The Party Does not Arise from "Circles"

International Communist Party
1980

The following text brings together articles from *Il Partito Comunista* n. 68, 69 and 71 (in the following respectively separated by horizontal rules), to argue against a faulty conception of *the party*. Taken from the IPC Website.

IPC Introduction (2017)

The article that we republish here was written in 1980, a little more than six years after our separation from a party in which many of us had served since its birth. It concerns a maneuver that we regarded as shabby, to which the article returns in the final section.

Its publication was prompted by a nonsensical assertion by our former comrades, according to which up until that moment we had passed through a phase of "circles" and it was now time to build the real party; but the article is in general a clear reaffirmation of the fundamental principles underpinning the very existence of the communist organization, of the way it works and of the relationships between comrades, all vital aspects of our very existence as a revolutionary political organ.

In the assertion referred to above they spoke about a revolutionary camp, to be filtered in order to provide the materials for the construction of the mass party. In practice, this operation would obviously mean reducing our Party to a circle or a collection of circles, whose only concern would have been the elaboration of theory.

In this regard they recalled the Bolshevik experience, which, as a matter of fact, had something to do with circles. But the similarity stops there: it is true that in the late nineteenth century, due to the Tsarist repression, larger organizations had been dispersed and the socialists were forced to meet only locally, without connections; this had resulted in obviously heterogeneous groups, with the most varied theories. They were in most cases sincere socialists, who wanted to fight to overthrow Tsarism and capitalism.

But, in contrast to what various low-life political hacks would have you believe, Lenin never did any filtering, he did not make compromises with regard to theory or tactics in order to build the Party, on the contrary he always hammered away on the intransigence of original and monolithic Marxism, the "granite foundation of theory", he writes in "Left-wing Communism", a doctrine he knew perfectly, as witnessed by his theoretical and polemical writings of those years. There had in fact been a revolutionary camp in existence, which Lenin contributed to greatly in accompanying its maturation into a centralized and disciplined party, inspired by the unique doctrine and unique communist program, which was to guide it to the October Revolution

Even before then, revolutionary theory had never arisen from filtering, that is to say, rummaging through different groups: not in 1848, not in 1903. It was not so for our Left current in the Italian Socialist Party, which since its establishment at the end of the war of 1914-18 boasted theoretical bases perfectly in line with Marx. As well as with Lenin, who we still did not know at that point.

To think, in 1980, that it was possible to bring groups and organizations drawn from areas of bourgeois rebellion over to correct Marxist doctrine, assuming that one possessed this, groups that always swarm around the Communist Party, and to get them to accept Marxist teaching by virtue of who knows what tricks and maneuvers, was just anti-Marxist wishful thinking. It was opportunism: it was claimed that the intention was only to sift through these groups, but the real effect was to allow the Party *to be filtered*, reducing it to a circle among circles.

Hence the article, which in accordance with our method offers very little in the way of polemics, but positively reaffirms the fundamental characteristics of the Communist Party, as ever. Already in 1980, the years that had passed since our expulsion had proven these to be undeniable for holding to the straight course that leads to the proletarian revolution. And the decades that have passed since then have only confirmed those statements and those predictions.

In the understanding of the Communist Left, the political party's essential function is to not deviate from the "historical party", from its program, from its tradition. The Party's political organization is unique and opposed to all other parties because it embodies the communist program of the proletarian class. That being said, it follows that the history of the political Party is the history of the class conquest of communist consciousness.

Just as it would be absurd and anti-historical to believe that the proletariat should use barricades as a military option today, so it is absurd and anti-historical to consider that the political Party needs to go through the "circle phase" before turning into a "compact and powerful" party. This, in the theoretical field, would be like admitting that there was no historical activity of the class before now and that we ought to *rewrite* Das Kapital, that the class doesn't have a historical memory.

The "circle phase" was typical of late nineteenth century Russia, and that is why Lenin took the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) as a model in order to unify the Russian socialist circles into one national political party. It has no equivalent in the contemporary industrially developed world.

Since the world proletariat now has a rich history behind it in all fields, it doesn't need to start afresh every time it suffers a defeat. Besides which, this would be inconsistent with the centralization, development and concentration of productive forces, from which there arises almost automatically the need for a party which is a thousand times more centralized, not only in an organizational sense, but also in terms of its theoretical activity.

