. Hunger revolts, caused by the war, broke out all over the Mezzogiorno in 1898; in the same year, ferocious repression in Milan cost 100 workers their lives. Despite this repression, *L'Avanti* became a socialist daily. The elections of 1900 saw the defeat of the right and a breakthrough by the PSI which won 13 % of the vote.

But this victory also resulted in the victory of the reformist current organised around Turati. After King Umberto's assassination by anarchists, Turati declared to the parliamentary deputies: "We associate ourselves with your pain". The Rome Congress of the same year saw the triumph of this current. It proclaimed not only the defence of the Constitution but the autonomy for local sections in electoral matters, and for the socialist group in parliament. The attitude of the government, which recognised the 'right of coalition' after some big workers' strikes, further encouraged the reformist tendencies. The counterpart to this reformism was the appearance, at the Bologna congress of 1904, of the 'revolutionary syndicalist' tendency around Antonio Labriola, which proclaimed the necessity for the general strike and the predominance of the unions over the party. Labriola's current left the party in 1907.

The Left in the Party (1913-18)

Up to this point, a true left tendency still did not exist within the PSI. The first intransigent Marxist reaction did not develop until 1910. With the parliamentary group supporting the right, at the Milan congress Lazzaro bitterly criticised the parliamentary action of Turati's friends. He declared that "if the Italian proletariat was no longer represented in parliament, it would be a lesser evil". Mussolini, in the name of the lefts from Romagna, denounced the political truce between socialists and republicans. But the left minority around Lazzaro was crushed.

It was the Italian-Turkish war over Libya that gave a real push to the intransigents. The extreme right of the party around Bissolati, Bonomi, and Felice (as well as Labriola), declared their solidarity with the government. But in 1912, the whole socialist group voted against the annexation of Libya to the kingdom. This intransigent position was confirmed at Reggio-Emilia, when the congress expelled Bonomi, Bissolati, Cabrini and Podrecca, all of them deputies who had gone to the Quirinal to express their disapproval of an attempt on the king's life. This was a success for the left, which published *Lotta di Classe* in Forli, and *La Soffitta* (the 'attic' - a title defying those who claimed that Marxism was only good to be 'scored in the attic'). Encouraged by Mussolini, the congress rejected the autonomy of the parliamentary group, as well as the preponderance of electoral activity in the party. Universal suffrage only served "to demonstrate to the proletariat that it is not the weapon that will enable it to obtain its total emancipation". Furthermore, "the party is not a shop-window for illustrious men". Supporting the left, Lenin commented on the split in these terms: "A split is something grave and painful. But it is sometimes necessary, and in this sense any weakness, any sentimentality, is a crime... The Italian Socialist Party has taken the right road in distancing itself from the syndicalists and the right-wing reformists." (*Pravda*, 28 July 1912). Strengthened by the support of the International, Mussolini became editor of *L'Avanti*.

But the most resolute struggle against the right and the centre of the PSI was to develop above all in the Federation of Young Socialists. Formed in 1903, the Federation held a congress in Bologna in 1907 where it put on the agenda the necessity for anti-militarist propaganda. Concerned to maintain the purity of the party, it proclaimed the impossibility for militant Catholics and Christian democrats to be members of the organisation. Through its organ *L'Avanguardia* it also demanded that Freemasons be expelled from the party. But the left of the Federation's definitive triumph came at the 1912 congress in Bologna, which also saw the first public appearance of a small group of intransigent young socialists, all from Naples. They were a centre of attention, and their leader was undoubtedly Amadeo Bordiga.

Bordiga was born in 1889, near Naples. His father was a professor of agrarian economy, while his mother came from the nobility. He entered the socialist movement in 1910. In Naples, after the departure of the revolutionary syndicalists, the socialist group was still permeated by freemasonry and had a penchant for autonomy in electoral matters and for alliances with the parties of the republican left. This is why the intransigent Marxists around Bordiga were compelled in 1912 to leave the Naples socialist section en masse, no longer considering it to be socialist. From this split came the 'Circolo Socialista Rivoluzionario Carlo Marx' whose leading lights were Bordiga and Grieco. Its split was greeted positively by *La Soffitta*. As for the reformists, organised in the 'Neapolitan Socialist Union', they were to leave the party in 1914. Bordiga, Bombacci and Grieco then rebuilt the Naples section of the PSI, composed of 16 members.

At the youth congress of 1912, Bordiga took up arms against Tasca's 'culturalist' current which wanted to transform *L'Avanguardia* into "an essentially cultural organ", and all the young socialist circles into study circles, through a system of lectures and libraries. The motion from the left current, presented by Bordiga, won a majority. It affirmed that "in the capitalist regime the school is a powerful weapon of conservation in the hands of the ruling class and tends to give the young an education inculcating loyalty and resignation towards the present regime". Consequently, "the education of the young takes place much more in action than in study regulated by a bureaucratic system and norms"; education "can only be given by a proletarian atmosphere animated by a class struggle which is understood as a preparation for the proletariat's greatest conquests".²

Bordiga was to stick to this vision of the party as an organ of revolutionary action rigorously organised in the class struggle for the rest of his life.

Bordiga's activity in the party for the defence of an intransigent Marxism was to have four axes aimed

at preserving the party's proletarian and political character:

- antiparlamentarism: Bordiga always advocated the subordination of electoral action to revolutionary goals. But he was not an abstentionist before 1918. In 1913 he even wrote an article against the anarchists, entitled 'Contro l'astensionismo';
- revolutionary syndicalism: Bordiga was the fiercest partisan of the subordination of union action to that of the party. He opposed the revolutionary syndicalists who wanted to subordinate the party to the unions. This is why he was to become an adversary of Gramsci, Tasca, Togliatti and "l'Ordinovism", which held that the party had to be based on the factory councils in particular, and on economic action in general;
- reformism: Bordiga was the most determined partisan, along with Mussolini up to the war, of the expulsion of the Freemasons (agreed on in 1914), and of the right-wing tendency with its 'wait and see' attitude to the class struggle. To purify the party in order to maintain its revolutionary integrity — this was always the watchword of the 'Bordigist' current;
- war and anti-militarism: faced with the threat of war, the intransigent Marxist tendency in the youth Federation was in the front line of the struggle against militarism. In 1912 it saluted the Basle *Manifesto* against war, which called for the transformation of imperialist war into civil war. In the *Voce di Castellamare di Stabia*, Bordiga wrote: "When the order of mobilisation is announced, we will proclaim the unlimited general strike; to the declaration of war, we will respond with the armed insurrection. It will be the social revolution". To support this position of principle, Bordiga was made editor of an antimilitarist pamphlet *The Soldier's Penny* with which the youth Federation was associated.

