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Marxism and the Idea of Dictatorship

Chapter VII of “Dittatura e Rivoluzione”

Luigi Fabbri

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The idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat, that is, of the dictatorial direction of revolution, is taken as deriving from Karl Marx.

That the concept of the proletarian dictatorship is the most suitable for the mentality formed with Marxism, it may be true; but that Marx actually conceived the revolution as guided and dominated by an absolute dictatorial power, this seems to us very doubtful. Karl Marx was an authoritarian socialist, not an anarchist one, and therefore he foresaw a governmental development of the revolution, in which the proletariat would become the ruling class and use political power to expropriate the bourgeoisie, intervening *despotically* in the right of property and the bourgeois relations of production.

But this is not yet the *dictatorship*. It doesn’t even seem that this word has been so often used by Marx, nor that he did so by attaching a special importance to it or developing a concrete and precise idea in regards. He saw the coming to power of the proletariat as the *triumph of democracy*; that is to say, a

representative and not dictatorial proletarian government, inexorable and violent only to the detriment of the bourgeoisie.

Enrico Leone is also of our opinion, in an article we have already mentioned before. According to Leone, “the word *dictatorship* didn’t have an in-depth meaning under the pen of Marx, who used it to summarize the tactics of the revolutionary process that the proletariat will cling to when it has taken hold of political power. Marx enormously extended, *through a metaphorical amplification*, the exact and proximate meaning that this word has in history and political science ... Marx used the word dictatorship (and perhaps he would have eliminated it without the insistence of Engels, who was an admirer of Robespierre) for that sense of salutary pedagogy that was attributed to it ... The more enlightened modern popular consciousness is not willing to sacrifice itself to that sort of political fetishism that decrees dictatorship as salutary; even if exercised in the name of a class, it is a suppression of the fundamental guarantees of human personality.”¹

The idea of the conquest of political power, in order to use it to expropriate the bourgeoisie by means of laws and by force of authority, whether understood in a democratic sense or in a dictatorial and absolute one, is only very relatively of Marx; rather it belongs to the French socialists prior or contemporary to him, Louis Blanc or Blanqui, and it is an idea inherited, through the secret societies before 1848, from the Jacobin traditions of the first French revolution, from Gracco Babeuf, Buonarotti, etc.

Marx made his own the tactics of the conquest of political power, in a more democratic than dictatorial sense, relatively lately, more as a development of his sectarian action within the International and his contrast with the anarchists, than as an application of his theories. The idea of dictatorship can be considered more as a derivation (Kautsky would say deviation) of

¹ See the article “La Dittatura” [“The Dictatorship”] by E. Leone, in the newspaper *Il Lavoratore* from Trieste, 22 May 1920.

Let them take the living word and not the dead one of their masters. Let them remember that Karl Marx — who was keen to declare that he was not a “Marxist” at all — sixteen years after writing the “Communist Manifesto” already felt the need to advise the socialists not to take it too literally, to apply it “in each place and time according to the historical conditions of the moment.” Let us not be utopians to the point of forgetting that from 1848 up to today more than seventy years have passed!

Marxism, than as a true Marxist idea. Moreover, if one studies the currents of socialism, one will see that much of what bears the label of Marx is not Marxist at all, and it is much easier to find in Malon, Lassalle, Engels and maybe ... Von Schaeffle!

When Marx, rather than formulating theories, observed the facts closely, for example in his study of the Paris Commune, he reached conclusions not only different but in absolute opposition to the Jacobin, authoritarian and centralizing conception of dictatorship. Regarding the communal tendencies in France in 1871, he wrote:

“The unity of the nation was not to be broken at all, but on the contrary, organized by the communal constituent; it had to become a reality with the annihilation of that state power which pretended to be the authentic representative of this unity, but which wanted to remain independent and superior before the nation, on whose organism it was nothing but a parasitic excrescence. While the oppressive organisms of the ancient power of government were successfully severed, its legitimate functions had to be withdrawn from a power that aspired to overwhelm society, and had to be returned to the responsible servants of society ... The communal constitution would have returned to the social body all the forces that until then had been consumed by the parasitic State that feeds on society and hinders its free movement. For this fact alone, it would have put France on the path of rebirth ... The simple existence of the Commune brought with it, as a natural thing in itself, local autonomy; but now no longer as a counterweight to state power, which had become superfluous.”²

