

A Look at the Last Letters Exchanged Between Antonio Gramsci and Palmiro Togliatti

(October 1926 - April 1927)

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Preface

Antonio Gramsci and Palmiro Togliatti were both founding members and leaders of the Italian Communist Party (PCI); prominent figures whose fame was not limited to Italian society but had global dimensions: Gramsci for his long imprisonment in the clutches of Mussolini's fascist regime but certainly more importantly for the creation of his monumental, enigmatic work during this period, *The Prison Notebooks*; and Togliatti for his role and position, both as the head of the Italian Communist Party and, in the Comintern.

What you will read in this collection are the last letters exchanged between Gramsci and Togliatti in October 1926, and a relatively long text by Togliatti titled "Guidelines for the Study of Russian Problems," written in April 1927.

The importance of these texts, and indeed the necessity of revisiting them here, is that through these historical documents, we can become better acquainted with Gramsci's mode of thinking and methodology and evaluate it, albeit briefly. Moreover, although these texts cannot be considered a complete reflection of the intellectual evolution of these two Italian thinkers, nonetheless, clear signs of and the grounds for the later developments of their thoughts (both Gramsci's liberalism and Togliatti's "Italian road to socialism") can be traced in them. In this preface, we will pause solely on one aspect of Gramsci's mode of thinking and methodology, which is related to the first text.

The first text is a letter that Gramsci wrote on behalf of the Politburo of the PCI to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CC-CPSU) sent to Togliatti, who was then in Moscow, so that it would reach the CC of the Party. The second text is a letter written by Togliatti in response to the views expressed in Gramsci's letter. And the third text is a reply from Gramsci to Togliatti's letter. The fourth text, however, is an article that Togliatti published in a periodical called "The

Workers' State"^[1] which is in fact a response to the views existing among the communist parties in the West, including Gramsci's views, on some internal issues in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and specifically, the formation of the opposition and the split in the CC of the CPSU.

In his first letter, Gramsci, while emphasizing the importance of the role of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the revolutionary movement of the international proletariat, argues that any division and crisis in this Party would destroy revolutionary enthusiasm and morale not only within communist parties, but also among the broad masses of workers in other countries, and therefore, must be prevented at all costs.

Needless to say, the essence and importance of the issues that Gramsci addresses in this letter, as well as the sincerity of his concerns are unquestionable and by and large acceptable. But what is questionable and worthy of reflection is the way Gramsci views and approaches these issues. Gramsci's view of the existence of the Party is a mystical one, and his approach as to how to ensure unity within the Party is an ethical one.

In order to resolve the crisis in the Soviet Communist Party at that time, Gramsci calls on the majority of the Central Committee in this letter to, as the saying goes, be magnanimous and not "crush" the opposition in the minority, while at the same time, he also warns the opposition that: you have been "among our teachers" and since "unity within our fraternal Party in Russia is essential for the progress and victory of the revolutionary forces of the world... every communist and internationalist must be ready to make the greatest sacrifices," therefore (according to Gramsci) it is imperative that the parties **moderate** their contradictions with forgiveness and sacrifice and, for the sake of the interests of the proletariat, overcome these contradictions through **compromise**.

¹ Togliatti was the founder and editor of the periodical "The Workers' State" which he relaunched clandestinely in Paris on March 1, 1927. He supervised it for 12 years, until August 15, 1939. It indirectly played a role as the intellectual guidance for the Italian Communist Party.

Gramsci's grasp of the existence of the Party and of the relations between its internal components is idealist. It is as if we are dealing with a homogeneous totality (the Party) whose unitary substance and essence are infused in all its derivatives (Party members), in other words, as if the Particular is derived from the Universal; thus, the derivatives are all "of the same essence." However, in reality, the opposite is the case. That is, the Party is a social construct which is the creation and outcome of its components, and in fact, it is the members of the Party and their views and actions that determine the identity and essence of the Party, and not vice versa.

Let us put this philosophical abstraction on the ground of facts to make the matter a little clearer. The fact is that the Party and the intra-Party struggles are, indeed, a reflection of the class struggle within the Party, and that these internal struggles within the Party are themselves a reflection of the process of class struggle in wider society. Therefore, we must ask whether it is possible to carry out class struggle by appealing to morality? The history of class struggles itself proves otherwise. In fact, we must stipulate that **class struggle is not a moral struggle, nor is the ideological struggle that stems from it a moral struggle, although the opposing sides will always leave the stamp of their own particular moralities.** For example, we know that the Bolsheviks did not resort to moral advice in response to the incorrect and deviant positions of the Mensheviks, nor did they modify their positions in order to overcome their differences with the Mensheviks, but, on the contrary, they stood up to them and, through criticism and exposure, smash the Mensheviks' views and remove them from the path of struggle. In principal, it must be emphasized that ideological struggle cannot be reduced to a moral struggle. This is, however, precisely the position and behaviour that Gramsci adopts.

Gramsci, as Togliatti also suggests in his letter to him (the second in this series), presents a contradictory position regarding the crisis that has arisen at the core of the Party. In the sense that, on the one hand, he considers the opposition "primarily responsible for the present situation," but at the same time, he is unwilling to differentiate between the majority of the Central Committee and the minority

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opposition, and their positions, thus evading to defend the correct line against the incorrect line. In other words, he adopts an ambivalent position in this regard. This ambivalence also appears later in the Prison Notebooks—a disorder that has been appropriately referred to as “antinomy.” And this antinomy, in my opinion, is largely due to the oscillation between Hegelianism and Marxism, an oscillation whose thorough and comprehensive explanation requires a separate and independent article.

A comparative study of these four texts will exhibit various aspects of the above claims, as well as Gramsci’s other questionable viewpoints and positions. Interestingly, (as far as I have found) only two of the four texts in question are readily and abundantly available in English, and they are Gramsci’s letters. The two texts belonging to Togliatti, included in this collection, are only available in Italian, and that too, in a hard to reach and rather rare manner. This, regardless of its reasons, and whether intentional or unintentional, is wrong and reprehensible. Because the lack of access to all four texts, and consequently the inability to study them all together, casts a shadow on the whole truth and, as a result, leads to a fragmentary understanding.

And lastly, it is necessary to clarify that all four texts and all footnotes are taken from their Italian versions on the website below. The footnotes for Gramsci’s first letter were provided by the administrators of the aforementioned website, but the footnotes for the fourth text are from the author of the article, Togliatti himself. Note that the administrators of the aforementioned website, from their own perspective and addressed to the Italian-speaking audience of the website, have also written an introduction to these texts, which I have not translated, but is available at the link below.

A. Behrang
March 2025

https://www.associazionestalin.it/gramsci_togliatti_PCUS.pdf

Letter of the Political Bureau of the CPI to the CC of the RCP

[²]

(October 14, 1926)

Dear Comrades:

The Italian communists and all class-conscious workers of our country have always followed your discussions with the greatest attention. On the eve of each Congress and each conference of the R.C.P. we have always been confident that, despite the harshness of the polemics, the unity of the Party was not in danger; moreover, we were sure that upon reaching a higher ideological and organic homogeneity, through such discussions, the Party would be better prepared and equipped to overcome the many difficulties inherent in the exercise of power in a workers' state.

Today, on the eve of your XV Conference,^[3] we do not have the same assurance as in the past, we feel very anxious; it seems to us that the current stance of the opposition bloc and the harshness of the polemics in the CP of the USSR demand the intervention of the fraternal parties. It is precisely this deep conviction that impels us to send you this letter. It could be that the isolation in which our Party is forced to live has led us to exaggerate the dangers relating to the internal situation of the

² This confidential letter, written by Gramsci on 14 October 1926 and signed on behalf of the Political Office of the PCI, was sent to Moscow, to Palmiro Togliatti who represented the Italian party in the executive of the Communist International. The text was published for the first time by Angelo Tasca in the magazine *Problemi della Rivoluzione Italiana* in April 1938 and reprinted, later, in numerous collections of Gramsci's writings. [Gramsci's text, as well as Togliatti's response and Gramsci's subsequent reply is taken from Gramsci, *Le opere, La prima antologia di tutti gli scritti*, edited by Antonio Santucci, Editori Riuniti, 1997, pp. 164-178. Editor's note].

³ The 15th Soviet Party Conference opened on October 27, 1926.

Communist Party of the USSR; in any case our judgments about the international repercussions of this situation are not exaggerated and, as internationalists, we must do our duty.