But Bordiga's hope that the war would be transformed into revolution was not to be realised. While the

'Red Week' at Ancona led to a wave of working class agitation all over the country against repression and war, the decision of the union HQ to call for a return to work broke the movement.

How would the PSI, with a left tendency at the forefront, respond to the war? The majority of the main Socialist Parties had revealed themselves to be participationist. In *L'Avanti*, Mussolini wrote that he refused to consider a 'truce' with the Italian bourgeoisie. Bordiga pronounced against any distinction between 'offensive war' and 'defensive war'. In 1914, he criticised any idea of neutrality in the workers' ranks: "For us neutrality means a fervent socialist intensification of the struggle against the bourgeois state, the accentuation of all class antagonisms, which is the real source of any revolutionary tendency". The left declared itself to be "at its post for socialism" in another article by Bordiga: "We must be and remain at our post, against all wars, and for the proletariat which has everything to lose in them, nothing to gain, nothing to preserve". But the article underlined the weakness of the proletariat's reaction:

... in all countries the ruling class has succeeded in making the proletariat believe that it is animated by peaceful sentiments, that it has been forced into war to defend the country and its supreme interests; in reality, the bourgeoisie in all countries is equally responsible for the outbreak of the conflict, or rather, it is the capitalist Regime which is responsible because of its need for expansion, which has engendered the arms race... (Avanti, 'Al nostro posto!', 16 August 1914).

The PSI was not to maintain such an intransigent position. Mussolini renounced his revolutionary past by adhering to the war. He became an interventionist in October 1914 when he published in *L'Avanti* an article entitled '>From Absolute Neutrality to Active and Operative Neutrality'. Expelled from the party he published *Il Popolo d'Italia*, thanks to the subsidies of the Entente, which he received through the intermediary of the French socialist deputy, Marcel Cachin, a future leader of the French Communist Party. On the question of war, the attitude of the PSI centre, led by Lazzari, was not of the

clearest. Faced with the war it proclaimed that the party should “neither adhere nor sabotage”, which was an equivocation about the transformation of war into revolution and took the form of neutrality towards the Italian bourgeoisie. When the war broke out, *Il Socialista* of Naples, however, ran the headline “War has been decided. Down with the war”. And *L'Avanti* declared itself to be “against the war, for anti-militarist international socialism”.

The PSI's oscillation between left and right did not favour the development of a left fraction during the course of the world war. At Zimmerwald, it was not the left which was present at the conference, but the right in the person of the deputy Modigliani. Bordiga, mobilised twice, in 1915 and 1916, was unable to crystallise a left opposition before 1917.

Towards the conquest of the Party (1918-1921)

It was only in 1917, at the Rome congress, the opposition between the right and the left hardened. The former obtained 17,000 votes, the latter 14,000. The victory of Turati, Treves and Modigliani, at a time when the Russian revolution was already underway, precipitated the formation of an ‘intransigent revolutionary fraction’ in Florence, Milan, Turin and Naples. Against the formula ‘for peace and life after the war’ put forward by the majority of the party, the platform of the fraction defended “the right of the proletariat in all countries to set up its own dictatorship” and to “pursue the struggle against all the bourgeois institutions, not only on the political terrain, but also through the socialist expropriation of the capitalists”.

This crystallisation of a revolutionary fraction reflected a maturation of the revolutionary consciousness of the Italian proletariat. In August 1917, the workers of Turin, driven by hunger and encouraged by the Russian example (a few months before they had given a triumphant welcome to the representatives of the soviets), set up barricades and armed themselves with rifles handed over to them by the soldiers.

More than 50 were killed. But despite the upsurge of a revolutionary movement, the Rome congress of September 1918 failed to eliminate the right fraction from the party; it forgot that Turati, at the time of Caporetto, had declared that “*L’Avanti* has, during this period of war, written a glorious page in class history”. Thus was born the ‘maximalist’ tendency; radical in words, it did not dare draw a clear line between right and left, above all in the form of a split.³

Convinced that it had to march resolutely towards the organisation of a Left fraction to eliminate the right and the centre, the intransigent fraction equipped itself with its own organ, in Naples in December 1918:11 *Soviet*. This was the birth of the ‘Abstentionist Communist Fraction’. in a situation of proletarian fever marked by economic strikes, the Fraction formally constituted itself after the Bologna congress in October 1919. In a letter from Naples to Moscow in November, it set out its goal as being to “eliminate the reformists from the party in order to ensure for it a more revolutionary attitude”. It also insisted that a real party, which would have to join the Comintern, could only be created on an anti-parliamentary basis. Not only “all contact must be broken with the democratic system”, but a real communist party was only possible “if we renounce electoral and parliamentary action”.

But Bordiga did not want a split. Although organised as an autonomous fraction within the PSI, with its own press, the Abstentionist Fraction sought above all to win the majority of the party to its programme. It still thought this was possible, despite the crushing victory of the parliamentarist tendency represented by the alliance between Lazzari and Serrati. The Fraction could only become a party if it worked with all its strength towards the conquest of at least a significant minority. Not to abandon the terrain before having taken the struggle as far as it can go: this was always the preoccupation of the ‘Bordigist’ movement. In this it showed that it was never a sect, as its adversaries have alleged.

It was the implicit support given by the Comintern at the 2nd World Congress to Bordiga's intransigent tendency which was to enable the Abstentionist Communist Fraction to break out of its isolation as a minority in the party. While opposed to antiparlamentarism as a principle, Lenin saw Bordiga as the most ardent and resolute partisan of the foundation of the International on a rigorous basis. The representative of *Il Soviet* persuaded the Congress to adopt the 21st condition for joining the Comintern - the expulsion of those parties which did not accept all the conditions and theses of the International. Reassured that the struggle against the reformists would be carried out in a resolute manner, Bordiga bowed to the discipline of the Comintern in its demand that each party should present candidates at the elections. To distinguish himself from the anarchists, he affirmed that his abstentionism was 'tactical', that in practice the choice was posed between "electoral preparation", requiring a disproportionate mobilisation of resources by the communist party, and "revolutionary preparation", through the propaganda and agitation necessary for the development of the party.⁴