² C. Marx. — *La guerra civile in Francia*. [The civil war in France] — p. 45 and 46. (*Opere di Marx, Engels e Lassalle*, Vol. II, n. 4)

Everyone understands that the exaltation of local autonomy and communalist constitution, against the power of the State, deemed superfluous, is quite the opposite of the apology of dictatorship.

We are not Marxists. But it would be wrong to take Marxism as a term of differentiation between anarchism and socialism. One could theoretically, strictly speaking, be an anarchist and a Marxist, and vice-versa be an anti-anarchist socialist and not a Marxist. Of course, by Marxism we mean the complex of theories developed by Marx in his works (historical materialism, class struggle, capitalist concentration, surplus value, etc.), and not the practical political stances of the second period of his activity [in the International], carried out largely to combat the anarchist current of the International. In fact, theoretically, in the ideas of the various socialist and anarchist writers, there has not always been an absolute incompatibility between anarchism and Marxism.

Many have reproduced the passage in which Marx, in 1872, accepted a socialist definition of anarchy.³ On the other hand, Bakunin repeatedly claimed to be a follower of the Marxist doctrine of economic determinism;⁴ and so the first vulgarizers of Marxism in Italy were anarchists. It was the anarchist Carlo Cafiero who made for the Italians the first summary of *Capital*,

³ “All socialists mean this by anarchy: once the aim of the proletarian movement is achieved, that is, the abolition of laws, the power of the state disappears, and governmental functions are transformed into simple administrative functions.” C. Marx — *L'alleanza della Democrazia socialista, ecc.* [*The Alliance of socialist democracy, etc.*] — P. 13. (*Opere di Marx, Engels e Lassalle*, Vol. II, n. 5).

⁴ See also a letter from Bakunin to Herzen, dated October 28, 1869, in which Marx's “enormous merits” are boasted, especially for his influence which prevented the infiltration of bourgeois ideas and tendencies into socialism. (*M. Bakounine, Correspondance* — Edit. Perrin, Paris — pages 288–291).

most to overthrowing the bourgeois powers. This is far from impossible, and one could say it is inevitable, in countries like ours, in which a regime of industrial government would clash against the impatience to any compulsory discipline that is in the character of the populations, against the habit acquired under the current regime of seeing government as an enemy, and against the inability to adapt to the industrial regime for which we lack the main natural conditions. This last difficulty could be overcome with time, little by little; but wanting to strike against it with violence, of a sudden, from the very first moment, would mean uselessly arousing new enemies against the revolution, even among those who would be interested in defending it.

All this, instead of benefiting production, would inevitably prevent the order necessary for its development; and it would favor the game of the counter-revolution, preventing the new regime from soon reaching a definitive and stable trim. The reaction, disguising itself as a partisan of sometimes one sometimes the other side in conflict, would end up having the upper hand and unmask itself when all the revolutionary forces had exhausted and canceled each other out in sterile and certainly bloody retchings, in infightings between freedom and authority. That is to say, the revolution would end like that of 1789–93, by devouring itself.

The Socialists always have time to prevent such a disaster from being prepared for the revolution. We do not pretend by this, although it is our desire, that they become anarchists and definitely accept the anarchist concept of socialism and revolution. However, it is necessary that they inspire their tactics and revolutionary methods with a greater feeling of freedom; and above all they should renounce the pretense of bending by force the revolution to an aprioristic and dogmatic scheme, which of scientific has only the name arbitrarily given to it, and which may perhaps be called Marxist, but certainly Karl Marx himself would repudiate if he were still alive.

We would like to rejoice that, after forty years, the socialists have returned to communism, after having for so long left to the anarchists alone the care of propagating it.