The internal situation of our fraternal party of the USSR seems different and much more serious than in the preceding discussions, because we see materialized and verified a split in the Leninist central group that has always been the core leadership of the Party and the International. A split of this kind, regardless of the numerical results in the votes of the Congress, may have the most serious repercussions, not only if the minority opposition does not accept with the highest loyalty the fundamental principles of revolutionary discipline of the Party, but also if it exceeds, in the course of its struggle, certain limits that are higher than any formal democracy.^[4]

One of the most precious teachings of Lenin has been that we must study deeply the judgments of our class enemies. Well, dear comrades, the fact is that the newspapers and most notable statesmen of the international bourgeoisie are carefully contemplating the organic nature of the conflict in the fundamental core of the Communist Party of the USSR, they are counting on a split in our fraternal party and they are convinced that this will lead to the disintegration and the slow death of the proletarian dictatorship, that this split will result in the catastrophe of the revolution that the invasions and insurrections of the White Guards failed to achieve.

The same cold circumspection with which the bourgeois press today tries to analyze the Russian events, the fact that try to avoid, as far as it is possible, the violent demagoguery that characterized it in the past, are symptoms that should give pause to the Russian comrades, to make them more conscious of their responsibility.

⁴ The formation of the opposition bloc to the majority of Stalin and Bukharin, led by Zinoviev, Kamenev and Trotsky, had been announced by the latter to the Central Committee on 13-23 July 1926. The political bureau of the Italian Communist Party had been informed of the harshness of the conflict by Togliatti, present at the sessions of the Bolshevik Central Committee.

There is yet another motive for the international bourgeoisie to take account of the possible split, or the aggravation of the internal crisis within the Communist Party of the USSR. The workers' state in Russia has existed already for nine years. It is true that only a small minority of the labouring classes, and even of the communist parties themselves in other countries, are able to reconstruct in its whole the full development of the revolution and to find, even in the details that make up the daily life of the State of the Soviets, the continuity of the red thread leading to the general perspective of the building of socialism. And this is not only in those countries in which there is no freedom of assembly and freedom of the press has been completely suppressed or is under unprecedented limitations, as in Italy (where the courts have confiscated and prohibited the printing of books by Trotsky, Lenin, Stalin, Zinoviev and finally even the Communist Manifesto), but also in countries where even our parties are free to provide their members and the masses in general sufficient information. In these countries, the large masses cannot understand the discussions that take place in the Communist Party of the USSR, particularly when they lead to the current violence and affect not one aspect of the detail, but the whole political line of the Party. Not only the working masses in general, but the very mass of our parties see and want to see in the Republic of Soviets, and in the party that is in government, a united combat unit acting in the general perspective of socialism. And it is only because the masses in Western Europe see Russia and the Russian party from this point of view, they accept voluntarily, and as a necessary historical fact, that the Communist Party of the USSR should be the leading party of the International, so today only the Republic of Soviets and the Communist Party of the USSR constitute a formidable element of organization and revolutionary impulse.

The bourgeois and social-democratic parties, for the same reason, are exploiting the internal polemics and conflicts in the Communist Party of the USSR; they want to fight against the influence of the Russian revolution, against the revolutionary unity that is being forged throughout the world around the Communist Party of the USSR.

Dear comrades, it is extremely significant that in a country like Italy, where the state and party organizations of fascism have managed to crush every important expression of independent life of the great masses of workers and peasants, it is significant that the fascist newspapers, especially in the provinces, are full of articles, technically well prepared for propaganda, with a minimum of demagoguery and insulting language, which seek to demonstrate, with evident effort at objectivity, that now, according to the expressions of the best-known leaders of the opposition bloc of the Communist Party of the USSR themselves, the Soviet State is changing, from all evidence, into a pure capitalist state, and that therefore, in the worldwide duel between fascism and Bolshevism, fascism will prevail. This campaign shows well how enormous is the sympathy enjoyed by the Republic of Soviets among the great masses of the Italian people, who for six years in some regions have not received more than a little illegal party literature; this also shows that fascism, which knows very well the actual Italian internal situation, has learned to work with the masses and try to use the political stance of the opposition bloc to definitively break the strong hostility of the workers towards the Mussolini government and to achieve, at least, a state of mind in which fascism appears as an inevitable historical necessity, notwithstanding its inherent cruelty and calamities.

We believe that in the framework of the International, our party is the one that is suffering the greatest impact of the grave situation in the Communist Party of the USSR. And not only for reasons that are, let us say, external, related to the general conditions of the revolutionary development in our country. You know that all the parties of the International have inherited from the old social democracy and the different national traditions existing in each country (anarchism, syndicalism, etc.) a mass of prejudices and ideological motives that represent the cause of all the deviations from the right and left. In recent years, and particularly after the Fifth World Congress, our parties were arriving, through painful experience, through painful and debilitating crises, at an effective Leninist stabilization; they were becoming true Bolshevik parties. Our proletarian cadres were being formed at the

base, in the factories; the intellectual elements were being subjected to a rigorous selection and to a harsh and severe ordeal of practical work in the field of action.

This restructuring was taking place under the guidance of the Communist Party of the USSR, in its united structure, and of all the great leaders of the Party of the USSR. The sharpness of the current crisis and the threat of a split, whether open or latent, is paralyzing this process of development and restructuring of our parties, it crystallizes the right and left deviations, retards once more the success of the organic unity of the world Party of the workers. It is particularly about this aspect that we consider it our internationalist duty to draw the attention of the most responsible comrades of the Communist Party of the USSR. Comrades, in these nine years of world history you have been the organizing and promoting element of the revolutionary forces of all countries; the role that you have played is unprecedented in the whole history of humankind in its breadth and depth. But today you are destroying your own work, you are degrading and running the risk of destroying the leading role that the Communist Party of the USSR had won under the leadership of Lenin; it seems to us that the violent passion of the Russian questions makes you lose sight of the international aspects of these Russian questions themselves, that it makes you forget that your duties as Russian militants can and should be realized only in the framework of the interests of the international proletariat.

The Political Bureau of PCI has studied with the utmost promptness and attention possible all the problems that are now being discussed in the Communist Party of the USSR. The questions confronting you today may confront us tomorrow. In our country as well the rural masses form the majority of the working population. On the other hand, the problems inherent in the hegemony of the proletariat will be presented to us in a manifestly more complex and acute form than in Russia itself, because the density of the rural population in Italy is enormously greater, because our peasants have a very rich organizational tradition and they have always managed to make the specific weight of the masses felt very sensibly in the national

political life, because in our country the Church's organizational apparatus has two thousand years of tradition and has specialized in the propaganda and in the organization of the peasants, in a manner unequaled in any other country. While it is true that our industry is more developed and that the proletariat has a notable material base, it is also true that this industry does not have raw materials in the country and therefore finds itself more exposed to the crises; therefore the proletariat can only play its leading role if it shows a great spirit of sacrifice and is fully freed of all remnants of reformist or trade union corporatism.

From this realist, and we believe Leninist, point of view, the Political Bureau of PCI has studied your discussions. So far we have expressed the opinion of the party only on the strict question of the discipline of the factions, wanting to stick to the recommendation that you made after the XIV Congress^[5] to not bring the discussion of your problems to the sections of the International. We declare at this point that we consider fundamentally correct the policy of the majority of the CC of the Communist Party of the USSR and that obviously the majority of the Italian party will state this in this sense if it is necessary to address the issue. We do not want, and we consider it unnecessary, to make agitation and propaganda with you and with the comrades of the opposition bloc. We have not made a list of all the particular questions, with our position on each one. We repeat that we are impressed that the position of the oppositions affects the whole of the political line of the CC, that it goes to the heart of the Leninist doctrine and the political activity of our Party of the Union. At issue is the principle and practice of the hegemony of the proletariat, the fundamental relations of the alliance between the workers and peasants that is being questioned and put in danger, that is, the pillars of the Workers' State and of the Revolution.

Comrades, it has never in history been the case that a ruling class, as a whole, has living conditions inferior to those of certain elements and strata of the dominated and subjected class. History has reserved this unprecedented contradiction to the

⁵ The 14th Congress of the Soviet Party ended on December 31, 1925.

proletariat; in this contradiction lies the greatest dangers for the dictatorship of the proletariat, particularly in countries where capitalism has not achieved a great development and has not been able to unify the productive forces. And it is from this contradiction, which also appears elsewhere in some respects in some capitalist countries in which the proletariat has objectively reached a high social function, from which arise reformism and syndicalism, the corporate spirit and the stratifications of the labor aristocracy. And nevertheless, the proletariat cannot become the ruling class if it does not overcome this contradiction with the sacrifice of the corporatist interests; it cannot maintain its hegemony and dictatorship if, despite having become the ruling class, it does not sacrifice its immediate interests for the general and permanent interests of the class.