Bordiga and the Partito Comunista d'Italia

Thus the road to the constitution of a Communist Party was open. In March 1920, a general strike broke out in Turin, lasting ten days. The dispersion of the struggles and the PSI's immobility, supported by a legalist trade union, forced the different oppositions to work together and shortly afterwards, to unite. On 1 May 1919 the first issue of *L'Ordine Nuovo* was published, led by Gramsci, Togliatti and Tasca. Contacts with the 'Bordigist' tendency were necessarily close; the Turin group of the PSI was abstentionist and led by a partisan of Bordiga: the worker Giovanni Boero. Gramsci's tendency, however, was in favour of participating in elections. It opposed *Il Soviet* with a subtle dosage of Lenin and De Leon's revolutionary syndicalism. It thought that "trade unionism has shown itself to be nothing other than a form of capitalist society", that it had to be replaced by factory councils and soviets. Later on it called for workers' management of the factories and seemed to underestimate the role of the communist party by assigning it purely economic tasks. For *Il Soviet* the key question was

that of the party, without which the class struggle would be unable to find its true path. Bordiga was a partisan of the councils but he insisted that they could only acquire a revolutionary content by being formed on the basis of “local sections of the communist party”. For him the dictatorship of the proletariat could only be realised through the dictatorship of the party, because the soviet was not “in essence a revolutionary organ”. Apart from these theoretical questions, on which Bordiga waged a continuous polemic, the fundamental divergence was over *Ordine Nuovo's* failure to break with maximalism and its hesitation in constituting a fraction with a view to a rapid break with Serrati's centre.

At the end of 1920, the *Ordine Nuovo* group moved towards the ‘Bordigist’ fraction, which now had a majority not only in Naples, but also in Turin, Milan and Florence. The failure of the occupation of the factories in September dealt a severe blow to Gramsci's theories of “economic management” and “workers’ control”. The Giolitti government, through a consummately skilful manoeuvre, had let the strike in Turin fade out and decreed workers’ control in the factories. Revolutionary events had shown up the absence of a communist party ready to support and guide the movement. The reflux that followed proved to the Abstentionist Fraction and to *Ordine Nuovo* that it was no longer possible to wait and to act separately. In Milan in October the Unified Communist Fraction was formed. It put out a manifesto calling for the formation of the communist party through the expulsion of Turati's right wing; it gave up the electoral boycott, applying the decisions of the 2nd Congress.

The move towards a split, which had not yet become an open one, was decided at the Imola conference in December. It rejected the German model of a party based on a fusion between communists and left socialists. “Our work as a fraction is and must be terminated now”. The participants unanimously affirmed that they would no longer remain in the old party to carry out the exhausting work of persuasion, which is in any case completed, because that way the proletariat would be condemned to immobility till another congress”. Thus the conclusion was “an immediate exit from the party and the

congress (of the PSI) as soon as the vote puts us in majority or a minority. From this follows ... a split with the centre”.

On 21 January 1921, the Imola motion obtained a third of the votes: 58,783 against 172,487. The Communist Party of Italy, section of the Comintern, had been founded. Previously, Bordiga had declared at the PSI Congress that “the Socialist Party remains what it was on the eve of the war: the best party of the 2nd International, but not yet a party of the 3rd International”. Serrati had formally accepted the 21 conditions, but had not been capable of “translating them into action. We take with us the honour of your past”, he concluded before leaving the congress. The Abstentionist Fraction dissolved itself into the new party which rejected the presence of autonomous fractions and was to act in the “ strictest homogeneity and discipline ”.

What were to be the bases of the new party, under Bordiga’s leadership? These had already been laid down in the ‘Theses of the Abstentionist Communist Fraction’ in 1920. The theses affirmed that the communist party had to act “as a general staff of the proletariat in the revolutionary war”, because “only its organisation into a political party can carry out the proletariat’s formation as a class fighting for its emancipation”. Rejecting the United Front with other parties which did not adhere to the communist programme, and the subordination of the party to simple economic action, the next underlined that the supreme goal of any communist party was the violent seizure of power, installing the dictatorship of the party.

The councils which would arise in the revolution would only be revolutionary “when the majority of them are won over by the communist party”; otherwise they would represent “a serious danger for the revolutionary struggle”. In the immediate struggle, through propaganda, through “an intensive work of study and criticism... the communists must continually direct things towards an effective preparation for the inevitable armed struggle against all those who defend the principles and power of the

bourgeoisie”.

The ‘Rome Theses’, drawn up by Bordiga and Terracini for the 2nd Congress of the PCI in 1922, confirmed this vision. They were the basis of the ‘Bordigist’ current. They showed that the war had opened up a new historic period in which “capitalist society is falling to pieces and in which the class struggle can only end up in an armed conflict between the working masses and the power of the different capitalist states”. The party is the synthesis of programme and will, the instrument for putting this into action, and is defined by its organic continuity with the fraction which gives birth to it. It could not form an agglomeration with other parties or fractions without endangering “the firmness of its political position and the solidity of its structure”. As a unitary party, it had to become the unitary leadership of the unions and of any workers’ economic associations. Finally, the party was not a sum of individuals but a disciplined collectivity. It had to develop an incessant critique of other parties and denounce their practical action when it reflected a dangerous and erroneous tactic.⁶

But the Communist Party had already been formed too late. The development of the fascist movement was to limit its action and put it onto the defensive. It organised armed groups to protect its offices and push back the fascist offensive, sometimes victoriously. But really to push it back the PCI could only count on widespread economic struggles, and since September 1920 these had gone into decline. It could not count on an alliance with the PSI, because the latter had adopted a policy of ‘neutralism’ by signing a ‘pacification pact’ with Mussolini. Its calls for a ‘return to legality’ showed the impotence it hid behind maximalist language. The PCI therefore carried out its own policies, rejecting any United Front with “elements whose goal is not the armed revolutionary struggle of the proletariat against the existing state”. The party’s policy was identical towards the anti-fascist coalitions. In order to maintain a revolutionary vision within the proletariat, in order to preserve its class independence, there could be no question of the party allying itself with the *‘arditi del popolo’*. The latter, like the PSI, called for a return to “democratic order”. Having come out of fascism they proposed to “bring about internal peace”.

They declared themselves patriots and only gave admittance to former combatants and members of assault battalions. It was not out of 'sectarianism' or 'purism' that the PCI refused to form such alliances. As a revolutionary party, it could not permit any equivocation on the nature of democracy or divert the proletariat from its goal, which was not the defence of the 'democratic' state but its destruction.

In fact, as Bordiga underlined, it was democracy which encouraged and developed the fascist movement. The government which the PSI did not find quite 'strong' enough had, by a decree of 20 October 1920, sent 60,000 demobilised officers into the training centres, with the obligation to sign up for the groups of 'squadristi'. Whenever fascists burned down the offices of unions or the Socialist and Communist Parties, the army and the gendarmerie were always on the side of the fascists. And these armed forces were those of the liberal democratic state.