The narrowness of the "circle" is typical of the petty bourgeoisie, in which there is a prevailing incapacity to elaborate doctrine, an absence of principles or program, and whose maximum ambition is a federation of associations, just like the anarchists.

With the advent of the Communist Third International, with one world center, on its way to the International Communist Party, the working class acquired what Lenin called "organizational consciousness", the programmatic content, the tactics, the world dimension, the pyramidal structure of its political organization.

The Communist Left, after the destruction of the Comintern, is the latter's custodian. Since the end of the second imperialist war, embodied in the small International Communist Party, it has carried out the task of linking the prolific, heroic past to the revolutionary, victorious future in an unremitting effort to restore the doctrine and rebuild the political organization.

Tenacious and Coherent Party Activity

Lenin used the expression "embryonic party" and the Communist Left the term "small party" to signify that becoming a "big party" requires no distortion of the prerogatives and the forms of the Party as such.

To grow from an embryonic party to a mature party there is no need to "change direction". But the political organization in embryo deserves the name *Party* if, and only if, it carries out its relevant functions with coherence and fidelity to the doctrine and program. From any other embryo there will emerge not a large party but an enemy party. The embryo, as we know from biology, contains the essential and fundamental functions of the mature adult organism, some of them potentially and others more or less defined.

Indeed, the proof of this contention is the work and activity of the "small party" over the past thirty years; work conducted not only in the realm of theory and doctrine but also in the trade union economic field, together with the activities of propaganda and enrolment of new members, organization and internal party life.

Our 1965-1966 Theses, binding on all those who profess to be revolutionary communists, confirm these assertions. They remind us that "the Party cannot but be affected by aspects of the real situation that surrounds it" (*Theses on Organic Centralism*, 1965), a situation that is clearly unfavorable, yet for all that "it mustn't give up the fight, but must survive and pass on the torch along the historical *filo del tempo*. Clearly it will be a small party, not out of choice or because we want it that way, but due to ineluctable necessity".

Regarding the structure of this small party, "we don't want a party which is elitist or a secret sect, which turns its back on the world out of a mania for purity. We reject any 'Workers Party' or Laborite formula (...) We don't want to turn the Party into some kind of cultural, intellectual or academic association (...) Nor do we believe, as some anarchists and Blanquists do, that a party of armed conspiratorial action and the weaver of plots is conceivable".

The fact that over a long period we have had to invest most of our energy in taking action to combat "falsifications and the destruction of theory and sound doctrine", "is no reason to erect a barrier between theory and practical action, since if taken too far we would end up destroying ourselves and all of the principles we base ourselves on". "We lay claim, therefore, to all appropriate forms of activity at the propitious moment, to the extent they are allowed by the real balance of forces". And not only do we lay claim to them, but, wherever material conditions permit, we put them into practice. "Everywhere and without exception Party life must be complemented by an unceasing effort to enter into the life of the masses, and even into those expressions of it influenced by initiatives opposed to ours (...) In many regions the Party now has behind it a notable activity," in the economic-union field, "although [it is] always bound to encounter serious difficulties, and hostile forces which are greater than ours, at least in a statistical sense".

Activity and Action

Our theses thus commit us to conspicuous activity and theoretical action. As long as the current unfavorable period endures (and for us passionate revolutionaries it seems interminable) the Party will be restricted, not out of choice, to political activity and theoretical action, propaganda, and polemics. The field of action is inevitably limited and the instruments of this action likewise inevitably limited to disseminating the revolutionary program.

In spite of this relative, temporal constraint the Party always strives to pass from activity to action, from propaganda to agitation and mobilization in order to influence the class. Beware, however, of thinking that willpower is enough to alter the respective proportions of the different aspects of our work, because, to use Lenin's expression, "the greater the spontaneous pressure of the masses, the further the movement extends, the greater the need – in an incomparably more rapid manner – for consciousness in the organizational, political, and theoretical activity" of the Party.

The transition from activity to action is expected by the Party, is sought by its militants as the natural way in which finally to expend all the energy so long contained and repressed due to the greater pressure of the enemy forces. If it were not so, if the Party were to hear that the time for action had come by means of an official "announcement", or following a sudden, unexpected decision, then the organization would be mortally traumatized.