In effect, it is easy to be demagogic on this matter; it is easy to dwell on the negative aspects of the contradiction: "Are you the ruler, or a poorly dressed and poorly fed worker? Or are you the NEP man,^[6] with his fur coat and all goods of the earth at his disposal?" The reformists also, after a revolutionary strike that has increased the cohesion and discipline of the masses, but has further impoverished the workers, say: "Why have you fought? Now you are worse off and poorer." It is easy to be demagogic in this area and it is hard not to do so when the question has been raised in terms of the corporatist spirit and not one of Leninism, of the doctrine of the hegemony of the proletariat which is situated in one determined position and not in another.

This is for us the essential element of your discussion, where the root of the errors of the opposition bloc resides and the origin of the latent dangers contained in its activity. In the ideology and practice of the opposition bloc there are reborn the whole tradition of social democracy and trade unionism, a tradition that has prevented, until now, the Western proletariat from organizing itself as the ruling class.

⁶ Man of the NEP, the New Economic Policy launched in Russia by Lenin after the 10th Communist Congress in March 1921, which partially liberalized agricultural trade.

Only a firm unity and a firm discipline in the Party that rules the workers' State can ensure the proletarian hegemony in the NEP regime, that is, in the full development of the contradiction that we have emphasized. But unity and discipline in this case cannot be mechanical and forced; they must be loyal and out of conviction and not that of a prisoner or besieged enemy detachment who only thinks of an evasion or a surprise escape.

This, dear comrades, is what we meant to say to you in the spirit of friends and brothers, even if we are younger brothers. Comrades Zinoviev, Trotsky and Kamenev have contributed vigorously to educate us for the revolution, they have corrected us, sometimes forcefully and with severity; they have been our teachers. We direct ourselves especially to them since they are primarily responsible for the current situation, because we want to be sure that the majority of the CC of the USSR does not intend to crush them in the struggle and is willing to avoid extreme measures. The unity of our fraternal Russian party is necessary for the development and triumph of the world revolutionary forces; for this every communist and internationalist must be willing to make the greatest sacrifices. The damages caused by an error of a united Party are easily surmountable; those of a split or a prolonged situation of a latent split may be irreparable and fatal.

**With communist greetings,
Political Bureau of PCI
[Antonio Gramsci]**

Togliatti's personal response to Gramsci's Letter

18 October 1926

Dearest Antonio, I am writing to you very briefly to express my opinion on the letter from the political bureau of the Italian Communist Party to the central committee of the Communist Party of the USSR. I do not agree with this letter, for some reasons, which I will indicate to you very schematically.

1. The essential defect of the letter consists in its formulation. In the foreground is placed the fact of the split that has taken place in the leading group of the Communist Party of the Union and only in a second plane is placed the problem of the correctness or incorrectness of the line that is being followed by the majority of the Central Committee. This procedure is characteristic of the way in which many comrades of Western parties consider and judge the problems of the Communist Party of the Union, but it does not correspond to an exact formulation of these problems. There is no doubt that the unity of the leading group of the Russian Communist Party has a value that is not comparable to the value of the unity of the leading groups of other parties. This value derives from the historical task that has fallen to this group in the constitution of the International. However, however great it may be, it must not lead us to judge the questions of the Russian Communist Party on the basis of a line other than the line of principles and political positions. The danger inherent in the position taken in your letter is great because, probably, from now on, the unity of the old Leninist guard will no longer be or will be very difficult to achieve continuously. In the past the greatest factor in this unity was Lenin's enormous prestige and personal authority.

This element cannot be replaced. The party line will be established through discussions and debates. We must accustom ourselves to keeping our nerves in check and to have our comrades at the base keep theirs in check. And we must initiate ourselves and the party militants into the knowledge of Russian problems so that we can judge them following the line of principles and political positions. The help that the other parties of the International must give to the Russian Communist Party consists in this study of Russian questions and not in the appeal for unity of the leading group. What you say about the need for intervention by these parties in the conflict between the Central Committee and the opposition is therefore correct, but this intervention can only take place in the form of a contribution, on the basis of our revolutionary experience, to establish and confirm the exact Leninist line in the solution of Russian problems.

If our intervention has another starting point, there is a danger that it is not useful, but harmful.

2. The consequence of this erroneous starting point is that in the first half of your letter, precisely the one in which you set out the consequences that a split in the Russian party (and its leading nucleus) could have on the Western movement, you speak indifferently of all the leading Russian comrades, that is, you make no distinction between the comrades who are at the head of the Central Committee and the leaders of the opposition.

On page two of the folders written by Antonio, the Russian comrades are invited "to reflect and be more aware of their responsibilities" There is no hint of a distinction between them.

On page 6 it says:

"It is on this element in particular that we believe it is our duty as internationalists to draw the attention of the most responsible comrades of the Communist Party of the USSR. Comrades, you have been in these nine years of world history the organizing and propelling element of the revolutionary forces of all countries; the function that

you have carried out has no precedent in the whole history of the human race that equals it in breadth and depth. But today you are destroying your work, you are degrading and running the risk of nullifying the leading role that the Communist Party of the USSR had conquered thanks to the impulse of Lenin; it seems to us that the violent passion of the Russian questions makes you lose sight of the international aspects of the Russian questions themselves, makes you forget that your duties as Russian militants can and must be fulfilled only within the framework of the interests of the international proletariat."

Here too, there is no distinction, even remotely. One can only conclude that the political office of the Italian Communist Party considers that everyone is responsible, everyone must be called to order.

It is true that in the closing of the letter this attitude is corrected. It says that Zinoviev, Kamenev and Trotsky are the "major" responsible and adds: "We want to be sure that the majority of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR does not intend to win the struggle by a landslide and is willing to avoid excessive measures."

The expression "we want to believe" has a limiting value, that is, it means that *we are not sure*.

Now, apart from any considerations on the appropriateness of intervening in the current Russian debate by attributing a bit of blame to the central committee, apart from the fact that such a position can only be resolved to the *total* benefit of the opposition, apart from these considerations of appropriateness, can it be said that the central committee is a bit of a wrong? I don't think so. This is proven by the attempts made before the 14th congress to reach an agreement and, what is more important, it is proven by the policy followed after the 14th congress, which was prudent and which cannot in any way be blamed for being a policy conducted blindly in one direction. As for the internal life of the party, the Russian centre is no more responsible for the discussion, for the factionalism of the opposition, for the

acuteness of the crisis, etc. than we, the Italian centre, were responsible for Bordiga's factionalism, for the constitution and activity of the committee of understanding, etc. There is undoubtedly a rigor in the internal life of the Communist Party of the Union. But there must be. If the Western parties wanted to intervene with the ruling group to make this rigor disappear, they would commit a very serious mistake. In this case, the dictatorship of the proletariat could really be compromised.

I therefore consider that the first half of your letter and the concluding expressions that are connected with it are politically a mistake. This mistake spoils what is good in the letter (and even in its first part).

One more observation on this point. It is right that foreign parties should see with concern the worsening of the crisis of the Russian Communist Party, and it is right that they should try to make it less acute as much as they can. It is however certain that, when one agrees with the line of the Central Committee, the best way to contribute to overcoming the crisis is to express one's adherence to this line without placing any limitations. If the Russian opposition had not counted on the support of some opposition groups, or of entire parties of the International, it would not have maintained the attitude it maintained after the XIV Congress. The experience

It shows that the opposition makes use of the slightest oscillations which are also evident in the judgement of groups and parties which are known to be in agreement with the central committee.

3. In the passage I quoted above in which the Russian comrades are called to their responsibility, it is said that they lose sight of the international aspects of Russian questions. In this statement, it is lost sight of the fact that after the 14th Congress the Russian discussion has shifted from predominantly Russian problems to international ones. The omission of this fact explains why the letter does not mention these international problems, and this is a third serious defect.