However, if the socialists take it from Bukharin, it will happen that they have only changed their outer label. Inside there will always be the old German barracks collectivist utopia, the authoritarian socialism of before 1870, criticized by Proudhon and Bakunin, impossible to achieve. When Bukharin speaks to us of a *state power*, of an *iron power*, of an *energetic government*, our thoughts turn not only to Lenin, but also to Noske — indeed to Czar! In other words, we have every reason to fear that the governmental violence of the new State will not only be unleashed against the reactionary and bourgeois forces that have survived — which we will certainly not regret — but also against the workers recalcitrant to the “single work plan”, against the libertarian tendencies developed in the proletariat, against the spirit of autonomy, independence and revolt of the oppressed today who do not want, even for good reasons, to be oppressed tomorrow.

Marxist writers take pleasure sometimes in speaking of anarchism as an exaggeration of bourgeois individualism, pretending to ignore the theoretically and historically socialist foundation of the anarchist idea. With much greater right we can say that their monstrous conception of state capitalism, improperly called socialism, is the most exasperating exaggeration of bourgeois statism. Bourgeois individualism, without socialism, ended up killing the egalitarian spirit that animated the revolution of 1789 from its outbreak. In the same way, state socialism, without freedom, will render sterile the fruits of the revolution that began in Russia in 1917.

There is moreover a serious danger in all this: that the revolution will be exhausted in terrible internal struggles, in a vain effort of the revolutionary government to submit everything and everyone to its decrees, and in a growing discontent and rebellion of the subjects, especially those who first contributed

which Marx praised; it was the anarchist Pietro Gori who had the *Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels published, with a forward by him, for the first time in Milan. It was Mikhail Bakunin who first translated the *Manifesto* into Russian and had begun the translation of *Capital*, which did not continue only for reasons beyond his control. As Malatesta noted in a polemic in 1897, almost all anarchist literature until around 1894 was impregnated with Marxism. Little by little our movement and our propaganda (at least for the most part, because some tendency of this kind is still manifesting here and there) lost this character; and rightly in our opinion, for the reasons we will tell later. But what we have mentioned is no less valid in showing how wrong it is to speak of Marxism to characterize an antithesis of anarchism.

Moreover, political and social parties, which are parties of action, and are divided by the precise purpose they want to achieve and the methods they intend to use, can hardly be characterized and baptized with names and references to scientific and sociological theories of a general character, that are due to the intuitive or analytical genius of this or that single personality. There are Marxists, or there have been some, among anarchists and republicans, among syndicalists and reformists, among revolutionaries and legalitarians. One could be a Marxist — that is, consider the theories of class struggle, historical materialism, etc. to be correct — and be conservative and reactionary at the same time. Indeed, we believe that there are some. For this it is sufficient to put oneself into practice on one side of the barricade instead of the other — while agreeing that the barricade exists, that there is a conflict of interest and that it is fatal to come to blows sooner or later.

The scientific or sociological explanation of this conflict can be useful to see things in their reality (when the explanation is accurate, which in our opinion is not always the case for Marxism), it can be used as a topic for discussion; but it is not the most important thing and it is not essential. To see all things

through a single unilateral explanation, as is done with Marxism, and reduce to the minimum Marxist denominator an entire current of ideas and a complex movement such as socialism, all the action of a party and indeed of the entire proletariat, all the social revolution itself, which by its very nature cannot fail to be multiform and eclectic, according to circumstances and places, means shrinking everything by looking through inverted binoculars at everything: socialism, proletarian movement and revolution.

We, we repeat, are not Marxists, though anarchism at its rise, not in practice but in theoretical motivations, was almost completely so; though we recognize, with Bakunin, that Karl Marx contributed powerfully to making socialism make the enormous progress we are witnessing today. We are not Marxists, although many of Marx's ideas are accurate, either because some have over time shown themselves as simple hypotheses not confirmed by reality (capitalist concentration and growing misery) or as insufficient explanations of economic phenomena (surplus value), and because even the accurate ideas, such as those on historical materialism and class struggle, are accurate in a relative and contingent sense, and not in an absolute way, for all times and places.