From this historic experience, the PCI at the 4th (1922) Congress of the Comintern drew out what it saw as the most essential lessons.

- Fascism was not the product of the middle classes and of the landed bourgeoisie. It was the product of the defeat which the proletariat had suffered and which had the indecisive petty-bourgeois strata behind the fascist reaction:

When the middle class saw that the Socialist Party was incapable of taking advantage of the situation, little by little it lost confidence in the proletariat's chances and turned towards the opposing class. This is the moment when the bourgeois and capitalist offensive began. It exploited essentially the new state of mind in which the middle class found itself.

- Fascism was not a 'feudal' reaction. It was born first of all in the big industrial towns, like Milan, where Mussolini founded its party in 1919. The industrialists had supported the fascist movement,

which presented itself as “a grand unitary movement of the ruling class, ready to put it self at its service, to use and exploit all means, all the partial and local interests of groups of bosses, both agrarian and industrial”.

- Fascism was not opposed to democracy. It was its indispensable complement when “the state was no longer able to defend the power of the bourgeoisie”. The fascist party provided it with a “unified party, a centralised counter-revolutionary organisation”.

In other texts, the Italian Left drew out the practical implications of its analysis vis-à-vis the PCI and ‘anti-fascism’:

- It was the left, and in the first place social democracy, which opened the door to fascism, by lulling the workers with the defence of ‘democratic freedoms’ and the ‘democratic statue’. Alongside the Left, Bordiga saw the Italian CGL — which, as in 1921, during the metallurgical workers’ strikes in Lombardy, Venice and Liguria, was imprisoning the struggle in a regional framework — as a major factor in demobilising the workers and leaving them open to the fascists’ attacks. To summarise its position, by using the German example of 1919, he declared that “this was the road that leads to ‘Noskism’”.

- Anti-fascism’ was the worst product of fascism, because it pretended that an alliance with the liberal or left parties would save the proletariat from the blows of a united bourgeois reaction. It kept up the worst illusions about the ‘democratic’ left which had peacefully ceded power to Mussolini in 1922.

The Communist Left saw the solution in the workers’ offensive against capitalism, emerging out of the economic struggle. Against a unified offensive of the bourgeoisie, the Italian proletariat could only give a unified response on its own specific terrain: the strike. This is why, while the ‘Bordigist’ leadership

rejected the political united front, it still supported the united trade union front with the socialist and anarchist unions. The PCI rallied to the 'Labour Alliance' which had been formed on the initiative of the railway workers' union and to which all the unions adhered in February 1922. However, the Communist Party, confronted with the Alliance's policy of local strikes, had to say that the latter remained "inert and passive; not only had it not undertaken the struggle, but it hadn't even said clearly that it was ready to do so, not shown that it wanted to prepare for it". In fact, at the time of the great August strike which spread all over the country, the Alliance ordered a return to work.⁷

Despite this bitter experience, the PCI, and latter the left communist minority, never questioned the slogan of the united trade union front. There was a certain lack of logic in this position: if the unions were led by the political parties, they necessarily had the policies of these parties. Consequently, it is difficult to see the basis for this distinction between the trade union united front and the political united front. Unlike the German Left, the Italian Left did not question its participation in the unions, which it continued to define as "opportunist" workers' organisations.

It was precisely the question of the united front which was to lead to an increasingly animated opposition between the 'Bordigist' leadership and the Comintern. At its 3rd Congress the Comintern had ordered the application of this 'tactic' in all countries; it had even participated in a joint meeting in Berlin between the three Internationals, in order to organise this front. At the 4th Congress, the PCI delegation opposed this slogan and declared that it:

would therefore not accept being part of joint organs of different political organisations ... (it) would also avoid participating in joint declarations with political parties, when these declarations contradicted its programme and were presented to the proletariat as the result of negotiations aimed at finding a common line of action.

The PCI also refused to take up the slogan of the "workers' government", which was the concretisation

of the political united front:

*To talk about a workers' government by declaring that we could not exclude the possibility that it could emerge from a parliamentary coalition in which the Communist Party participated amounts to a denial in practice of the political programme of communism, i.e. the necessity to prepare the masses for the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat*⁸

'Bolshevisation' and the reaction of the Left

But the main divergence between the leadership of the Comintern and that of the Italian party crystallised around the fusion between the PCI and the left of the PSI, once the latter had expelled Turati's right wing. The Comintern wanted to create a mass party in Italy on the model of the German VKPD. It thought that Serrati and Lazzari were revolutionaries from whom Bordiga's tendency was distancing itself out of "sectarianism". Even though it proclaimed that "reformists and centrists were an iron ball chained to the party's leg", that they were "nothing but the agents of the bourgeoisie in the camp of the working class", the Comintern Executive ordered a fusion without delay in order to form a united communist party. With this aim an organisation committee was formed, comprising Bordiga and Tasca for the PCI, Serrati and Fabrizio Maffi for the PSI, and Zinoviev for the Executive. Thus the Comintern gave its backing to the right wing of the party (which was a small minority, having obtained only 4,000 votes against 31,000 for the left at the Rome Congress) in the attempt to tame the 'Bordigist' leadership. The right wing tendency was composed of all the old '*ordinovisti*', except for Gramsci and Togliatti who still followed the majority. It was decided to apply Zinoviev's directives⁹.

As to the fusion, which for the Comintern was the motive for eliminating the leadership, it did not even take place. The PSI refused to accept the conditions for joining and expelled the Serrati-Maffi group around the review *Pagine Rosse*. The '*terzionalisti*' or '*terzini*' finally fused as a group in August 1924, bringing 2,000 members from a party which, under the effects of repression and above all of

demoralisation, only had 20,000 adherents.

Zinoviev's Bolshevisation had not succeeded in eliminating Bordiga's intransigent tendency, which remained the overwhelming majority of the party. The Comintern Executive then tried to neutralise its uncontested leader by asking Bordiga to return to the Italian Executive Committee. Given his disagreements, Bordiga refused. He also refused the post of deputy that was offered him — a real insult to an abstentionist. His reply was brief, and blunt: "I will never be a deputy, and the more you carry on with your projects without me, the less time you will waste." (Letter from Bordiga to Togliatti, 2 February 1924.)