4. Your letter is too optimistic when it speaks of the Bolshevization that was taking place after the Fifth Congress, and it seems that you attribute the arrest of the

process of consolidation of the Communist Parties only to the Russian discussion. Here too there is a limitation of judgment and an error of evaluation. On the one hand, it must be recognized that the Bolshevik solidity of some of the leading groups placed at the head of our parties by the Fifth Congress was entirely external (France, Germany, Poland), so that subsequent crises were inevitable. On the other hand, it must be recognized that these crises are connected much more than with the Russian discussion, with the change in the objective situation and with its repercussions within the vanguard of the working class. The Russian crisis is also connected to this change, as are all the rest of the previous crises and discussions, and in particular, for example, that which was closed by the Tenth Congress and which has the greatest analogy with the present one.

5. The letter is too pessimistic, however, not only about the consequences of the Russian discussion, but in general about the ability of the proletarian vanguard to understand what the line of the Russian Communist Party is and to make the working masses understand it. For this reason you overestimate the harmful consequences of the Russian discussion within the Western proletariat and your pessimism gives the impression that you do not consider the party's line to be entirely correct. If this line is correct and corresponds to the objective conditions, we must be able to make the masses understand its value and we must also be able to keep the masses gathered around Russia and the Bolshevik Party despite the discussions. Through discussions and splits the Bolshevik Party succeeded in conquering the leadership of the Russian proletariat. It seems to me that today you understand the historical role of the Russian party and of the Russian Revolution in an external way. It is not so much the unity of the leading group (which has never been an absolute thing) that made the Russian party the organizer and the driving force of the post-war world revolutionary movement, but rather the fact that the Russian party led the working class to conquer power and to remain in power.

Does the party's current line condemn it to fail in this historic task or not? The question of the position of the Russian party in the international workers' movement

Togliatti's personal response to the letter written by Gramsci

must be posed in this way, if one does not want to fall straight into the arguments of the opposition.

These are just a few hastily made observations. But they are, I believe, the fundamentals. Let me know your thoughts on this.

Fraternally

Palmiro Togliatti

Gramsci's reply to Togliatti

October 26, 1926

Dearest Ercoli:

I received your letter of the 18th. I'm responding on a personal basis, though satisfied that I express the opinion of the other comrades.

Your letter seems to me too abstract and schematic in its reasoning. Our point of departure – which seems to me to be accurate – is that in our countries there exist not only parties – understood as technical organizations – but also the great working masses, politically stratified in a contradictory way, but on a whole inclining towards unity. Among the most energizing elements of the unitary process is the existence of the USSR, combined with the real activity of the CPUSSR and the widespread conviction that the USSR is on the road to socialism. Insofar as our parties represent the entire complex of activities of the USSR they have a determining influence on all political strata, representing the unitary tendency progressing on a historical terrain fundamentally favorable, despite the contrary superstructures.

But there's no need to believe that this element, which makes of the CPUSSR the most potent mass organizer that has ever appeared in history, has already acquired a stable and decisive form: on the contrary. It is still unstable. We shouldn't forget that the Russian Revolution has already been in existence for nine years, and that its current activity is an amalgamation of partial political and governmental acts that only a highly developed theoretical and political consciousness can grasp as a whole and in its overall movement towards socialism. Not only for the great laboring masses, but for a notable part of the members of the western parties – who are

differentiated from the masses only by the radical initial step towards a developed political consciousness which is entry into the Party – the overall movement of the Russ. Rev. is concretely represented by the fact that the Russian party advances in a unitary fashion; that the representative men that the masses know and have gotten used to knowing work and move forward together. The question of unity, not only of the R.P., but of the Leninist nucleus, is therefore a question of the greatest importance on an international level. And *from the point of view of the masses* this is the also the most important question in this historical period of an intensified, inconsistent process towards unity.

It is possible and probable that unity can't be preserved, at least in the form it was in the past. It is also true that nonetheless the world will not collapse, and that it is necessary to prepare the comrades and the masses for the new situation. This doesn't take away from that which is our absolute obligation, which is to energetically draw to the attention of the political consciousness of the Russian comrades the dangers and weaknesses that their attitudes *are about to cause*. We'd be poor and irresponsible revolutionaries if we passively allowed the fulfilling of a *fait accompli* by justifying their necessity *a priori*.

That the fulfilling of such an obligation on our part would – in a subordinate way – also be useful to the Opposition should only worry us up to a certain point. In fact, it is our objective to contribute to the creating and maintaining of a unitary plan in which the diverse tendencies and personalities could gather and meld together ideologically as well. But I don't think that in our letter – which obviously must be read in its entirety and not in bits and pieces – there is the least danger of weakening the position of the majority of the CC. In any case, taking into account the possibility of such an appearance, in an attached letter I've authorized you to modify the form.

[7] You can quite well separate the two parts and place our affirmation of the “responsibility” of the Opposition at the beginning our affirmation. This mode of reasoning of yours has made a very distressing impression on me.

And I’d like to say to you there is not in us the least shadow of alarmism, but only a well-thought out and cold reflection. We are sure that in no way will the world collapse. But it seems to me that it would be foolish to move forward only if the world *were* about to collapse. Nevertheless, no phrases spoken can turn us from the idea that we are following the correct line – the Leninist line – in the way we consider the Russian question. The Leninist line consists in fighting for the unity of the P., but not only for external unity, but for a unity a bit more intimate, one that consists in there not being in the P. two political lines completely divergent on all questions . When dealing with things having to do with the ideological and political direction of the Intern., with that which concerns the hegemony of the prolet., that is the social content of the state, not only in our countries, but also in Russia, the unity of the P. is the existential condition.

You confuse the international aspects of the Russian Question – which are a reflection of the historical fact of the ties of the laboring masses with the first socialist state – and the problems of international organization in the area of unions and politics. The two orders of fact are strictly coordinated, but nevertheless distinct. The difficulties that are encountered, and which were constituted on the most restricted organizational level, depend on the fluctuations occurring on the larger plain of the idea spread among the masses of the reduction of the prestige of the R.P. in some popular areas. As a method we have only sought to speak of the more general aspects. We wanted to avoid falling into the scholasticism which too often

⁷ Attached to the text of the letter addressed to the Central Committee of the Soviet Party was a personal note to Togliatti, in which Gramsci wrote: «You will have it copied and translated, adding, if you wish, our names, which in any case should not be published. You can review the text, for some changes in detail and form, given the haste with which it was compiled» (Letters. 1908-1926, cit., p. 454).

surfaces in some documents of other parties, and that remove all seriousness from their interventions.

It thus isn't true – as you say – that we are too optimistic about the real Bolshevization of the western P. The process of Bolshevization is so slow and difficult that every obstacle, however small, stops it or slows it down. The Russian discussion and the ideology of the Oppositions play a greater role in this slowing down and halting insofar as the Oppositions represent in Russia all the old prejudices of class corporatism and syndicalism that weigh on the traditions of the western proletariat and slow down their ideological and political development. Our remarks were totally against the Oppositions. It's true that the crises of the P. and also of the R.P. are linked to the objective situation, but what does that mean? Perhaps that we should thus end the struggle and stop our efforts to favorably modify the subjective elements. But Bolshevism also consists precisely in keeping one's head and in being ideologically and politically firm in difficult situations as well. Your remark is thus idle and void of any value, like that contained in point 5, since we spoke of the great masses and obviously not of the proletarian vanguard. Subordinately, therefore, the difficulty also exists for this, which is not an idle question but is tied to the masses; and it exists all the more insofar as reformism – with its tendency towards class corporatism: that is to say to the non-comprehension of the leading role of the vanguard, a role we must preserve even at the price of sacrifices – is much better rooted in the west than it was in Russia. You forgot the technical conditions in which the work of many parties developed, which don't permit the diffusion of the most elevated theoretical questions other than in small circles of workers. All of your reasoning is corrupted by "bureaucratism:" today, nine years after October 1917 it is no longer *the fact of the seizing of power by the Bolsheviks* which can revolutionize the western masses – because this has already been taken into account and has produced its effects; today ideologically and politically the conviction is active (if it exists) that once power is seized the proletariat *can construct socialism*. The authority of the P. is linked to this conviction, which can't be inculcated in the great masses with scholastic pedagogical methods,

but only through revolutionary pedagogy, that is by the *political fact* that the R.P. is its entirety is persuaded and fights unitarily.

I'm sincerely sorry that our letter wasn't understood by you in the first place, and that you, on the outline of my personal letter didn't seek to better understand. Our letter was in its entirety a requisition against the Oppositions; one not done in demagogic terms, and precisely for this reason more effective and serious. I ask you to include with the proceedings, aside from the Italian text of the letter and my personal letter, this one as well.^[8]

Cordial greetings.