All of the work carried out by the Party, externally and above all internally, is intended to prepare its small organization for the opportunity to translate its formidable historical program into precise and specific political acts, i.e. when the conditions are right. For as long as the material conditions remain unfavorable, the preparation of the Party consists in testing how open these conditions are to party action, not in resorting to simple subterfuges or dubious maneuvers, which in the end would only leave the Party itself open to penetration by the enemy's subterfuges and maneuvers, contaminating the organization and destroying our programmatic basis whilst completely adhering to the traditional and programmatic roots.

History has demonstrated that the Party can easily be disorientated; it would be enough to confront it with an abrupt maneuver, to assail it with a last-minute "discovery", for example of a "revolutionary milieu" outside the Party, and as a consequence a willingness to embrace the swarms of pseudo-revolutionary crackpots in student and academic circles, in the world of the spineless middle classes. This would be enough to demolish decades of hard work, or, at best (given that the error could be rectified) to delay or compromise the preparation of the Party and its growth.

The need for consciousness in the Party is a categorical imperative. The Party must be ready to make predictions, to be aware of what it is doing and what it is about to do, the consequences of every undertaking and transition, and the impact they might have on the organization.

The Party's theoretical action is also political activity, in the sense that we have used theoretical elaboration as a weapon, whose organs of diffusion are the newspaper and the militants themselves, by means of which the Party puts itself in physical contact with the class and in direct conflict with the false ideologies, the false parties and trade unions. Our contact with the class and our confrontation with the enemy, as our theses show, extend by virtue of this constant action, and are aligned with the maturation of the crisis of capitalism.

The newspaper, our Party's mouthpiece, has always showcased the activity and action of the Party. As the Party's practice develops and grows, the political paper will also develop, filtering into and influencing the class. If it were not so, we would end up with a paper that went its own way with respect to the Party's real activity; a paper that didn't reflect the organization's real situation. It would become merely an expression of wishful thinking, inevitably succumbing to voluntarism and empty activism. Conversely, if our newspaper refused to broaden its political activity and take political action where possible, it would relapse into academicism. But in the real Party this has never happened, and it will not happen so long as it doesn't lose its bearings.

This is why no credence can be given to the theory of the "circle phase" which our Party is allegedly going through and hasn't yet completed; a convenient theory for our detractors to justify their false steps, their twists and turns and sudden reversals, and their denials of an enviable organizational efficiency in the fields of activity and action. Our detractors have not hesitated to use these maneuvers to split the small party, with the aim of throwing it into incomprehension and perplexity.

Organization and Discipline

It is too easy to state: "Well it has happened and even if we were wrong we can't turn back". To theorize the "circle phase" and then act as if one were building the "great party" leads directly to the notion that the Party will expand and develop beyond its current perimeter not based on the strength of the activity proper to it, but by virtue of the "circles", that is, through wheeling and dealing with the petty-bourgeois milieu, where the "circles" originate. Getting people to believe these false constructions serves to justify the organization's bureaucratization and the use of coercion in the internal life of the Party, transforming discipline into control of the Party from on high, without which, in fact, the circles cannot be held together.

The real Party did not originate in circles and nor will it grow by passing through the "circle phase". The whole history of the Communist Left proves and confirms this.

Even if, for the sake of argument, we admitted that the Party had gone through or is still going through the "circle phase", it would still be wrong to maintain that the "circle phase" can be overcome by means of organizational expedients, by resorting to discipline, by using innovations of "the political newspaper" variety: as if Lenin had operated in the fields of organization, activity and discipline without first concentrating his fire on all the falsifications of socialism spread by the "economists" and the other socialist groups of the time. If we were to believe this in 1980 [when this article was originally published – ed.], in the zone where revolution is unambiguously on the agenda, we would falsify Lenin, and end up distorting his powerful lessons. By aping the Russian experience in party-building one arrives at the opposite result to that arrived at by Bolshevism and the Italian Communist Left; we would end up as a party made up of "groups" or "circles", whose life would be one of constant political bickering and the consequent rifts, with nothing to counter the intended "filtering" of micro-political organizations, who by their very nature are opposed to the real Party.

Viewing organization and discipline as a magic formula, the "open sesame" to the question of building the political party, is based on military and bureaucratic automatism. The Party's conception of organization, structure and ways of regulating

discipline to directives from the center is opposed to that of the bourgeoisie.