We are not Marxists — and in this sense we have never been so, not even when all the theories mentioned above were accepted by many of us — in practice, about the direction to be given to the workers', socialist and revolutionary movement in the struggle against the ruling classes. From this point of view it is useless for the neo-Marxists to look in the master's books for some phrase proving the opposite: Marx, Engels and the other early Marxists are responsible for the erroneous direction given to the socialist movement, with the adoption of the tactics of the conquest of power, which after 1880 gave rise to the Second International, shamefully collapsed in 1914.

It is useless to be here remaking the critique of Marxism, and repeating what has already been said by Tcherkesoff, Mer-

houses, without need to first centralize work and workers in a workshop-barracks.

The same applies to farms. Certain small properties in Marche, Umbria or Abruzzo have nothing to envy, in terms of intensity of cultivation and richness of products, to the large farms of our cooperative friends in Romagna and Lazio. With this we want to give an example, not to support the small culture in preference to the large one, but to show how reckless certain apriorisms are, which do not take circumstances into account and are based on the observation of a single series of facts — as happens with Marxists. It will be the associated producers, we think, who will have to freely establish their own mode and type of production, according to their capacity and the needs, not a government that imposes it on everyone from above.

The aberration really reaches the monstrous, when the type of large industry is established as mandatory for all, even for countries that are less suitable for it, without worrying about the opportunity and possibility of doing so, without distinguishing where and to what extent it is possible. There is confident talk of *a single work plan for all, according to a rigorously prepared, calculated and measured plan*. The environment, the tendencies, the spirit of the populations do not count for anything! Under the pretext that Peter should not ignore what Paul does, and vice-versa — as if in order to get informed, help each other, exchange ideas, raw materials and products, it was not possible other means than to force us all to do the same way — Bukharin dreams of submitting no less than the whole of humanity to that unique plan, rigorously prepared, calculated and measured!

*humanity works for itself with the best machines, in the largest factories, without today's bosses and capitalists, but **according to a rigorously prepared, calculated and measured plan.***¹²

What a monstrous aberration!

Not that we anarchists are disgusted, as Bukharin believes, by big associations of production or distribution, nor that his joke about our preferences for the “Confederation of the two exploited” is justified (we have already dealt with that nonsense). When the type of work or service to be performed requires it, when it is possible without greater inconvenience than utility, depending on the environment and circumstances, we too admit large factories, large workshops, large farms. We too think that production should be placed on as wide a foot as possible. Nor do we have any phobia for big industry itself; and where its experiences and methods of production can be used for the good of all, it would be foolish not to do so.

The aberration consists in holding that only the mode of production of large industry is effective, and that small companies are condemned to perish for an alleged crime of incapacity. Everyone knows that there are kinds of work and production that are actually done better in large workshops, others that are better suited to small-scale manufacturing, and still others that are done as well in small as in large. Even for technical progress, Kropotkine observes, the concentration of industries in large workshops is not always useful; sometimes it is an obstacle. If the big workshops today have the advantage over the small ones, this often happens not for economy of driving force or for technical progress, but only for the greater ease of disposal of products¹³ — an advantage that in a socialist society would be achieved simply by centralizing the products in social ware-

¹² N. Bukarin — op. cit., pg. 13 and 14

¹³ P. Kropotkine — *La Piccola industria in Inghilterra* [*The small industry in England*] (See journal «Il Pensiero» of Roma. — issue 19, 1st october 1906).

lino, Malatesta, Cornelissen and Nieuwenhuis from the anarchist point of view, and Graziadei, Croce, Sorel, Bernstein and David from the reformist point of view. It is not a doctrinal discussion that we want to do, but simply warn socialists and revolutionaries against certain practical attitudes, which originated from Marxism, and which could be the source of terrible disasters, irreparable failures of the future social revolution.

Because, if it is dubious that the dictatorial conception of the revolution — which we believe to be wrong and harmful — can be attributed to Marx, as if he had expressly formulated it and elevated it to a theory, it is also true, as we said in the beginning, that Marxism creates the mental habit best suited to accommodate that concept. In this sense, Marxist apriorism can truly become a danger to the revolution.