In Como, in May 1924, the conference of the PCI was held in clandestinity. It was a crushing victory for the Left. 35 federation secretaries out of 45, 4 inter-regional secretaries out of 5 approved the theses presented by Bordiga, Grieco, Fortichiari and Repossi. These stated that the party had been formed in an unfavourable period; however, fascism, "by beating the proletariat had liquidated the political methods and the illusions of the old pacifist socialism", posing the alternative "dictatorship of the proletariat or dictatorship of the bourgeoisie". In particular they criticised the International for imposing the fusion and for its equivocation on the nature of maximalism. On the political level, while waging a resolute struggle against fascism, the party also had to make "a determined critique of the so-called anti-fascist bourgeois parties, as well as the social democratic parties, avoiding any policy of blocs or alliances...". But above all the left launched its attack on Bolshevisation, which had imposed a disciplinary mode of functioning. In its Naples organ, *Prometeo*, it stated that throughout the history of the workers' movement "the revolutionary orientation has been marked by a break with the discipline and hierarchical centralism of the previous organisation". The party being based on voluntary membership, discipline could only be the result of and not the premise for a healthy mode of functioning. Otherwise the latter would be reduced "to a banal rule of mechanical obedience".

But paradoxically, at the 5th Congress, Bordiga was the most resolute defender of the application of discipline, even though he maintained its previous criticisms. “We want a real centralisation, a real discipline”, he explained, to show that his intention was not, as was being claimed, to constitute a left fraction. His rejection of Zinoviev’s offer of the Vice-Presidency of the Comintern may thus seem contradictory. However, this proposal was not an innocent one: it was nothing other than an attempt to buy off the founder of the Italian Party. But Bordiga was not Togliatti.

Henceforth, the war was on between the ‘Bordigist’ tendency and the Russian leadership of the Comintern. The year 1925 was to be decisive.

1925 was the year of the active Bolshevisation of the parties. It was also the year in which the struggle of the Russian CP and the Comintern against Trotsky’s Left opposition really got under way: in January Trotsky resigned from its post as People’s Commissar. This was the year that the old ‘left’ leadership of Fischer and Maslow began to be pushed out of the KPD, and Karl Korsch began to organise its fraction. It was thus the decisive beginning of the Comintern’s struggle against its left tendencies, to the profit of a centrist leadership subordinated to Stalin.

It was therefore more out of a reaction against these policies than on its own initiative that the Italian Left found itself compelled to organise as a tendency and to wage a struggle against Gramsci-Togliatti and the Russian leadership.

In March-April 1925, the Enlarged Executive of the Comintern put the elimination of the ‘Bordigist’ tendency on the agenda of the 3rd Congress of the PCI. It forbade publication of an article by Bordiga favourable to Trotsky (‘The Trotsky Question’). The Bolshevisation of the Italian section began with the removal of Bruno Fortichiani from its post as the federal secretary of Milan. In April, the Left,

through Damen, Repossi and Fortichiari, founded an 'Entente Committee' (*Comitato di intesa*) in order to co-ordinate its activities.¹⁰

The Gramsci leadership violently attacked this Committee, denouncing it as an "organised fraction". In fact, the Left still did not want to constitute itself into a fraction; it did not want to provide any pretext for its expulsion from the party while it was still a majority. At first, Bordiga refused to adhere to the Committee, as he did not want to go outside the framework of discipline that had been imposed. It was only in June that he rallied to the position of Damen, Fortichiari and Repossi. He was given the task of drawing up a 'platform' of the left, which was the first systematic attack on Bolshevism. It condemned the politics of "manoeuvres and expediency" which aimed at the creation of a mass party on an artificial basis, "given that the relationship between the party and the masses depends essentially on the objective conditions of the situation". It condemned the system of factory cells, "negation of the centralisation of the communist parties". In an article published the same day as the platform, Bordiga emphasised that the function of these cells was to stifle any internal life and to imprison the workers in the narrow boundaries of the factory. In the name of the struggle against the "intellectuals", the power of the functionaries was being reinforced. It would be worth pausing to examine the arguments of the left which most systematically criticised the policy of Bolshevism:

- The replacement of territorial sections by cells was the abolition of the organic life of a revolutionary party, which had to present itself "as an active collectivity with a unitary leadership". It was the negation of centralisation and the bureaucratic triumph of federalism, in which the party's body would be partitioned off into watertight cells.
- 'Bolshevism' favoured particularism and individualism. The party became a sum of individual workers, attached to their professional branch. The consequence of this was corporatism and workerism, breaking the organic unity of the collectivity of the party, which must go beyond all

professional categories.

- Instead of limiting the role of “intellectuals” in the party, the system of cells had the opposite effect:

The worker, in the cell, will have a tendency to discuss only particular economic questions of interest to the workers in his enterprise. The intellectual will continue to intervene in it, not thanks to the strength of his eloquence, but more thanks to the monopoly of authority granted to him by the party centre, to ‘settle’ whatever question comes up.

Furthermore, the ‘proletarianisation’ of the party leadership, a goal proclaimed by the ‘Bolsheviks’, was so little a reality that the new leadership, in contrast to the old one, did not have one worker on the Executive.

- Having leaders with a working class origin was no guarantee of the proletarian character of the party, because “leaders from a working class extraction have shown themselves to be at least as capable as the intellectuals of opportunism and treason and, in general, more susceptible to being absorbed by bourgeois influences”.

Under the threat of expulsion, the Entente Committee had to dissolve, respecting the principle of discipline. It was the beginning of the end for the Italian Left as a majority. Since the recruitment campaigns launched by the Gramsci leadership, the party had gone from 12,000 to 30,000 militants. The newcomers were young workers and peasants entering political life for the first time; according to Togliatti, “the level of political capacity and maturity was rather low”. It was with this profoundly transformed party ¹¹ that the Lyon Congress was to eliminate definitively Bordiga’s partisans from positions of responsibility; the latter only obtained 9.2 % of the votes. But to prevent its tendency from creating a fraction, or even a new party, Gramsci brought three members of the Left into the central committee.

It was on the occasion of this congress that the famous 'Lyon Theses' were presented. These theses were to orient the politics of the Communist Left in exile.

The theses were first of all a condemnation of the politics of Gramsci, which were denounced as a pseudo-Marxist mixture of Croce and Bergson. They criticised the proposed alliance with the anti-fascist parties at the time of Matteoti's assassination, and the slogan of a "federal workers' republic" as an abandonment of Marxism.