Only in the field of military organization does the Party require mechanical discipline from the general party organization, but, as Lenin also maintained, the more conscious it is the better. This presupposes preparation by the Party so that nothing appears improvised or unexpected. It is no coincidence that the famous "political commissars" of the Red Army were nothing other than the voice of the Party, senior, in both hierarchical and political rank, to the military commanders. Through them the Party not only controlled the class structure and the class military apparatus, but above all instilled the proletarian fighters with communist passion and consciousness.

In organizational matters, the Left's position has never been to divide militants into "specialists" or "experts" dedicated to particular functions within the Party's complex activity. One way to combat the negative consequences of party routine is to encourage comrades to take on different roles and engage in different tasks, because even now, in the present party, we strive in practice to combat the technical division of labor. The Party must be capable of forging comrades capable of taking on any role, of discouraging individuals from any personal "vocation" beyond that of simply working for the Party, within the Party and at the Party's command.

The history of the Communist Left reminds us how all comrades, whatever the place assigned to them by the Party in the organizational structure, have got involved in the proletariat's trade union and economic struggles, never thinking for one moment they were invading some other comrade's fields of "competence", or were not "up to a task" due to a lack of "specialization" on their part. Our bitter and long-standing polemic against the "renegades to come", around organizing the Party on the basis of workplace cells, as specialized organizational structures rather than on a territorial basis, reasserted the necessary aspiration to work and progress by breaking down specializations, technicalities, limitations, narrow-mindedness, the baggage of the "iron" hierarchies of the time, with which opportunism was crushing the Party, by passing off stupid hierarchical and bureaucratic exercises as "Bolshevism", rather than by supporting the Party with the organic use of all of its militant forces.

In transposing Lenin's powerful lessons on the building of the political organization to today, one cannot disregard the historical processes that have occurred since the October Revolution and the Third International, the high points of the global revolutionary proletariat's historical experience. If, in order to rebuild the Party, we did not use the best materials available from history, but instead took what is outdated and obsolete, we wouldn't be working to build the International Communist Party as a powerful social force; rather, we would be building an abortion of a party, a political organization that would hinder the rebirth of the Party. Transferring the question to the field of tactics would be like applying the operational models of party action that were appropriate to the phase of double revolution to the single revolution phase.

In line with this correct principle of historical and dialectical determinism, we have been fighting for more than 56 years to build a single world Communist Party, not a new version of the Communist League or the International Workers Association; revolutionary class organs in 1848 and in 1866, utopias – if not actually reactionary, at least of dubious origin – in 1980.

The falsifiers of the Left argue that if the "circle phase" is not completed, a phase during which (by the way!) the program and theory would be restored, you would not be able to rebuild the political Party. A nice discovery this, that you can rebuild the program and theory without at the same time, day by day, rebuilding the organization! As if the restoration of the programmatic and theoretical fundamentals was not

the activity, struggle and action of an organization, small maybe, but still a political organization.

One of our more significant pamphlets is entitled *In Defense of the Continuity of the Communist Program*. In it are contained the theses of the Left, from those of the "Communist Abstentionist Fraction" in 1920, to the body of theses from 1965-66 known as the "Theses on Organic Centralism". The theses crystallize our basic positions over a period of 46 years in a perfect uninterrupted succession. They cover the salient phases in the struggle of revolutionary communists to build, rebuild and defend the worldwide Party; the most vital organ for a new "storming of heaven".

It is precisely in the Theses of July 1965, directed at those who wanted to deny the status of Party to our small organization and portray us as a sect of Marxologists, that we read explicitly stated: "*Before quitting the subject of the Party's formation after the Second World War, it is worth reaffirming some results which are today considered characteristic party positions insofar as they are substantial historical results, despite the limited quantitative extension of the movement, and not discoveries by useless geniuses or solemn resolutions made by sovereign congresses*". And here is the list of "substantial historical results" achieved by the "small party", the most important one being not "*conceiving the movement as merely an activity of propaganda and political proselytism*", but as engaged "*in an unceasing effort to merge its own life with the life of the masses*"; and thus, "*the position in which the small party is reduced to being a set of narrow circles, with no connection with the outside world, must be rejected*".

Finally, there is the peremptory reminder not to split the organization, not to "*subdivide the Party or its local groupings into watertight compartments that are only active in one field, whether theory, study, historical research, propaganda, proselytism or trade union activity. This is because the very essence of our theory and our history is that these various fields are totally inseparable, and in principle accessible to each and every comrade*".