Antonio

⁸ The letter of October 14 was not forwarded to the Central Committee of the Soviet Party but, according to Togliatti himself, «it was delivered by me to Nicholas Bukharin, who was then the leader of the Bolshevik Party delegation in the Executive of the International and, naturally, to the Secretary of the latter. I think that Bukharin brought the letter to the attention of the Political Bureau of the Bolshevik Party» (see 2000 pages of Gramsci, edited by G. Ferrata and N. Gallo, Il Saggiatore, Milan 1964, v. I, p. 827).

Guidelines For the Study of Russian Questions

The Workers' State, year 1, No. 2, April 1927, pp. 125-138 [9]

Palmiro Togliatti (Hercules)

I

The difficulty which the militants of the Communist Parties of Western Europe have encountered in forming a correct idea and in making a rapid and certain judgment of the questions which have been discussed since the conquest of power, and especially in recent years, in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, depends largely, indeed almost exclusively, on two reasons. The first consists in the widespread opinion that the problems which present themselves to the proletariat and its party after the conquest of power are, by their nature, profoundly different from those which before the conquest of power must be studied and solved by the vanguard of the working class and by the whole working class. The second consists in the fact that, for a long period of time, the problems which were discussed in the ranks of the Russian party, presented themselves and were studied by us separately from one another, in relation to the objective situation of the given moment and in relation to the directive established in connection with it, but not in relation to a general political line of the Russian party, the search for, defense and consolidation of which were at the basis of every discussion. The extreme consequence of these, which I consider two deviations, was the position taken by some comrades of various parties, who maintained that non-Russian Communists cannot have well-founded opinions on Russian questions. The same root is found in the error of those who believe that information and debate on Russian problems must be limited to a

⁹ The text is taken from: Palmiro Togliatti, Selected Works, edited by Gianpasquale Santomasimo, Editori Riuniti, 1974, pp. 38-54.

narrow circle of initiates, but can never interest the whole mass of our militants, and the mass of workers who, although outside the ranks of our party, follow the discussions on other theoretical and tactical subjects that take place among us. The first blow to the demolition of these two erroneous positions was given, in 1923-24, by the discussion on Trotskyism, which extended so as to touch on all the fundamental problems of our politics, and to interest the parties of all countries. The second blow, — and a formidable one this time — has been given by the recent struggle that the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party has waged against the opposition bloc with the active help of the entire International. After this last discussion there is no longer any doubt that the fundamental directive that must be given for the study of the Russian questions is to consider them in the continuity of the development of the political line of the Bolshevik Party, to strive to reduce them, as they are, to a simple particular aspect of the general problems of strategy and tactics that the vanguard of the proletariat must resolve at any moment in its history.

The only point that requires explanation, I think, is the difference between the problems and tasks that arise before, and the problems and tasks that arise after, the conquest of power. It would be absurd and ridiculous to affirm that the conquest of power does not pose new tasks to the working class and its party. On the one hand, there is all the activity relating to the organization and functioning of the organs of power, that is, of the proletarian state, and on the other hand, there is all the activity of economic construction, which constitute new fields for the class that, until the conquest of power, was politically oppressed and economically exploited. The achievement of the objectives that are set in these two fields undoubtedly requires the existence and development of particular qualities and capacities in the proletariat and in its vanguard. There are special problems, the terms of which are modified by the very fact that the proletariat has power in its hands: see, for example, the problems of foreign policy.

But none of the new fields that are opened by the conquest of power is a field in which one can move with the help of a simple technique. None of the new or renewed questions is a pure question of technique. There is no technique for the construction and direction of the proletarian State, just as there is no particular science that teaches how to proceed in the construction of a socialist economy. Technique and science will guide the solution of particular problems, but even the solution of these does not have and cannot have value except within the limits and on the basis of the directives that guide the activity of the working class and of the communist party in general. And these directives are not different, neither in their content, nor in the method of their definition and application, in the period preceding and in the period following the conquest of power.

Let us examine some of the strategic and tactical guidelines of the Communist Party: let us take, for example, two points that can be considered fundamental for the definition of Communist politics, that is, the relations between the vanguard of the proletariat and the great majority of the working class and the relations between the working class and the classes that can be allied with it in the struggle against the capitalist regime. Even a cursory examination leads to the conclusion that, as far as these points are concerned, not only are there no substantial differences between the guidelines that the Party follows in the period preceding the revolution and those that it must follow in the period following the revolution, but that, in these fields, the Party's policy, after the conquest of power, is a continuation and direct consequence of those that it followed before achieving revolutionary victory. The fact of having power in one's hands is a new element. It places the proletariat and the Communist Party in a position that is sometimes more favourable; sometimes less favourable to the exact definition of the relations between the Party and the great masses or between the workers and the peasants. This diversity of position must be taken into account - it is the specific aspect of the Russian problems - but it must be taken into account precisely to avoid it leading to a shift in our general guidelines of strategy and tactics, to the overthrow or modification of the system of relations between the different driving forces of the revolution that they establish. In

the period of political and economic struggles that precede the conquest of power, the task of the proletarian vanguard, in dealing with the great masses, consists in leading them to overcome every particular vision of their interests, to recognize the general interests of their class, as such, and to fight to achieve them. The same task faces the proletarian vanguard in the period of building the state and the socialist economy. Towards the peasants, the working class must, before the revolution, conduct a policy which, based on the satisfaction of the material interests of the peasants, breaks the ties that unite them to the bourgeois ruling classes, mobilizes them alongside the proletariat, and makes them enter into the struggle against capitalism. And this is the directive that is followed, even after the conquest of power, to ensure the life of the workers' state and the continuity of socialist construction. And the examples could be continued, going into detail, examining the positions taken by the adversaries of the working class and the way of combating them, the influence they exercise or try to exercise in our ranks, the traditional and common deviations from the straight line of our policy, and so on. All that is the substance of our activity, that which constitutes the fabric on which our daily work of leading the proletariat to the overthrow of capitalist society and the construction of a new society is woven, all this constitutes the guide to understand and evaluate exactly the problems that the Russian party encounters on its path, faces and solves.

From this way of understanding Russian questions comes the importance of studying the precedents of these questions. If we did not set ourselves the goal of seeking the "line of the Bolshevik party," and if we were not convinced that in this line lies the most exact determination that has been made of communist politics up to now, the study of precedents would be a demonstration of useless historical and bookish erudition. On the contrary, it can allow us to reduce to unity all the different questions that have been discussed in Russian discussions in recent years.

II

If we try to define what is the fundamental idea that has guided Bolshevism in its policy for more than twenty years, before and after the conquest of power, we will see that it is the idea of the hegemony of the proletariat in the struggle against capitalism. To this idea is, naturally, linked that of the necessity that the proletariat find allies in this struggle and know how to unite them with a correct policy.

It is not difficult to find the thread that connects, with these two fundamental principles, the positions defended by the Bolshevik Party, before and after Lenin's death, in a whole series of discussions that took place, both within the party and in contrast with other parties that equally referred to the working class.

The discussion that I consider the first, not in chronological order, but of theoretical and historical importance, is that on the driving forces of the revolution in Russia, on their disposition in the different periods of the revolutionary movement, and therefore on the prospects of development and victory of the latter. To be more precise, indeed, one can say that this is the only point around which all the debates take place, in the period of preparation for the conquest of power, in the period immediately preceding it and in the period of the dictatorship.

The position defended by the Bolshevik Party, throughout these different periods, can be schematically indicated with some fundamental theses.

1. thesis of the necessity for the proletariat, drawing together the semi-proletarian masses of the population (peasants and urban petty bourgeoisie), to take the lead in the struggle to overthrow the autocracy and to carry it through to the end, overcoming the hesitations and defeating the betrayals of the bourgeoisie. Corresponding to this perspective is the slogan of the "democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants", in which the bourgeois revolution is realised under the leadership of the proletariat. This was the slogan of the Bolsheviks throughout the period of political preparation for the revolution. It affirms the impossibility of the proletariat being able, with its own forces alone, to overthrow the

autocracy, and therefore the necessity for the collaboration of at least two fundamental forces, the workers and the peasants;

2. Thesis of the possibility of the development of the bourgeois revolution into a socialist revolution, that is, of the passage from the democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants to the dictatorship of the proletariat. For this second perspective to be realized, it is necessary that the hegemony of the proletariat during the transition period from the first to the second revolution assume the form of an alliance between the workers and the great mass of the peasantry. And it is on the exact solution of the problem of the alliance with the peasantry that the victory or defeat of the proletarian revolution depends;
3. Thesis of the possibility that the proletariat, after having conquered power with the support of the peasants, not only maintains it by crushing counter-revolutionary attempts with terror, but succeeds in bringing the revolution to the economic level and in building a socialist economy. Also for the realization of this possibility, an exact solution to the peasant problem is required, a solution such that leads the great mass of peasants to cooperate in socialist construction through the continuation of the alliance with the workers, in the forms required by the needs and methods of economic construction.