In the second place, they gave a definitive summary of the 'Bordigist' conception of the party. In order to lead the class struggle to its final victory, the party had to act on three levels:

- theoretical: Marxism enriches itself through complex situations, and cannot be reduced to "an immutable and fixed catechism", being "a living instrument for grasping and following the laws of the historical process";
- organisational: the party is formed not out of the pure will of a small group of men, but in response to a favourable objective situation. "The revolution is not a question of organisation", and the party is "both a factor and product of historical development". The 'theses' therefore reject voluntarism and fatalism;
- intervention: the party participates in the class struggle as a party independent from all others.

In the third place, the 'Bordigist' platform rejected the kind of discipline which replaces voluntary adherence with the military law of submission to authority. It underlined the danger of degeneration in the parties of the International submitting to Bolshevisation. In the face of this danger, the 'theses' did

not envisage the constitution of a fraction, since the real danger was emerging “in the form of a subtle penetration, wearing a unitary and demagogic garb”, and was “operating from above to frustrate the initiatives of the revolutionary vanguard”.

What were the historical perspectives arising out of this degeneration? They were becoming sombre for two reasons:

- **the stabilisation of capitalism.** While recognising that the “crisis of capitalism is still open”, the “partial stabilisation” had led to “a weakening of the revolutionary workers’ movement in practically all the economically developed countries”.

- **The danger of counter-revolution in Russia.** A revolutionary policy by Russia and the Comintern would subjectively determine the future conditions of the revolution. But Russia was threatened by capitalism from within its frontiers, from its economy where bourgeois elements (state capitalism) coexisted with socialist ones. Faced with an evolution which would “make it lose its proletarian characteristics”, the Russian revolution could only be saved “through the contribution of all the parties and the International”.

In order to make such a contribution Bordiga, for the last time, in February-March 1926, took part in the 6th Enlarged Executive of the Comintern.¹² For him this was an opportunity to bid a long discussion with Trotsky and assure him of the Italian Left’s solidarity in his struggle against ‘socialism in one country’. In some extremely firm interventions, Bordiga mounted an attack on Stalin. He courageously defended the necessity for a “resistance from the left against the danger from the right”, and this “on an international scale”. He did not envisage the formation of fractions, but neither did he reject this as a possibility. He recalled that the “history of fractions is the history of Lenin”; they were not disease, but symptom of a disease. They were a reaction of “defence against opportunist

influences”.

This was the last fight by Bordiga and the Italian Left within the Comintern. From then on, it was little by little to constitute itself into a fraction of the Communist Party of Italy. After its elimination from the party, and because of its disperse into several countries under the blows of fascist repression, it was to find itself alone and isolated in its struggle to redress the Comintern. Without contact with Trotsky, who was following his own path, without support from left fractions within the International, without the possibility of developing its propaganda in Italy in the party, and in the Comintern, it found itself in the status of a very restricted minority opposition.

Relations with Karl Korsch

The first question posed to the Italian Left, therefore, was to establish links with the German Left opposition, which at that time was working towards an international regroupment of the communist lefts. These Links had already been begun in 1923, when members of Bordiga’s tendency, present in Germany, were directly in contact with the left of the KPD. Some, like Pappalardi (see Chapter 2) had even resigned from the Italian CP and formed the first organised opposition of the Italian emigration.

But it was above all with Karl Korsch, whom Bordiga had known since the 5th Congress of the Comintern, that the closest links existed. Excluded from the KPD on first May 1926, because of his opposition to the Russian state’s foreign policy, which he called red imperialism, Korsch had founded an opposition of several thousand members, ‘Die Entschiedene Linke’, the ‘Intransigent Left’, which published a review *Kommunistische Politik*. In the theses of this group, Korsch defined the Russian revolution as bourgeois, its nature having become clearer and clearer “with the reflux of the world revolution”. His group, in contrast to the Italian Left, “had abandoned all hope of a revolutionary reconquest of the Comintern¹³”.

The group's organisational goals did not appear very clearly, *Kommunistische Politik* did not define itself as a party or a fraction, and its members could be non-party or adhere to the KAPD. Nevertheless it affirmed that "in the present situation, the historic task of all Marxists consists in the new foundation of a really revolutionary class party on the national and international level, of a new communist International". But it emphasised that "it is not possible to carry out this task at the present moment". Without communist parties, the group could not see other solution than to call a new Zimmerwald :

The formula which we have found for our political and tactical use in the present moment is Zimmerwald and the Zimmerwald Left. By that we mean that in the period of the liquidation of the 3rd International we must take up the tactic of Lenin at the time of the liquidation of the 2nd International. (Letter from Korsch to the external Italian opposition group, 27 August 1926, cited by Danilo Montaldi, *Korsch e i comunisti italiani*).

This proposal was put to the Italian Left, and a letter of invitation to an international conference of the lefts to be held in Germany was sent to Bordiga, who was living in Naples. *Kommunistische Politik*, after becoming acquainted with the proceedings of the 6th Enlarged Executive, published in German in Hamburg, believed that a community of ideas and action between the two lefts could quickly be created.

The response from Bordiga and from the Italian Left — since at this stage Bordiga was in permanent correspondence with the latter — was a clear refusal. This refusal was the consequence of political divergences, not of a 'sectarian' withdrawal.

The divergences centred around the nature of the Russian revolution and the perspectives for the work of the communist Lefts:

- **The nature of Russia.** This was defined as proletarian, even if there was a real danger of counter-revolution:

Your way of expressing yourself does not seem right to me. One cannot say that the Russian revolution was a bourgeois revolution. The 1917 revolution was a proletarian revolution even if it was an error to generalise its 'tactical' lessons. Now the problem is posed as to what happens to the dictatorship of the proletariat in one country, if the revolution does not carry on in other countries. There can be a counter-revolution; there can be a process of degeneration whose symptoms and reflections within the communist party have to be discovered and defined. One cannot simply say that Russia is a country where capitalism is expanding.

- **The rejection of a split.**

We should not be in favour of splitting the parties and the International. We should allow the experience of artificial and mechanical discipline to reach its conclusion by respecting this discipline in all its procedural absurdities as long as this is possible, without ever renouncing our political and ideological critique and without ever solidarising with the dominant orientation.

- **The rejection of opposition blocs.**

I believe that one of the faults of the present International was that it was a 'bloc' of local and national oppositions.

- **The critical evaluation of the past.**

In general, I think that what must be a priority today is, more than organisation and maneuvering, a work of elaborating a political ideology of the international left, based on the eloquent experiences which the Comintern has been through. As

this point is far from being attained , any international initiative seems difficult.

For all these reasons, Bordiga concluded by rejecting any joint declaration, as he did not think this was possible in practice¹⁴.