The comprehensive positions, set out in the form of theses, that is in a positive way, do not constitute a nice, elegantly bound book to stick in a library, but are rules of practical life, which, as the small organization takes shape and gets stronger, the more it fights to assert, implement and defend them against enemies and false friends.

Who Benefits?

The Party's political organization, therefore, is structured and forged by means of the perfect agreement of its functions and its specific and general duties with the program and traditions of revolutionary Marxism. Organizational and disciplinary expedients cannot replace this.

For seven years now denigrators of the Left have been repeating that hitherto the Party has been going through a "circle phase", and that in order to emerge from it organizational and disciplinary measures are required.

For 35 years no one had noticed they were living in and among circles. Only the theorists of the "circle phase" have had this powerful flash of enlightenment. Thus these latest doctrinaires with their false theory have accredited the lie that the political Party arises after having completed the "circle phase", in which the Party is supposedly incubated. Thus we witness a new historical sequence: first "circles", then, after organizational and disciplinary action, the true Party.

In reality “circles” are an invention by the detractors of the Left to justify their false political theorems, their eccentric interpretations, and their insane organizational and disciplinary measures for “mastering” the organization’s “circle phase”.

With the same purpose “fractions” were invented by the degenerating Executive of the Third International in Moscow to destroy the Left. Over and over again, and with incomparably greater force than us, past generations of left communists repeated these same considerations in the national and international conferences to the greater and lesser leaders of the communist movement. Over and over again we have heard it repeated that they were the fancy notions of visionaries, that we were “fractionists”, and that this was enough to warrant our expulsion from the party under a cloud of treason.

It is easy enough today to establish what the ignoble aim of the “Iron Bolsheviks” was, but it is much more difficult to fully understand the way the usurpers of the revolution betrayed communism, and destroyed the Party. Even back then we heard repeated the bourgeois doctrine, falsely attributed to Lenin, of “the ends justify the means”, as though the means were independent of the ends, as though there was not instead a close dialectical relationship between the means employed and the ends attained. When we treated these central themes (Rome theses, Lyon theses, etc.) we were accused of being “doctrinaire”, “academic”, or of wanting a “disembodied” party.

The most shameful aspect of this false doctrine is that it attempts to cast a veil of pious silence over the 35 years of work and struggle during which a small organization was forged; as though one had been slogging away for a third of a century not to prepare the Party but a bunch of “circles” instead.

To reinforce this view the work of rebuilding the doctrine was artificially separated from rebuilding the political Party, attributing the former not to party forces, but to “the genius” of Lenin, to whom treacherous reverence was made by publishing his “works” *post mortem*, making much of his name, spelled out in full.

A Harsh Lesson for All

The conservation of our forces, especially in this negative phase, which has gone on for 54 years, is a primary organizational concern for our small party. It is a commitment dating back to the time of Marx and Engels and has allowed the transmission of the doctrine intact from one generation of communist revolutionaries to another. And woe betide the Party if this handing over is interrupted by specious “stages” and “turns”. We are in the Party not as a result of formal membership, nor to observe some kind of discipline, but because of our unwavering faith in the program and in the organization that expresses, practices and defends it.

This is no formal “unitarism”, which is just as harmful as fractionism, but neither is it the foolish and base conceit of being “the elect”, a nucleus blessed by history who are allowed to do what they like, including denying today what was said the day before.

The boasted “selection of forces” is not a prerequisite but a consequence of the revolutionary struggle. But when it is invoked to suppress forces within the Party who are “uncomfortable” when faced with the difficult task of opposing the general trend, we must admit we are in the presence of a fatal degeneration process, not a practice that helps strengthen the organization.

These are not moral or aesthetic considerations, but the patrimony of the Left. To argue that “conditions” are not ripe enough to apply them is equivalent to rejecting them, and consequently to paving the way, in the long run, for the defeat of

revolution.

Never to allow anyone to attack the Party's programmatic and organizational integrity is the other injunction handed down to us, derived from the first. Anyone who dares as much, whether high up in the Party or in "the ranks", must be cast adrift. It shouldn't be thought that the Party just consists of its leaders and that the "followers" are just the executors of their irrefutable orders. Often, very often in fact, the correct revolutionary policy hasn't been handed down from above, as proved by the Left's formidable struggle, against which the majority consensus was opposed as proof of revolutionary veracity, rather than the doctrinal solidity of the arguments, aligned with the program and the tradition. That the democratic form of consensus, as was customary in the International, has now been discarded, is not a useful vindication, but an attempt to browbeat the Party. Dirty tricks are still dirty tricks with or without the feather duster of counting votes.