Now, there is no doubt that these fundamental theses can be found implicit even in the most distant debates of the history of Russian workers' movement. In the polemic against the economists, who wanted to take the proletariat to school with the bourgeoisie, it is not difficult to find in Lenin's position the origins of all the subsequent politics of Bolshevism. But the precise and complete awareness of the theses that we have indicated was acquired and highlighted in the course of the history of the party and the workers' movement, through some discussions of capital importance that corresponded to some fundamental historical turning points, to some moments in which the orientation of the vanguard of the proletariat, gathered around the Bolsheviks, was decisive for the fate of the revolution.

The first thesis was established, in the period of political preparation for the revolution, in the debate with Trotsky and in the struggle against Trotskyism. Trotsky's position was apparently more radical than that of the Bolsheviki. The perspective that he indicated with the words: "*Without a Tsar. Workers' Government*", was that of an immediate passage from the autocratic regime to the proletarian regime, obtained as a consequence of a victory due to the exclusive forces of the working class. This perspective was based on the exclusion of the existence in Russia of a class that could be an ally of the proletariat in the struggle for the socialist revolution. And in fact, still in 1922, Trotsky would affirm that "the proletarian vanguard, from the first moment of its power, must, in order to ensure victory, make a profound attack not only on feudal property, but also on bourgeois property. This brings it into conflict... with the great masses of the peasants, with the help of which it has come to power". The contradiction that arises between workers' power can only be resolved on an international scale, that is: "Without the direct, state aid of the European proletariat, the Russian workingclass cannot maintain itself in power." From the apparently most advanced position, one arrives, as one can see, at denying the prospect of revolutionary victory. The theory of the isolation of the proletariat in the struggle (theory of permanent revolution), substituted for the theory of the hegemony of the proletariat in the direction of the struggle itself, has as its consequence revolutionary impotence. Only the search for possible allies of the working class, and a policy which establishes the connection with them, allow the workers to fulfill the leading role that is theirs in the period of political preparation for the revolution, in the overthrow of the Tsarist regime and in the transition to the socialist revolution. What we have said allows us to understand how erroneous is the statement made by Trotsky in the October Teachings, regarding the need, in which the Bolsheviki found themselves, after the February revolution, to reload the weapons of their ideology and to adhere to Trotsky's point of view, bringing about a complete change of front. What happened after February was the clear and conscious determination of the second of the three theses we have indicated, that is, the possibility of transforming the bourgeois revolution into a socialist revolution.

But it is important to note that this determination, which is already found in the way in which the formula of the democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants was illustrated and defended by Lenin, occurred with the consequent application of the same principles from which the first thesis was deduced, that is, the necessity that the hegemony of the proletariat and the revolutionary victory be obtained through the union of the proletariat with the peasants. If in 1917 the Bolsheviks and Trotsky fought together, the platform on which they fought was the traditional platform of Bolshevism, which had materialized, in contact with a new objective revolutionary situation, in a new immediate perspective and in a new slogan.

The determination of this new perspective and the new slogan did not, however, occur without encountering resistance within the Bolshevik party itself.^[10] They manifested themselves on Lenin's return to Russia, when he presented, in April 1917, the theses in which he affirmed the socialist character of the revolution, that is, he affirmed that it was about to be transformed into a socialist revolution and therefore maintained that the party had to take the necessary measures for the transition from the bourgeois-democratic revolution to the socialist revolution. This thesis was denied by Kamenev, with a series of arguments that correspond to those that Trotsky made in the previous period. According to him, the transition to the socialist revolution was not possible because the democratic bourgeois revolution had not yet completed its task; he therefore denied the bond by which the two revolutions are united. Furthermore, he affirmed that Lenin's thesis was premature for the very fact that the workers were still forced to fight together with non-

¹⁰ Until the last discussions, non-Russian comrades who were not specialists in the subject had no opportunity to study this very important moment in the history of Bolshevism. The articles written by Kamenev and Zinoviev before October to combat the decisions of the Central Committee have not yet been, as far as I know, translated or summarized in any language other than Russian, and that is a bad thing. I am sure that until two years ago, that is, even after the 1924 debate with Trotsky, many foreign comrades were unable to clearly understand the reasons and meaning of the attitude of Kamenev and Zinoviev in 1917. This was how Trotsky's theory of the inevitable regression to Social Democracy on the eve of the seizure of power could have taken hold. Instead, the regression that occurred was a regression to Trotskyism. But this cannot be understood except in relation to the discussion of Lenin's theses of April 1917 (editor's note).

proletarian sections of the population. If we had really been on the eve of the socialist revolution, the workers would have had to break the bloc with the petty bourgeoisie and proceed alone to the realization of their program. As in the theory of permanent revolution, so in Kamenev's opposition to the April theses the possibility is denied that the proletariat has the help of the peasants also to complete the bourgeois revolution and make the socialist revolution. Also in Kamenev's opposition the Bolshevik theory of the hegemony of the proletariat in the union with the peasants, gives way to the theory of the isolation of the working class in the revolutionary struggle. And the consequences were also the same. Not only did Kamenev theoretically deny the possibility of socialist revolution in April, but in October, together with Zinoviev, he opposed the decisions of the Central Committee, because he believed that the party, instead of conquering power, should continue to move on the terrain of a coalition *government* . This terrain was the terrain of a movement that could not yet lead to the dictatorship of the proletariat. In connection with this attitude of comrades Kamenev and Zinoviev in 1917, it is perhaps necessary to highlight one more element. In the April discussion between Lenin and Kamenev, the arguments that I have briefly indicated formed the main, almost exclusive, part of the debates.^[11]

In October, however, the intervention of a factor is evident, which is indeed closely linked to these arguments, but which could only appear with such great evidence on the eve of the action. It is not only a lack of confidence in the fate of the insurrection,

¹¹ In Pravda of April 8, 1917, the day after the publication of Lenin's theses, a note by Kamenev merely observes that the statement that the bourgeois-democratic revolution is over, and that we must pass to the proletarian revolution, is not correct. In Pravda of April 12, the argument is developed in detail that if one accepts Lenin's thesis on the need to take decisive steps toward the overthrow of capitalism, in taking these steps the workers will find themselves alone. Furthermore, since Lenin's theses affirmed that only socialism can deliver from war, hunger and the massacre of new millions of people, Kamenev replies that these are general truths, useless for the purpose of establishing the line to be followed in Russia, where the democratic revolution is not yet over. But those general truths were brought by Lenin to demonstrate precisely the inevitability of the development of the revolution towards socialism, because the great popular masses, even non-proletarian ones, who wanted bread and peace, would have been led to line up behind the proletariat and to make, under its guidance, a second revolution of a socialist character (editor's note).

but also a panic, a widespread defeatist tone, a complete bewilderment in the face of the decisive gravity of the historical turning point. It is necessary to remember this factor because it is found in some of the attitudes assumed by the new opposition of 1926 and by the subsequent unified opposition.

A fact that greatly surprised the non-Russian comrades, especially after the discussions of '23 and '24, was the bloc that was formed last year, after the XIV Congress, between Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev. Knowledge of the roots of the old differences between Trotsky and the Bolshevik Party about the prospects of the revolution and knowledge of the value of the disagreements that in 1917 divided Kamenev and Zinoviev from Lenin, allows us instead to conclude that the bloc of 1926 is entirely logical and natural. In the years 1925 and 1926 the party of the Soviet Union found itself faced with a historical turning point equal in importance and analogous in significance to that of 1917. On the one hand, the end of the period of restoration of the pre-war economic base, the beginning of the period of reconstruction and therefore the sharpening of the problem of creating a new technical base of production through an accumulation of new capital; on the other hand, the results and consequences of the new economic policy which become clearly visible and consolidated. Coupled with these two factors, an economic crisis which is grafted onto the difficulties of the transition period, and comes together with the slowing down of the tempo of the world proletarian revolution. All these elements converge to pose, once again, the problem of the driving forces and prospects of the revolution in Russia, of the foundations it possesses and of the possibilities of victory: — the same question that was discussed with Trotsky in 1905, the same question that was debated in 1917. It is at this moment that the party, reconnecting with its previous positions and making an effort to bring out their full significance, reaches full awareness of the third thesis that we have indicated as fundamental, the thesis of the possibility of socialist economic construction in Russia, in isolation, even outside of state aid from a victorious proletarian revolution in Western Europe.

