

Onorato Damen

Points of Disagreement with the 1952 "Platform" Drafted by Bordiga

Originally published: *Battaglia Comunista*, no. 5, March 1952.

English translation: in [*Bordiga Beyond the Myth*](#), 2016, pp. 68-73.

Transcription/Markup: [Micah Muer](#), 2019.

During a party meeting held in Florence (8-9 December 1952), Bordiga presented a document in a schematic form which focused on the tasks and activities of the Party. The pretext for it was that, as a basis for the organisation, the document affected all adherents to the Party. The more “ambiguous” points were discussed in the journal *Battaglia Comunista* (No. 5, March 1952) and are reproduced below. The numbers and titles are taken from the original draft by Bordiga – translators' note. – ICT.

With the following critical notes we aim to clarify our points of disagreement with the “platform” which we refer to in the document. It should be understood that, in principle, we agree with the other points of the platform. We think that in this way we may specify the most serious reasons for the differences that weigh on the life of the party, and which must be resolved at the next congress.

I. Doctrine

1. - “Theoretical basis: Marxist historical materialism.”

The acceptance of historical materialism does not imply, nor should it imply, the rigid acceptance of a body of doctrine since its interpretation is always open and alive. That would close our eyes to reality and could cause our vanguard movement some problems in the future, considering that among us there are those who do not accept the Marxist dialectic as a complete view of the world and of life, or accept it in an idealistic or deterministic way, i.e., “externally”, to the extent that they are inspired by a mechanistic scientism. In short, there are those who sense it and translate it historically, putting more emphasis on the “historical” than the “materialism”.

“Our doctrine, Engels said, is not a dogma, but a guide to action. This classic formula strongly emphasises this aspect of Marxism with extraordinary conciseness, that we lose sight of at every moment. And thus we turn Marxism into something one-sided, deformed and dead, emptying it of its essence and undermining its fundamental theoretical bases: the dialectic, the doctrine of the multiform historical evolution full of contradictions; weakening its close practical relations with each era, which may change with each new historical twist.” (Lenin).

3. - “The proletarian dictatorship is exercised by the party.”

This statement is valid and politically and theoretically correct, despite the terrible recent Russian experience, provided that we consider that the party and its governing bodies, which in fact exercise the dictatorship, should act as a part of the class, in unison with the interests, struggles and historical objectives of the entire proletariat, until classes and the state disappear. Historically, the dictatorship is that of the proletariat and not of the party, in the sense that it is the proletariat, as a class that has come to power, which channels and focuses in “its” party and crystallises in it the reasons, the strength and will that feeds the proletarian dictatorship. Beyond this, lies Stalinism, i.e. the dictatorship of the state (Party-State) which replaces the proletariat and throws it back to oppression, reversing the wheel of revolution.

II. The General Task of the Class Party

2. - “Fighting for the victory of bourgeois revolutions over the feudal system to boost capitalist production is a dialectical necessity.”

But this fight means that the revolutionary party actively participates in the ideology, organisation and policy of the bourgeois movement that is now penetrating economically backward areas, i.e. dragging these areas out of the extra-capitalist sphere for inclusion in its production process. It is not, therefore, about fighting so capitalism can increase its “greed” and its natural inclination to extend into backward areas. Capitalism is merely obeying the logic of its structure, the dynamics of its internal contradictions, the drive of its interests, which is clearly demonstrated by the fact that, thanks to this activity, not only are there very few extra-capitalist areas left, but they are currently unable to provide a sufficient and safe reserve as markets of consumption.

It is not, therefore, about fighting for the victory of bourgeois revolutions over the feudal system, which would place the action of the revolutionary party on the same terrain as capitalism, accurately assessing the problem, we must place the activity of the proletariat on the terrain of class conflict, which is the only way to spur capitalism to resolve by “its” own means the problems of “its” preservation.

Extra-capitalist areas can be found, for example, both in the Italian economy and in Russia. In these areas capitalism and its historical ruling class dominate, although it only controls a part of the economy, not necessarily the most important part.