For the same reason that we are custodians of our theory and program, we are also the guardians of our organization. The supporters of the false doctrine of the "circle phase" have no such scruples, since it is not about the Party, according to them, but "circles".

To stop someone in the Party from pontificating, in true Pharisaic fashion, by serving up solutions selected at random, in crass ignorance of our history and the history of our class, you ignore the fact that central questions never reappear in exactly the same guise; this is to prevent the Party from being "periodically subjected to hot and cold showers" and having to adapt to the whims of random passers-by.

The Party must be able to control every aspect of its life, carry out each of its organizational roles in such a way that nothing strikes it as unexpected, incomprehensible or mysterious. Passing off as positions of the Left that terrorism is a "gleam of light" for the proletariat; that the folksy political traditions of extremist factions, with their lumpen-intellectual student base, represent a "revolutionary camp"; that the idea of "workers committees" is fanciful and that working within them is "activism" or "economism", and then immediately to state exactly the opposite, not because anything has actually changed but due to impatience and disappointment that no *immediate* gains have been made; that such oscillations represent the "tactics" of the Left only disorientates militants, sows discord in the Party, erodes the organization, and compromises decades of hard-earned, consistent work.

The theorists of the "circles" are not afflicted with any such preoccupations, because their remedy for everything is "discipline" and organizational formulas.

Of one thing we can be certain: the International Communist Party did *not* arise from circles.

The points developed up to now have aimed at demonstrating that the political Party arises not from organizational "shifts" or disciplinary "cures", but from conscientiously working to restore the program. On this basis, the political Party has always arisen, and then arisen again. The forces that coalesce around all the various activities through which the Party's life objectifies itself take up their battle stations and discover their commitment in a natural way, by respecting, also in a natural way, the fundamental principles of the organization, i.e., centralism and discipline. These principles are common to all political parties, even bourgeois parties, the major difference being that in the Communist Party they are applied in a way that the Left defines as organic.

Let there be no mistake: the word "organic" does not mean that each militant can arbitrarily interpret the Party's instructions, or that the Party has no hierarchical structure, or that within this functional hierarchy, whoever is at the top, can just as arbitrarily issue orders, repress, and condemn. The history of the Left has shown that rather than breaking the basic rules of party political organization it preferred to "suffer" often in "heroic silence". The example of the so called "retractions" of the Bolshevik old guard, brought before the State tribunals of Stalin, confirms the formidable willingness of Communists to renege on their personal convictions should these conflict with the principle of principles: the primary requirement of the class political Party. Anything to avoid offering the enemy, capitalism, the chance to blackmail the working class, with an example of its own Party being repudiated by the revolutionaries. The lesson of Bukharin, Zinoviev, Kamenev, etc. was precisely not to offer the capitalist world the spectacle of insubordination to the Party.

Organic means that the Party is not bound by any *a priori* form and that it wants to be able to assume any form that is serviceable in the deadly all-out war of the revolutionary proletariat against capitalist society. In this sense, it does not exclude from its arsenal – tactical ideological, political or organizational – any means it deems effective in defeating the enemy. A party with a flexible organization, able to pass from one stage of the class struggle to the other without going off its programmatic rails. This is what Lenin always stood for as well.

The Principles of Organization

A political party can exist without an ideology, a doctrine, or a historic program of its own, but it must have an organization. The fascist party is a prime example. The anarchist party had to renege on all its sophistry to survive as a political force.

The advantage the Communist Party has is that its organization is not based on organizational principles of centralism and discipline that are disconnected from its program. In this the communist organization finds continuity, it can periodically die off and arise again because it draws its strength from the unique and indivisible program from which it arose. If on the one hand we take the "historical party" as said, i.e. the party-program that won't die until class divided society dies, the political Party, which in Marx's words is ephemeral, is on the other hand susceptible to fluctuations in the class struggle, and operates and sets itself in motion by organizing its forces on the basis of centralism and discipline.

Certainly the Party does not arise from circles, but it may dissolve into circles if it fails to stick to its program, tactics and organizational principles.