It is not my task now to present this problem in all its aspects, and particularly in the economic ones, which are the most important.

As regards the general political line, the denial of the possibility of building socialism in Russia corresponds exactly to Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, corresponds to Kamenev's position in 1917, just as it corresponds to the skepticism and pessimism of Kamenev and Zinoviev on the eve of October. And note. While there is continuity in Trotsky's theoretical line, there is also continuity in the fact that Kamenev and especially Zinoviev, after having collaborated for almost ten years in the application of the exact Bolshevik line, seem to be gripped by the same panic that had gripped them in 1917, and are making, in a situation that is in many respects analogous, the same dangerous swing towards Trotskyism.

Was the possibility of the victorious construction of socialism in a single country admitted by Lenin? There is no doubt.^[12] Lenin had admitted it for the first time, implicitly, when he had led the party and the proletariat to the conquest of power, not only to make a political revolution, but to begin a work of economic construction. He explicitly admitted this with the introduction of the new economic

¹² A few words on the method of quoting from Lenin's works. The comrades of the Russian opposition have collected many statements by Lenin in which the possibility of building socialism in a single country is supposedly excluded. These are mostly sentences in which the international character of the proletarian revolution is emphasized, but on this point no one has any doubts. It is not about this that we are discussing. The truth is that, from Lenin's work examined as a whole, emerges the affirmation of the possibility that the Russian workers, allied with the pe Not even Lenin could formulate the thesis precisely until he had before him all the elements of the problem as it presents itself to us today, that is, after the first period of proletarian power. From this period are the passages in Lenin in which he denies that the new economic policy is only a retreat and states precisely that socialism can be built in Russia. The article on cooperation is decisive. As for Marx and Engels, beyond the passages in which the international character of the proletarian revolution is reaffirmed, the citation of passages from which it appears that they worked not with the perspective of a victory of the proletariat in Russia and the permanence of the capitalist regime in the West, but with the perspective of the fall of capitalism in some countries of Western Europe, has no value. These passages could also be cited to demonstrate the impossibility of what has already happened in Russia. It is only in the continuity of Marxist thought, in its realization in the experience of the Russian revolution, it is in the definition of the perspectives opened up by the current crisis of capitalism that the thesis of the possibility of building socialism in a single country becomes clear (editor's note).

policy. In fact, if war communism could appear as a provisional expedient to overcome counter-revolutionary resistance and awaiting the outbreak of the revolution in the West, the new economic policy was conceived by Lenin as a system which, by guaranteeing the proletariat the keystones of the economic edifice and granting a certain freedom to private capital and trade, strengthens the bloc between the workers and the great mass of the working peasants on the economic level, on the level on which the workers fight to make the socialist elements of production triumph over the non-socialist elements.

It therefore creates a situation in which, barring the intervention of an external disturbing factor (counter-revolutionary war), the constructive economic action undertaken by the working class can be victorious. The prospect of victory derives from the fact that even in this new moment the workers are not alone, that the alliance with the peasants, created on the political terrain, continues on the terrain of struggle and economic construction. And the exclusion of this alliance derives from not considering this alliance possible. Once again, we find ourselves faced with the consequent application or denial of the principle of the hegemony of the proletariat in the worker-peasant bloc.

III

The problem we have tried to highlight by studying the formation of the fundamental theses of Bolshevism on the possibility of a socialist revolution and the victorious construction of socialism in Russia can also be presented in a different form from that in which we have examined it. It is commonly presented in the form of a debate on the character of the Russian October Revolution and on the nature of the Russian state. For those who reject the theses of Bolshevism, the October Revolution was not a socialist revolution, but a bourgeois revolution, and the Russian state today is not a proletarian state, but a bourgeois or petty-bourgeois, i.e. peasant, state. None of the comrades of the Russian party have come to openly support a similar thesis, but the social democrats and the consequent German leftists

have come to it, starting from equal premises and making similar reasoning to those of the various Russian oppositions. The latter, ideologically, have returned to social democracy and, practically, have passed into the camp of the counter-revolution. Within the Russian party, the affirmation of the non-proletarian character of the State was presented in a veiled and oblique manner, with accusations of degeneration of the State itself, of a contrast between the party's policy and the interests of the great working masses, of Thermidorism, excessive concessions to the peasants, etc. All this, while indicating confusion and panic in an objectively difficult situation, is a consequence of the denial of the possibility of victorious socialist construction. But I do not want to go into details.

It seems interesting to me, instead, to show, following the discussions that took place in the Russian party after the seizure of power, the confirmation of the fact that the necessity of maintaining the worker-peasant bloc is at the basis of the policy of Bolshevism. At the bottom of "all" these discussions lies the problem of the relations between workers and peasants. Let us see briefly:

a) disagreement over the Brest-Litovsk Peace. The Left Communist opposition regards the conclusion of the peace as an insult to the heroic proletariat, which is ready to resume the struggle against German imperialism, that typical representative of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie. But the proletariat should conduct this struggle alone, because the peasants, fleeing from the front, have shown that they do not want to know anything about war. It is therefore the workers' and peasants' bloc that is broken, and this is the end of the revolution;

b) discussion on the role of the trade unions, which takes place at the time of the transition to the New Economic Policy. Trotsky proposes, instead of the end of the organizational methods of war communism, a particular application of them in the economic field. At the same time he proposes the fusion of the leading bodies of the trade unions with the leading bodies of economic life. Both proposals are contrary to the re-establishment of that minimum of freedom of trade and freedom of private capital which is a condition for maintaining the workers' and peasants' bloc. In

Trotsky's proposals we see the proletariat continuing, isolated, its permanent revolution, condemned to certain defeat;

c) discussion with the workers' opposition group. This group proposes the immediate and complete transfer of economic management to the trade unions. It is against the concession of a partial freedom of trade, it is against the employment of specialists in economic enterprises, against the New Economic Policy, which it considers "at worst" only as a retreat. It supports a purely workers' policy, in which the necessity of the workers' and peasants' bloc is not taken into account;

d) discussion of 1923. In the economic field, the opposition supports the theory of so-called primitive socialist accumulation, according to which, in the transition period, there is no other fate for the peasants than that of being an exploited colony of the working class. It is against the "dictatorship" of the Commissariat of Finance, that is, against the measures taken for the creation of a stable currency, an absolute condition for collaboration with the peasants in the economic field. It is also for a bureaucratic accentuation in the application of the economic plan, without taking into account the changes in the market, that is, without taking into account the concessions that must be made to the small and medium peasants in order to have them as collaborators in the economic field;

e) discussion of 1925 with the new opposition. The question of the relationship with the peasants is of decisive importance. The opposition raises the alarm in the face of the danger of the rich peasants, because it sees even the medium-sized peasant farm as an enemy, rather than a possible ally of the proletariat. It would like to return from the alliance with the middle peasants to the simple neutralization of them. It also raises the alarm in the face of the results of the directive to animate the soviets by involving the peasants more widely in their life;

f) discussion of 1926 with the opposition bloc. The fundamental directive of the opposition bloc is found in the failure to recognize the possibility and necessity of attracting the great masses of working peasants (middle peasants) to economic

collaboration with the proletariat, that is, to weld the peasant economy to the socialist industrial economy. Hence the economic program of the opposition. While it apparently calls for more rapid industrialization, in reality, by breaking the ties with the countryside, it removes the basis for the development of socialist industry.