The frontal attack against capitalism also involves attacking all remnants of the old regime, as both are in solidarity against the proletariat, thus solving indirectly, in a gradual development, the problem of reducing the extra-capitalist sector for the benefit of capitalism.

9. - “Struggle to defeat the counter-revolution and push the Russian economy beyond feudalism and capitalism, a struggle that is conditioned by the mobilisation of the working class and the colonial peoples against white imperialism and the Asian lords.”

It is not clear if this struggle has to be considered as one of the current tasks of our party. To avoid any misunderstanding, we must clarify immediately that although this was, and should have been, one of the tasks of the class party until the Third Congress of the Communist International, to which we have no objection, today it is no longer true. We have to remember that Stalin's Russia is in fact the victorious Russia which came out of the Second World War, so it is at the forefront of current imperialist conflict to defend the fruits of that victory and, if possible, extend and consolidate them through a third world war, which is now in an advanced state of preparation.

The current line of conduct of our party regarding Stalinism and war should not give rise to any doubt. Given that this document is intended as a platform to be approved as a whole or rejected as a whole by the organisation, it should contain a call to clarify these problems which are so serious and ongoing. But we find that this document deliberately ignores the role of the Russian state in imperialism and war, and the tasks of the party on these issues. This gap, which is not an unintentional oversight, seems more serious because it has deeply muddled the consciousness of the party with theories of a capitalism "number one" and the definition of the Stalinist state as a state with peaceful interests and intentions compared with a warmongering North America.

IV. Party Activity in Italy and Abroad

3. - "We are now in a period of depression and a revolutionary revival is out of the question for many years. The length of this period depends not only on the severity of the degenerative wave, but also the increasing concentration of enemy capitalist forces."

The term "out of the question" clearly contradicts Lenin's theory of the "sharp turns" characteristic of the imperialist phase. We agree with Lenin and are working so the party can become the driving force of any possible change.

"Sudden changes surprisingly quickly modify the social and political situation in an exceptionally sharp manner, which determine immediately and directly the conditions for action and therefore the tasks involved. Naturally I do not mean general and essential tasks, which do not change with historical twists if the fundamental relationships between classes remain unchanged." (Lenin).

The length of this period of depression not only depends on the severity of the degenerative wave, but rather on the intensity of the internal contradictions of capitalism and its drive towards rupture, which cannot be predicted by any scientific analysis or assessment.

7. - "The party forbids the formulation or manufacture, in a free, individual manner, of alleged new schemes and explanations of the contemporary social world, it prohibits free individual analysis, criticism and foresight, even by the most cultured and intellectually competent of its adherents and

defends the health of a theory that is not the result of blind faith, but the content of the science of the proletarian class, built of secular material, not thanks to the thought of men but to the strength of the material facts that are reflected in the historical consciousness of a revolutionary class that are crystallised in their party.”

This is a strange claim. It deletes with a stroke of the pen the opportunity to contribute to the development of a critical Marxism through study and militant activity of those who consider themselves part of the class, those who submit to the requirements, purpose and discipline of the class their ability to comprehend the laws that govern capitalist life from which they extract the reasons and the confirmation of the continuity of revolutionary theory. The theoretical elaborations of a Marxist worthy of the name are not personal, not abstracted from class reality, because in that case they would be outside the class and hence stop being Marxists. They act as an element of the class, or rather, express, as an individual, the collective feeling. Otherwise we could not explain why and for whom the editor of this and many other platforms has written, and continues to write, unless he deems himself, deterministically, as the sole repository of the correct interpretation of Marxism. In this case, this doctrine would become one of many “taboos” that genuine Marxism has taught us to despise.

8. - “The party, although weak, does not relinquish its proselytising, trying to attract new members, nor does it give up the propagation of its principles in all forms, oral and written, although meetings have few participants and its press has a limited readership, since it considers that this is the main activity at this stage.”