Another aspect that characterizes the application of organizational principles in the Communist Party is that the discipline is spontaneous, even when, due to *force majeure*, the Party has to equip itself with a military organization. Here too it should be emphasized that spontaneous does not mean acceptance or rejection of discipline depending on whether or not one got up on the wrong side of the bed in the morning.

One of the principal arguments which the Left used in its fight against Moscow's degeneration and against Stalinism was *and still is* that it is fatal for the Party to think it can correct deviations by means of organizational and disciplinary proceedings.

The Party establishes rules of operation that may change in the various phases of the class struggle, corresponding to the actions and activities it needs to carry out. These rules must also respond to specific requirements and organizational principles in order not to disrupt the underlying party structure. Ensuring optimum

development of the Party's internal life and work is not a secondary matter, nor is it a "moral" issue in the pejorative sense of the term. The tormented history of the International also had to undergo the opportunist contamination in these ways as well, which the Left, though it persistently denounced opportunism in the strongest terms, was unable to prevent. The small party cannot neglect these aspects or consider them secondary as compared to the bigger tasks that need attending to. The proper functioning of the Party not only derives from a strict adherence to its program, tactics and organization, but also from combining its internal with its external functions.

In this respect the Left gave precise guidelines, in the form of precepts that relate in their literary expression more to feeling than to reason, and were bound to provoke a sarcastic response from the iron neo-Bolsheviks, steadfastly opposed to any *moto dell'animo*, any stirrings of the heart. The definition of socialism as "sentiment" is not Tolstoy's but Marx's and the Left's; and we fail to see how this sentiment is supposed to permeate tomorrow's humanity if the "fighting community", that is today's Party, isn't also permeated by it. The "fraternal consideration for other comrades" which so scandalizes imbeciles and offers a pretext to hypocrites for their diplomatic maneuvers, is one of the precepts of party life. It signifies solidarity of comrades among themselves, not condescension. Solidarity is a material force, not a weakness. It is said that Lenin, the internationalist, gave to Stalin – the ultimate "romantic", "iron Bolshevik" or "man of steel" – a serious tongue lashing after the latter had showed disrespect towards his partner Krupskaya, who was also a party militant.

Another precept of party life, which seems to contradict the first, is that "you should love nobody". The hysterics, who can't appreciate the profound truth within the paradox, interpret this to mean that affectionate feelings between comrades are forbidden, that comrades should be regarded as mere instruments, to be used or cast aside, of a party viewed as a metaphysical Moloch, to whom everything must be sacrificed, forgetting that the political Party cannot exist without militants. The meaning of the precept is, on the contrary, that "*you should love all comrades*", not favor some and exclude others.

The idea that the Party is just a cold social organ, all rationality and militant science, as though it were a machine, is wrong. Even in the Party rationality and science are not derived from individuals, but from the body of the class as a whole, interpreted by Marxists and condensed into texts and theses which are transmitted over the centuries and successive generations. And there would be no science and rationality without the decisive impulse which passion and feeling provide. Without faith, instinct and sentiment there is no "reversal of praxis". There is no such thing as science for science's sake, Marxism for Marxism's sake, or party for the party's sake. Marxism and Party are weapon and organ of the last of history's revolutionary classes, the proletariat. We reasserted these concepts in particular during the final years of the International, when we were forced to witness poisonous infighting tearing the glorious body of the international Party apart when still in its formative stage: when fratricidal groups and factions formed and engaged in a no-holds-barred struggle, of which the macabre synthesis was Stalin.

The split in our small party in November 1973 did not happen because "Stalinist" discipline was imposed on the Party, according to the version of the splitters, whose balance sheet, however, is just as serious as the arrogance with which the Party was muzzled in those turbid and asphyxiating years. The reasons for the split lie in a tactical plan, which it was hoped would move the Party onto the terrain of

engaging with the petty-bourgeois extremist camp, rebaptized "*area rivoluzionaria*", with the "circles" and the swinish denizens of the perpetual "protest movement" of students and lumpenproletarians; brain and brawn of the sterile and reactionary *semi-classes*. The maneuver was backed up with the false idea that "they might become Soviets" and replace unions, absorbing a principle actually derived from the reactionary "extremism" of politics first, in which proletarian economic struggle, the rebuilding of the indispensable class organization, is downgraded.