The main defect of Marxism, even in what is good and vital about it, is to be one-sided; that is, to see only some parts of each problem, to pay attention to a single category of facts and to deduce its conclusions from it, and then apply them with its dialectic to all other facts, to all other questions and finally to the practical direction of the socialist movement.

We think that the main merit of Marx was the tireless work of socialist propaganda and organization within the first International, having strongly contributed to inspire in the working class the conscience and dignity of itself, being one of the first, and more than anyone, to see and support the need for international solidarity of workers. The cry “proletarians of all countries, unite!”, and the affirmation that the emancipation of workers must be the work of workers themselves, are worth more for the socialist cause than the book *Capital*.

We speak, of course, of the ideas contained in the two motos, and not of mere words alone. These ideas, in another form, may have been expressed by others before Marx, but no one in

his time and before him had attached so much importance to them, had accompanied them with such a passionate argumentation and historical documentation, had them so effectively hammered, with assiduous propaganda, into the heads of the workers and of those concerned about the social problem in the interests of the working class. The same can be said of the two Marxist concepts, which complement each other, of class struggle and historical materialism. In the so-called utopian socialist writers, before Marx, and in other economists, even non-socialist ones, much is found of these concepts; but Marx and Engels had the merit of coordinating them as a system, of presenting them in a scientific guise, of giving them a logical link, and finally of making them a propaganda subject, a weapon of struggle for the working class.

But evil also sprang from this good, due a little to Marx and especially to Engels, and much more to the Marxists who came later; an evil once unnoticed by all, but which little by little has generated many errors within the socialist movement. The evil consisted in the one-sidedness with which those concepts were supported, either as the only explanation of all past history, or (and here the theoretical error became a tactical one) as the only guide and motive of the practical movement of socialist propaganda and action.

We note this with all the more dispassionate serenity, since it is an error common to socialists and anarchists up to twenty years ago, and which many anarchists have not yet completely abandoned, especially those who specialize their work in the workers' movement or follow a predominantly trade-unionist mindset.

When anarchists admit that they too, like socialists and syndicalists, are on the ground of class struggle, they do not mean to unconditionally subscribe to the Marxist theory that goes

has triumphed, and not to talk about Italy and Spain, where its precursor signs are increasingly seen.

But the revolutionary Marxists, whom we will call left-wing, the Russian Bolsheviks and the Italian maximalists, do not disarm for all this, do not diminish their doctrinal infatuation, for which big industry should be the most advanced type of civilization and most compatible with socialist civilization.

They do not say (I challenge!), like their comrades on the right, that the revolution must wait for the complete development of capitalism, but in a certain way they want to use the revolution to develop it intensively, transforming it into state capitalism, that is, giving to the State the management of wealth and all governmental powers, so that by hook or by crook it makes the country in revolution an industrial country. This is one of the reasons why Bolsheviks in Italy and abroad appeal to the *proletarian dictatorship*; that is, so that with an iron hand it bends the whole population to the strictest discipline, necessary to artificially implant big industry, no longer capitalistic, and neither proletarian, but state-owned.

This aim is clearly stated in Bukharin's "Communist Program"; which the maximalists of every *nuance* in Milan, Turin and Naples translate and comment as their own program. According to Bukharin, *the best and most perfect way of organizing production is taught to us by large capitalist industry. Therefore, economic equality must be combined with big industry. It is not enough for the capitalists to disappear; production needs to be placed on a wide foot. All incapable small companies must perish. All labor must be concentrated in large factories, large workshops and large farms. One must not ignore what the other is doing, and vice-versa. It is necessary to have a single work plan, which will be better if it is spread over a larger number of places. The whole world must finally form a great labor company, in which all of*

limited in time and space, and therefore they necessarily had to come for many things to unilateral conclusions, hence impractical for other times and different environments. Which, moreover, they themselves would recognize several times later, when they had the opportunity to test the ideas expressed in the past in contact with new facts.

