

Conclusion

Some sceptical souls may find it strange that we should publish this book today, in a world where the "official" press exults (less and less with the economic crisis) over the death of "communism" and "socialism" (State Capitalism) in the now defunct Eastern bloc; where the definitive victory of "the market" (Private Capitalism) is accepted even by parties calling themselves "socialist"; and where the end of the world's division into opposing blocs supposedly opens the radius prospect of capitalism's invincible, harmonious, and endless development, bringing freedom and prosperity for all in its wake. Why, in such a world, devote any time to a tiny group of Italian émigrés, completely isolated and without any impact on social life? Besides, in the present climate, the ideas of "world revolution" or "proletariat" have gone out of fashion, and remain of interest only to a few dusty academics or retarded romantics.

History is not 'neutral': it is made by social classes, which give it their own orientation. Men make their own history, as Marx said last century. The fate of humanity depends on the action or inaction of revolutionary classes, whether it moves towards new progress, or ineluctable decline. World capitalism's entry, in 1914, into its phase of historic decline, with its train of world wars, permanent crises, and generalised social disintegration, is a decisive moment in history. At stake today is nothing less than the fate of humanity itself: socialism or barbarism. Either a world revolution, which will sweep away the cause of all the local and world-wide conflicts that mankind suffers today, or the continued survival of world capitalism, which will drag humanity down into a bottomless abyss of war, famine, and

destruction, even to the point of destroying humanity itself and the planet on which we live.

This terrible historic dilemma was condensed by the IIIrd International in 1919, and by the Italian Left after it, into the phrase: "war or revolution". It took all the weight of a crushing counter-revolution, sweeping away everything in its path in the name of "socialism in one country" and "anti-fascism" to bury in oblivion even the memory of the revolutionary wave which shook (shortly) the world between 1917 and 1921. During these years, the proletariat made the capitalist class tremble, from Russia to Germany, from Italy to Hungary. Then, the world revolution was not a "utopia" but a burning and immediate question.

The defeat of the revolution in Germany, where the Social Democratic Party drowned the workers' insurrection in blood, and the crushing defeat of the Russian workers by Leninist then Stalinist state capitalism, left the way clear for the most merciless and thorough counter-revolution in history. Capitalism's myths triumphed all down the line. The myth of "socialism in one country", the "construction of socialism" and the "socialist fatherland", and finally the myth of a "Proletarian State".

The myth of the defence of democracy, and "anti-fascism". The myth of the "moral " war against fascism. The myth of the Resistance. The myth of the national liberation struggle, "progressive" nationalism, and "anti-imperialism". Since 1989, the myth of "communism" in the East has been buried under the ruins of the collapsing Russian economy, only to be replaced by still more shameless lies: that the utterly bankrupt and decomposed state capitalism of the Russian economy is the true face of the so-called (and anti-) workers' revolution of October 1917; and the falsification of the Trotskyists, who having served faithfully all these years as Stalinism's acolytes, now claim to have been its first, indeed its only critics within the working class.

Each new triumph of the counter-revolution was presented as a new victory for the "revolution" and "socialism". The 50 million dead in World War II were the "price" of "democracy's" victory over fascism. The hysterical cries of "Viva la muerte" from the both imperialist camps submerged the faint appeals of the few groups of revolutionary workers, who called for the fraternisation of workers all over the world, and not their mutual slaughter.

In this period - the most tragic, and the most demoralising of the whole history of the revolutionary workers' movement - the Italian Communist Left appeared. Profoundly tied to the whole revolutionary movement of the 1920s, born in Italy and internationally, it was never a "sect": although after 1926 it remained numerically weak, far always kept its links with the proletariat both through its militants and above all through its internationalist positions. Far from putting its own "interests" as an organisation to the fore - which is characteristic of a sect - it aimed at the unity of all existing revolutionary forces that had broken with stalinism. More than anything, it fought for the triumph of the world revolution, not its own existence as a group. Nor was it "sectarian" in defending the positions of the only class capable of offering an alternative to growing barbarism, to war, and to the general crisis of world capital: the proletariat. Those who talk with contempt of the "sectarian" nature of the old Communist Left, whether German or Italian, are the same who, yesterday and today, have chosen their camp: alongside the so-called "socialist camp" of Stalinism and the official "workers' parties". These were certainly more numerous than the tiny communist groups. They were, and still are, "with the masses": but always with the aim of leading the masses away from their revolutionary goal.