The whole spirit of the Italian Left was summed up in this letter. First of all there was loyalty to the Russian revolution and the International which it helped to build. There was above all a fundamental difference with the other lefts — one of approach and method. The Italian Left never abandoned the battlefield before fighting to the end. This was a theoretical fight in that it sought to draw all the lessons it could from the defeat. Here its approach was similar to that of Luxemburg, for whom defeats were rich in lessons for the victories of the future. It was above all a political fight in its conception of a revolutionary organisation defining itself through the clarity of its goals, its principles and its tactics, tied together by its theoretical framework.

In contrast to the groups who precipitously proclaimed the foundation of new parties and a new International, the Italian Left always proceeded with method. As long as the International was not dead, as long as there was a breath of life in it, it would still be attached to it, like a member is attached to a body. Its conception of organisation was a unitary one: splits were an evil to be avoided, in order not to disperse the forces tending towards an international centralised organisation. Only when the death of the International was certain would it envisage forming an autonomous organisation. The foundation of the fraction of the old party, maintaining its former revolutionary programme, would be a precondition for the constitution of a new party, which could only be proclaimed during a revolutionary upheaval. The construction of the International obeyed the same laws: only the real existence of revolutionary parties in several countries could lay the bases of an International.

This organic view of the party was to be maintained until the Second World War. As the organ of an

International and a party, it wanted to develop according to the natural laws of this organ, without making any hazardous grafts, and without hurrying its free, natural development.

By 1926, the Italian Communist Left had virtually completed the elaboration of its most fundamental principles. It rejected:

- the United Front and ‘workers’ and peasants’ governments’;
- anti-fascism, and any policy not placing itself on the terrain of the class struggle;
- socialism in one country;
- the defence of bourgeois democracy.

Other theoretical points, such as the Russian question and the formation of fractions, had hardly been developed. This was to be the role of the Italian Left in emigration.

It may be asked why Bordiga’s tendency was defeated in the Italian CP. Indeed, this remains inexplicable if we forget that the Italian party was a section of the Comintern. It was not the base of the party which eliminated Bordiga, but the Comintern via Gramsci and Togliatti, making use of its hierarchical authority. The weight of the Russian party in the Comintern, which itself had become an instrument of the Russian state, swept aside all the left oppositions. In these conditions resistance was very limited. Not only had the revolutionary wave subsided, but the prestige of the Comintern, despite its degeneration, remained enormous and paralysed the will of the opposition.

All these reasons explain why the defeat was inevitable, despite all the sympathy the ‘Bordigist’ leadership had in the party. Perhaps its hesitations to resist, its semi-mechanical acceptance of discipline and its refusal to form a fraction accelerated this defeat. But while we can interpret the past, we cannot remake history with ‘ifs’.

Bordiga's development after 1926

At the end of 1926, after seeing his house ransacked by the fascists, Bordiga was arrested and condemned to three years of banishment, first in Ustica then in Ponza. With Gramsci he organised a party school of which he directed the scientific section. Dissension soon appeared among those detained. When 38 of them, including Bordiga, announced against 102 others their opposition to the anti-Trotskyist campaign, the CP leadership in Paris decided to expel the former founder of the party. This was done in March 1930, following the report of the Stalinist hit-man, Giuseppe Berti.

Whereas the Italian Left, in the prisons of Italy and abroad, carried on the struggle, Bordiga was little by little to distance himself from all political life, devoting himself to his work as an architectural engineer.

Many were astonished by his silence and put it down to his constant surveillance by the fascist police: wherever he went he was accompanied by two police agents.

In the 1930's, Trotsky asked Alfonso Leonetti, who had become a Trotskyist and knew Bordiga well since in 1924 he had been on *Prometeo's* publication committee: "Why is Bordiga not doing anything?" Leonetti replied "Bordiga thinks that everything is rotten. We have to wait for new situations to begin again." (Letter from Leonetti to PCI historian Franco Livorsi, 1/5/1974.)

This testimony is confirmed by a police report of 26 May 1936 (ACS, CPC 747, Roma) which notes a conversation between Bordiga and his brother-in-law. Bordiga declared: "It's necessary to distance oneself and wait ... wait not for this generation but for future generations." Bordiga was exhausted and disgusted by militant life, as can also be seen from this conversation of 3 July 1936 (ACS 19496,

Divisione degli affari generali e riservati): “I am happy to live outside the sordid and insignificant events of political militancy ... its day-to-day events do not interest me. I maintain my faith. I am happy in my isolation.”

Despite all the efforts of the members of the Italian Left to join up with him, Bordiga rejected all contact, limiting himself to purely informal contacts through old militants of the left like Ludovico Tarsia or Antonio Natangelo, who in 1939 was asked by Bordiga to convey his solidarity to friends in Milan, with the recommendation that they should stay faithful to themselves, without deviations and vacillations, and ready for any eventuality (ACS, Bordiga’s folder in the Central Political Archive).

As can be seen, while having the same view about the counter-revolutionary nature of the period, Bordiga and his comrades in exile arrived at very different conclusions: for the former, the impossibility of any organised work in this phase; for the others, the absolute necessity of such work, as a left fraction that had detached itself from the old party. This profound difference was to have an enormous weight — given Bordiga’s great influence — on the orientations taken up by the internationalist movement in Italy after World War 2. It seems that he expected a revolutionary resurgence to come out of war:

“If Hitler can push back the odious powers of England and America, thus making the world capitalist equilibrium more precarious, then long live the butcher Hitler who despite himself is working to create the conditions of the world proletarian revolution”. And he added: *“All wars have as their final epilogue the revolutionary deed. After the defeat comes the revolution.”* (26 May 1936, *ibid.*).

Convinced therefore that the revolution would come out of a war, Bordiga only resurfaced in 1944, in ‘Frazione dei comunisti e socialisti italiani’ (see below). Before that, he had refused all offers of collaboration made to him first by Bombacci — who had created a profascist review ‘of the left’ —

then by the Americans.¹⁵

From 1926 to 1945, the Italian Left was to follow its own course, deprived of the man who had best embodied it.

Because of its international action in several countries, the Italian Left was neither 'Italian', nor 'Bordigist'. Born in Italy, it was to develop internationally. Crystallised by the theoretical and political contribution of Bordiga, it was to become anonymous. Here it was following the essential lines of the Rome Theses, which defined the organisation as a unitary collectivity.