IV

In all these discussions, however, there is a problem that is always intertwined with the problem of relations with the peasants, and that is the internal regime of the party of the proletariat. And this is understandable. A correct internal regime of the party of the proletariat is in the doctrine of Leninism the element that allows the working class to correctly determine its position in relation to the other driving forces of the revolution, and to achieve its hegemony over them. A correct internal regime of the party of the proletariat is also a condition for its politics not to be that of a group or a category, but to be the politics of an entire class. Before the conquest of power, the deviation from this line is represented by the syndicalist and social democratic currents. They make the politics of the party of the proletariat not the politics of the entire class, but the politics of an aristocracy, which puts its particular interest in the forefront. They destroy the unity of the working class in a fragmentation of categories and groups fighting for their particular advantage. A part of the interests of the category and of the particular advantages of the group must, instead, always be sacrificed so that the working class in its unity can succeed in carrying out its revolutionary task, in founding a State and in building a socialist economy. The sacrifice cannot be made except under the guidance of a vanguard that is united and compact in its ideology and in its organizations, that is linked with even the most distant strata of the working class, but linked to them in order to direct them and not to give in to the particularistic spirit by which they can be dominated. After the seizure of power, the same social democratic and syndicalist currents tend to reappear, because the process of socialist construction is long and full of obstacles, because difficulties of various kinds, some very serious, can arise,

and at any moment it is required that the working class remain united in the revolutionary direction, without giving in to particular interests and without allowing itself to be surprised by the influence that other classes can exercise within it. The leadership of a tempered and conscious vanguard, united and disciplined, is therefore as necessary and perhaps more than before. There are moments of crisis, in the transition period, in which certain strata of the working class, - of the class that has won the revolution, that holds power and is at the head of the State, - are forced to live in worse material conditions than those in which some elements of the new bourgeoisie live, which the proletariat must tolerate alongside itself in order to continue its work of economic construction. Many "nepmen" wear fur coats and many workers do not. It is on this element that the Social Democrats base their assertion that the revolution has failed and is in general impossible. They are logical in their reasoning, since even before the conquest of power the whole policy of Social Democracy consists in making the workers forget the revolutionary aims of their class, stimulating in them the need to satisfy particular interests. In this way social democracy in Western Europe bases itself on a workers' aristocracy which it tends to make counter-revolutionary. But this will never happen in Russia as long as the Bolshevik Party, remaining within the line traced by its leader, succeeds in keeping the revolutionary class spirit alive in the masses, in keeping the working class close around a united and compact vanguard, capable of choosing with coolness and consideration the path to victory, and of leading the proletariat along it, exalting its enthusiasm and spirit of sacrifice to the highest degree.

The need to prevent a deviation in the direction of social democracy or syndicalism, and to maintain in the party the compactness, the internal unity that is therefore necessary for it, explains the importance that the problems of the internal regime of the party itself have had in Russian questions. For the non-Russian comrades the most important discussion was that of 1923 with Trotsky but the elements of it are already found in the debate held by Lenin, before the introduction of the New Economic Policy, with the group of democratic centralism. The demands of this group were those of the limitation of centralism in the party, of the replacement of

the principle of personal responsibility with the principle of collegiality, of the attenuation of the leading role of the party in the economic and state organs. The seeds of a syndicalist degeneration were already present in these proposals. The fact that they were presented while the period of the civil war had not yet been completely overcome, allowed this tendency to be quickly overcome, while more serious was the struggle against the workers' opposition and against Trotskyism, which presented similar platforms in the period of introduction and implementation of the New Economic Policy. In this period the process of decomposition of the fundamental proletarian nucleus, caused by the civil war, ended. The working class was recomposed both by the return of the skilled workers that the civil war had driven away from the factories, and by the entry into the factories of a new generation of young people and of vast masses coming from the countryside. Two dangers then arose. The first was that in the new elements, to whom the past of struggle against the capitalist regime was not known from direct experience, some of the features of revolutionary class consciousness could be obscured. The second danger was that these new elements, overestimating the negative aspects of the transition period (the existence of the new bourgeoisie, unemployment, wage inequality, etc.) could be led to defeatism, to lose sight of the general goals for which the working class fights in the transition period, to put the interests of the category in the first place. Since the Russian working class is continually expanding numerically, absorbing peasants coming from the countryside, it can be said that these dangers are always present. The internal politics of the party is aimed at overcoming them. The democracy of Trotsky's "new course" and the trade unionism of the opposition were instead a capitulation before them, a renunciation of the Leninist principles of homogeneity, unity and compactness of the party, a renunciation of the principle that the party leads the class making it capable of sacrificing the interests of the category, as well as a renunciation of continuity in the direction of the party itself. The deviations of Trotsky and the workers' opposition opened once again the way that leads to the destruction of the hegemony of the proletariat. Along this path we find both the attempts to break the unity of the

Bolshevik Party by forming factions within it, as well as the paradoxical affirmations of the need to allow the formation of different parties, as well as the demagoguery of the pamphlets, published illegally by the united opposition to mobilize the proletariat against the hardships and economies required by the economic situation, as well as the demagoguery of the interventions of Zinoviev and Trotsky in the cells of Moscow and Leningrad in October 1926, to excite the class spirit of the workers with the vision of billions to be conquered at the expense of the peasants.

V

The last point I intend to touch on is that of the international perspectives that are connected with the fundamental theses of Bolshevism that I have analyzed. More than perspectives on the international situation, it would be more accurate to speak of an integral conception of the way in which the world proletarian revolution develops, in the situation created by the crisis, which capitalism is going through in the period of imperialism.

The conclusion that Lenin reached at the beginning of the world war and which he confirmed with the analysis of imperialism, as the last phase of capitalism, is that of the maturity of the capitalist regime. When the capitalist regime has reached its maturity, the period of proletarian revolution opens. This thesis is fundamental for Marxism; but its application to the present historical period is what distinguishes us from social democracy. Social democracy has a very strange both of the maturity of the capitalist regime, and of the transition to the socialist regime. The transition to the socialist regime is for it the peaceful unfolding of a new order of things, which should be able to form, little by little, within the old world. The consequence of this conception is that for social democracy the capitalist regime cannot be ripe for a revolution, but is always ripe for a new progressive development which should bring it closer... to the socialist ideal and favor a further development of socialist elements within it. In this way social democracy not only comes to deny the revolutionary character of the present historical period, but to collaborate in the

capitalist restoration and to fight to arrest the development of the proletarian revolution.

But how does the proletarian revolution begin and how does it develop? The maturity of the capitalist system does not mean that the transition to the construction of socialism can and must occur simultaneously in all countries. Nor does it mean that in all countries the relations of production and the relations of power between the different classes have reached the same point of development. On the contrary, the imperialist development of capitalism has given greater evidence than in the past to the law of inequality in the economic evolution of different countries. The present period is a period of sudden and profound imbalances between one country and another, of the impossibility of reducing the entire world of production to a unity. This means that the proletarian revolution is also something greatly complex. It is not a question of the sudden appearance in the world of a new order of things, but of a long and complicated historical process, which includes in itself various facts and periods, revolutionary victories, defeats and retreats, imperialist wars and periods of relative peace, very acute crises and moments of temporary and partial stabilization.

This process of development of the revolution allows for revolutionary victory and the seizure of power even in a single country, and also allows the victorious proletariat in a country not only to remain in power, but, where the necessary material conditions exist, to successfully build a socialist economy. The first possibility is denied by the reformists and verbal revolutionaries of all countries. We too had proof of this in 1919 and 1920. In order to demoralize and disintegrate the revolutionary proletariat, the reformists did nothing but repeat that it was necessary to wait for the proletariat of the other European countries to move, without which nothing could be done. During the occupation of the factories Graziadei calculated that there were not enough grain reserves in Italy and that therefore the movement had to be crushed. There is always an excuse for not making the revolution when you don't want it.

As for the second possibility, its denial for Russia, for a country that comprises a sixth of the globe, for a country in which the necessary material conditions exist, if the alliance with the peasants is maintained, means revising the Leninist conception of the proletarian revolution, means admitting that in the near future capitalism will have enough strength to arrest the course of the proletarian revolution on all fronts, to restore unity to the world of production, and to include in this unity also the country — Russia — where the proletariat is in power. That capitalism could acquire such strength was excluded by Lenin to the point that he even repeatedly affirmed that the existence of a country in which the proletariat has power in its hands makes it possible for economically backward countries to arrive at forms of socialist economy, without passing, inevitably, through a capitalist stage. This can happen today in China.

Can the truth of these theses of Lenin be destroyed by the Communist International's statement of the existence of a period of relative stabilization? We believe not, unless we change our entire conception of the development of the proletarian revolution. But it is into this error, on the contrary, that some comrades of the Russian opposition have fallen. That is why they have at certain moments appeared so impatient to note the end of the period of relative stabilization and the return of an immediate revolutionary situation. That is why the substance of their positions, which is a loss of confidence in the forces of the proletarian revolution, has been covered by left-wing phrases. These phrases poorly mask, and do not hide, that the opposition currents in Russia tend to liquidate certain fundamental theoretical and tactical principles which must instead continue to illuminate and direct the activity of the proletarian vanguard in Russia and in all countries.