The organizational and disciplinary measures that were taken to force through this maneuver served to break the resistance within the Party and were supported by a campaign of denigration and lies worthy of the darkest years of the Moscow International.

Thus in the internal life of the Party there arose the false principle that you could switch with impunity from one maneuver to another simply by resorting to organizational and disciplinary instruments, and to ideological – or in some cases even non-ideological – terrorism. Increasingly relations between comrades came to be dominated by mistrust, diplomacy, and even hatred justified by the new slogan of the necessity, for the good of the Party, of "political struggle" within the Party.

We didn't complain, at the time, about the sudden tightening of disciplinary measures, nor about the police-like conduct of the Center's emissaries, because it is a non-negotiable fact that Communists do not complain about discipline; we complained because these means, when used unexpectedly, make Communists feel that some indefinable change is happening in the Party, which they are understandably suspicious about. Despite all this, we remained steadfast in our duty to submit to the Party leadership, without relinquishing the necessary function of any comrade to act as a check on the actions of the leadership.

We relate these painful and lamentable facts, so unworthy of the Communist Left tradition, to the serious, young comrades of yesterday, and those of today, who never got to hear the truth or only a distorted version of it, so they can arrive at the objective realization that the ways in which the Party may be destroyed are many and various, yet all can be traced back to historical experience which the true Party possesses, and which genuine comrades have a duty to research and to defend, cost what it may.

From Party to "Circles"

One of the ways the Party can degenerate is by fragmenting into circles; by far the worst way because it is entirely unproductive, whereas fractions, as history has shown, can be the basis on which rebuilding the Party can start again. This danger is one that affects not just big parties but above all any party in which the precious legacy of revolutionary Marxism has been dissipated. The way to disperse this legacy into thousands of separate streams is precisely by allowing to form, crystallize and eventually to operate, within the same political party organization, tendencies which diverge from those on which the Party is based; thereby cultivating the illusion that the Party, thus transformed into a party of opinions, can still respond to the highly challenging demands of the class struggle.

History has shown that when the launching of the revolutionary offensive seems imminent, it is wrong to make naive claims around attracting non-homogeneous forces, hoping the struggle will somehow amalgamate them, until victory is achieved at least, and with the firm yet even more naive intention of casting them adrift after the victory if they get in the way of maintaining political power. Our bitter

conclusion, after the attack failed and there was no victory, was that these non-homogeneous forces strongly contributed to the demise of the Party. If the small party were to take this path, which history has shown to have failed, it would die long before it became a big party.

Even more so when the opposite process occurs, that is, when, as a result of organizational discontinuity, tactical fluctuations, conflicting policies and an ambivalent attitude towards its tradition, the Party, nominally one, in fact is a composite organization composed of unequal parts, held together by disciplinary rules, which hold sway in the absence of real conflicts due to the persistent flaccidity of social relations.

The positions we are expressing are those of the Left, those of the old Party, of 1921, as crystallized in the Rome theses of 1922, the Lyon theses of 1926, in the firm consistent positions adopted at the Congresses of the Communist International, in the characteristic "basics" of 1952 through to those contained in the 1965-1966 theses.

We have also bluntly reminded the so-called "international" and "internationalist circles" about this, prompted by them inviting us to proto-constituent "Party" conferences, which elaborated, and probably still do elaborate, the argument that the Party arises from an "entente", a compromise agreement between various circles (or groups as they call them) to reunite the "scattered limbs" of the communists. That they might come to some "arrangement" we don't deny. What we rule out though is that this could generate the class political Party, the "compact and powerful" Party.

It should be recognized that these "constituents" are at least consistent, because they put their words into action. Not so those who preach the false doctrine that the "party arises from circles", and practice it only behind closed doors, whether out of shyness, opportunism, or both, we don't know.

The Left's positions do not lie somewhere in the middle, between brazen "constituents" and shy "constituents", but clash with both, since both denigrate the Left and the true Party.

The Party grows and develops in ways that are already known, that is on the foundation of the Left's heritage, and not through an accumulation of self-proclaimed revolutionary circles or groups, towards which we can pursue a policy of emptying them out to liberate the genuinely proletarian forces within. Put another way, the circles would enter the Party and the damage caused would be the worst imaginable. The Party might experience a surge in its membership, but only by transforming itself into a collection of fratricidal tribes and clans, until complete degeneration sets in.