In the 1930s, the Italian Communist Left had to take the difficult decision to isolate itself from the working class "masses" which had been won over ideologically to the counter-revolution, so as not to

betray. This "purism" was in fact an unconditional fidelity to the workers' cause, even if the workers themselves had temporarily turned away from the revolution. Far from giving into the immediatism and activism which swept so many revolutionary groups into the void, it fought "against the current" with all its strength. It was working, not for immediate success, but for the long term to preserve from the wreckage all the theoretical gains of the 1920s revolutionary wave.

Such a resistance may surprise those who understand nothing about the proletariat and the revolution. They will undoubtedly see it as nothing more than a few workers' nostalgic attachment to the heady days of revolutionary events in Italy between 1917 and 1920. It is true that the revolutionary events of the period galvanised all these young revolutionaries who later were to found the Italian Fraction. This was their true theoretical school. Certainly, the counterrevolution might wear down the best, even to the point of betrayal, but the power of a proletarian movement is such that even after it is crushed, the furrow it has ploughed in the spirit remains. And it is stunning to realise, in studying the history of both Italian and Dutch Communist Lefts, that most of their militants remained revolutionaries into old age.

Even in the midst of the counterrevolution, the proletariat's class consciousness does not disappear completely. Revolutionary minorities, no matter how weak, always appear to make a balance-sheet of the past, and to prepare the conditions for the victory to come. This constant effort by revolutionary minorities to enrich and develop revolutionary theory, to subject the positions of the past to the critical acid test, is not something meaningless, or absurd. It is the proof that the proletariat continues to live even in defeat. Contrary to what Vercesi said during the war, the proletariat does not disappear. It is an exploited class, and its resistance to exploitation continues, even though it may be temporarily diverted from its revolutionary goal. It retains its revolutionary potential, however far off its realisation.

Is this belief in the future revolution nothing but a revived mysticism? The events of 1968 in France, 1969-1973 in Italy, Spain, Great-Britain, the events of 1980 in Poland, but also the unprecedented struggles waged during the 1980s throughout the world, are there to show that the proletarian revolution is not a "myth" from the past, of interest only to nostalgic of revolutionary imagery. The difficult resurgence of the proletariat (Class struggles in France, December 1995; strikes in Korea) has there to show that the "purist" positions of the Communist Left were not and are not merely a "utopia" of a few unrepentant dreamers.

The history of the Communist Left is not "neutral". It cannot be reduced to an inoffensive historical "science", looking down on the social battlefield. In today's world of terminally diseased and rotting capitalism, the alternative posed 50 years ago by the Communist Left is more valid than ever: "World Revolution, or the destruction of humanity" (and of the nature too) is the choice before us.

By rejecting all the myths developed by the greatest counterrevolution in history, by remaining faithful to internationalism, by criticising mercilessly the "weaknesses" of the Communist International which led to its betrayal, the Italian Communist Left had fulfilled partially its task. Despite its progressive Leninist degeneration after 1945 to the point of complete fossilisation or blow-up (1982), the theoretical lessons contained in *Prometeo*, *Bilan*, *Communisme*, and *Octobre*, are still reach of political lessons. If this brief history of their struggle allows all those who have thrown in their lot with the working class, to bridge the gap between their past and their present, it will have fulfilled its task also.

Today bolshevism, leninism and stalinism are fortunatly dead ideologies, whose lethal effects had contributed to crush mercilessly the proletarian revolution in Russia (Workers Councils), in Europe and in Asia (China). The rebirth of a true proletarian revolution depends not only of the economic class

struggles but of the appropriation of the Marxist lessons left by all communist Lefts : Italian and Dutch-German Lefts.

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