We must reject the claim that the press is the main activity at this stage; it leads us to directly confuse one of the instruments of the struggle with the struggle itself. Party policy is to develop activity with the class, in the class, an activity which revolutionaries carry out within their material means, including “the press”, but not limited “only” to the press.

11. - “Firmly convinced that the period of revival will be accompanied by the reappearance of massive economic and trade union associations, the party, while recognising that today it can only develop sporadic union work, never gives up on it, and when the numerical relationship between its members, supporters and the individuals organised in a given trade union unit is sufficient, assuming that this does not preclude the possibility of an autonomous class activity, the party will penetrate into it and try to win its leadership.”

We have seen several versions or attempts to define the union problem, sometimes contradictory, from the same source. We take for good this latest version to assert that, although we agree to work in the unions because that is where a large majority of workers are to be found, and we also accept positions of responsibility on the Workplace Committees^[1], taking into

account the caveats and mitigating factors that are already known, we consider these organisms to be fortresses that have fallen into the hands of the class enemy and cannot be re-conquered from within in a peaceful and democratic way.

Existing unions, as well as other bodies of the counter-revolution, will fall under the blows of the revolutionary assault.

Meanwhile no one can predict whether the massive resumption of the workers' movement will bring about a true class union or other mass organisations that have already passed through the sieve of the past experiences of the workers' struggle. In the current situation, the centres of attraction and assembly of supporters and non-party elements are our factory groups, to which the party should pay the most attention.

12. - “Given the current balance of power and until future situations allow us to know if the capitalist state openly becomes the dictatorial form that Marxism considered it to be from the outset, eliminating elective parliamentary institutions, the party will not take interest in any type of democratic elections and will not operate on that terrain.”

We will not dwell on the tortuous nature of the argument which clearly demonstrates an unclear understanding of the electoral problem and reveals the concern, which we do not share, to prevent the party's participation in the electoral struggle in any situation. If we are serious about this strange and paradoxical way of stating the problem of abstention or participation, the party should not take interest in democratic elections simply because they are democratic, but would have to consider participating when the capitalist state, exercising its dictatorship 100%, abolished elected parliamentary institutions. This distinction between dictatorship and dictatorship, between Mussolini and De Gasperi^[2], is really a rather poor way to argue categorically and absolutely in favour of a priori abstention.

We retake and reaffirm, without caveat, the traditional line of the Italian left from the Meeting of Imola (1920), through the Livorno Congress (1921), the Congress of Rome (1922) and the election campaigns of 1921 and 1924, which has always rejected the abstention principle, accepting the electoral method depending on the circumstances, on a case by case possible participation in the elections, and actually participating without any new element of a theoretical or practical significance leading the party to revise this particular, marginal aspect of its work.

13. - “Convinced that generations of revolutionaries quickly overtake each other and that the worship of men is the most dangerous aspect of opportunism, since, due to deterioration, with rare exceptions, it is natural that leaders of advanced age pass over to the enemy and conformist tendencies, the party pays more attention to youth and makes every effort to recruit and prepare them for future political activity, avoiding social climbing and deference as much as possible.”

We consider both selection and evaluation of the human material of the party should leave out any assessment based on your birth certificate, which is likely to be interpreted in ways that do not correspond to experience and history. We cannot forget that the experience of the Italian left, which has seen its leading cadres dispersed in many ways and forms, is particularly significant in this respect.

In revolutionary activity, the duties are not age-related and the selection is made in the heat of political struggle and not in secret, behind closed doors; the appeal to the “young”, although it is right and necessary, does not mean that the “old ”should not shoulder all responsibilities alongside the other militants in the same party.

Notes

[1]. Workplace Committees (Comissioni interni) were set up in factories by the Fascist regime partly to get round the unions and partly to implement their corporatist ideology. They continued to exist under the new Republic.

[2]. Alcide De Gasperi (1881-1954). He was the founder of the Christian Democratic Party and the first post-war premier of Italy (with Togliatti as his deputy).