This label of 'Bordigism', which was often stuck to it, was always rejected by the Left in emigration, because it tended to give credence to a cult of 'great men', which it had nothing to do with, at least until the end of the war... The theoretical and political development of this left, enriched by its experience, was to go beyond and enrich the contribution of the man Bordiga. Thus the exasperated reaction of the Italian Fraction in 1933 was perfectly understandable:

On several occasions, within the Italian party, in the presence of comrade Bordiga, as well as within the International and the left opposition, we have affirmed the non-existence of 'Bordigism' as well as all the other 'isms', which have become real performances since a stockexchange of confusion and political dupery has been instituted within the communist movement. The only time the term 'Bordigist' has appeared is on the cover of our platform in French, and on this point we have explained ourselves many times. We said that this term was an error, although in the intention of the comrades it was employed only to specify, among the numerous oppositional groups of the French party, the traditions of the political currents which edited the platform.

'Bordigism', as well as the reduction of our political currents to the personality of Bordiga, is the most crass deformation of the opinions of comrade Bordiga himself, who, following Marx, has destroyed the notion of individuality as such and shown theoretically that only the collectivity and its social organisms can give a significance to the individual himself. (Bilan

no. 2, 'Pas de "Bordiguisme!").

If, during this study, we use here and there the term 'Bordigism' or talk of a 'Bordigist' current, there is no malicious intent. It is more a matter of convenience than any belief that the Italian Left had a fetish about the man Bordiga. However, in the post-war period, which saw former members of the Fraction, out of enthusiasm and sometimes without any critical spirit, join the 'party of Bordiga', or split 'for Bordiga', the term 'Bordigism' —often as one of abuse — is certainly justified.

NOTES

¹ For the history of the socialist movement before 1918, one can refer either to Bordiga's book (*Storia de la sinistra italiana*), the irreplaceable testimony of a militant, or the book by G. Arfe: *Storia del socialismo italiano (1892-1926)*, 1966, Einaudi.

² For Bordiga, *Invariance*, *Le Fil du temps*, *Programme Communiste* give all the references of the texts in their numerous re- editions. See in particular *Le Fil du Temps* no. 13, Nov. 1976, and *Programme Communiste* nos. 48-56.

³ For the PSI during the war, see the collective work *Il PSI e la grande guerra*, Firenze, 1969.

⁴ The relations between Lenin and Bordiga are studied in H. König, *Lenin und der Italienische Sozialismus (1915-1921)* Tübingen 1967. König was in correspondence with Bordiga.

⁵ Alfonso Leonetti has published a collection of texts on the question of the councils confronting Bordiga and Gramsci : *Dibattito sugli consigli di fabbrica*, 1973. *Programme Communiste* nos. 71,72 and 74 has published a number of texts in French from the debate, from a viewpoint critical of Gramsci and 'Gramscism'.

⁶ For the birth of the Italian CP, Giorgio Galli has written a very clear *Storia del partito comunista Italiano*, 1958. The programmatic texts of the Italian Communist Party can be found in *Le Fil du Temps* no. 8, October 71.

⁷ The Italian Left's conception of fascism is presented in the collection of Bordiga's texts. *Communism and Fascism*, ed. *Programme Communiste*, 1970. See also *Programme Communiste* 45-50, 'Le PC d'Italie face à l'offensive fasciste'.

⁸ See *Relazione del PC d'Italia, 4° congresso dell'Internazionale comunista, novembre 1922* ed. Iskra, Milan, 1976.

⁹ The resolution on Italy can be found in *Les Quatre Premiers Congrès de l'IC*, Maspero reprint, Paris, 1971.

¹⁰ It seems that Damen and above all Repossi were, contrary to Bordiga, in favour of the immediate formation of a left

fraction: the left elements must not take up posts, but constitute themselves into a fraction, and work among the masses, to take the party back to a healthy activity.” (Letter from Repposi to comrades, cited by Danilo Montaldi, *Korsch e i comunisti italiani*, Milan, 1975).

11 Togliatti *La formazione del gruppo dirigente del PCI*, 1962, which can usefully be compared with Stefano Merli, “Le origini della direzione centrista del PC d’Italia” in *Revista di storia del socialismo* 1964, as well as his study : “Il PCI, 1921 -1926”, Annali Feltrinelli, 1960.

12 Bordiga’s interventions can be found in French in *Programme Communiste* no. 69-70, May 1976.

13 D. Montaldi, *op. cit.* Die Entschiedene Linke, which regrouped the most intransigent left opponents of Stalinism, was in fact created in Berlin on 2 April 1926 at a conference which adopted a ‘platform of the lefts’. This pronounced itself against any spur in the KPD and the Comintern. It was extremely heterogeneous and this led the EL to break up very quickly:

- the group around Iwan Katz, strong in Nieder-Sachsen, separated from the Korsch group on 16 May 1926; with Pfemfert’s AAU-E, is founded on 28 June the ‘Spartakusbund der Linkskommunistischen Organisationen’, publishing the paper *Spartakus*. ‘Spartakusbund no. 2’ disappeared in the spring of 1927;

- the group around Schwartz, KPD deputy in the Reichstag, who had founded the EL with Korsch, separated itself on 28 September. It then published a paper *Die Entschiedene Linke* which took up the original name of the organisation. The EL merged with the KAPD in June 1927; this led to a grave crisis in the party, as Schwarz refused to abandon his seat in parliament;

- the group around Korsch, which after the September split, was then called Kommunistische Politik, from the name of the review published since 1926. Hostile to the KAPD, it was in favour of a “communist union policy”. It was for the creation of an ‘independent CP’ in an International independent from the Comintern. A propaganda group, whose militants could belong to workers parties formed around class principles (like the KAPD) to the Unionen or to revolutionary syndicalist organisations, the group practically disappeared in December 1927.

14 *Programme Communiste* no. 68, December 1975.

15 During the war, the pro-Nazi speaker Philippe Henriot (Radio Paris), as well as certain newspapers, claimed in May-June 1944 that Bordiga supported the Red Army advance in Europe as a victory for the ‘proletarian revolution’. This assertion, which perplexed the Italian Fraction in France and Belgium, is not credible. One should hear in the atmosphere of the time rumour-mongering and the most incredible falsification of information. On this point, however, the Internationalist Communist Party (ICP) never issued an official denial (on Bordiga’s political position, see the last chapter).

The communiqué published by the Italian Fraction in Marseilles can be found in its *Bulletin de Discussion* no. 7 (July 1944). It stated: “We do not think that a comrade of Bordiga’s ideological capacity could express such a position which, behind its apparently radical phraseology, can only express the position of international capitalism and its ally, ‘socialism in one

country', which has allowed it to throw the proletariat into the imperialist war. The present conditions do not allow us to establish the truth rapidly and precisely?.