On the other hand, more than to Marx, many errors are due to Marxists. Who, for example, for years and years have deafened us, in the name of their master, talking to us about the impossibility of revolution and implementation of socialism, because in this or that country there was not yet a developed capitalism, because there was not a proletariat in the precise sense of the word, because production was too rudimentary, industry undeveloped, the capitalist cycle not completed, etc. etc. This is also repeated today by the right-wing Marxists, the Russian *Mensheviks*, who wanted to stop the revolution precisely because Russia had not yet become a capitalist country. This is what the Italian reformists say — although they do not at all repudiate the Marxism of which they were — when they point to a danger in revolution, because in Italy the iron and coal necessary for industries are lacking.

In reality, industry has developed, forming the typical capitalism that the Marxist critique targets, only in a small number of privileged countries, rich in coal and iron mines and with a dense and agglomerated population. It has arisen and is growing in other countries as well, but in less advantageous conditions, in a secondary order, and not so powerfully as to absorb all the other forces and not to allow the life of other local processes of production, inherited from the past. Nor do we believe that this is bad from the point of view of international economy. In any case, if the industrialization of every country were to be expected to bring about the revolution, it should have been done for a long time in England, Belgium, France and Germany, where instead it seems we are still far from it, and conversely it should not have been possible in Russia, where it

under these words, but simply to join a practical movement that corresponds to their intentions: *the struggle of the workers against the bosses to free themselves from wage slavery*. Before socialism has organized this struggle of one class against another, attempting to unite the workers above all divisions of groups, professions, categories, nations and races, there was no class struggle, but only, as Merlino says,⁵ the struggles between different groups that mingled in the fray, disintegrating and reassembling modified.

The error of Marxism was to have seen a pre-existing fact, continuous through times, and assuming a character of historical fatality, where there was only a concurrence of multiple concomitant facts, among which the Marxists saw and noticed only those who benefited their thesis — moved more or less unconsciously by the noble revolutionary desire to make the whole proletariat solidary against the bourgeoisie. By wanting to give a scientific guise and basis to class struggle, they ended up seeing in it, under different aspects, a kind of historical law, of which they believed themselves discoverers, while they had been in a certain sense, together with all other socialists, its creators.

As Benedetto Croce well observes,⁶ for history to be, in the way as the Marxists say, a class struggle, there must be classes, distinct and in antagonism among themselves, and they must be conscious of this antagonism. Two distinct classes, in the strict sense of the word — capitalists and proletarians — exist only where industrialism has developed, that is, not in all countries and not even in the majority of them. For example, in Italy, large industry dominates only in a few and restricted regions. Moreover, as Croce and Merlin observe, *sometimes the classes have no antagonistic interests, and very often they don't have the*

⁵ Saverio Merlino, *Pro e contro il Socialismo*. [For and against Socialism]— Edit. Treves, Milano. — P. 28–29.

⁶ Benedetto Croce, *Materialismo storico ed Economia marxistica*. [Historical materialism and Marxist Economics] Edit. Sandron, Palermo — p. 106.

consciousness of them; this is well known by the socialists who try to forge such consciousness in modern proletarians.

Indeed, it is up to socialism to make the proletariat aware of its antagonism with the bourgeoisie; and where such antagonism, limited to certain categories, is not there or is little noticed, it must be created by arousing in the workers a sense of dissatisfaction and a feeling of solidarity with the less privileged categories, so as to break up certain commonalities of interests that prevent the development of class struggle. That is to say that we must also rely on the ideal factor, and not be content with the sole natural conflict of interests, for setting the exploited and oppressed classes against the ruling classes, and for the social revolution.

The too narrow conception that Marxists have of the class struggle between workers and industrialists can be a danger in countries like ours, where large-scale industry is limited. It would leave out of the revolutionary orbit a huge amount of people, otherwise exploited and oppressed, that is, those disorganized and unorganizable masses that the Germans call *lumpenproletariat*, all the handicraft still existing in lower and middle Italy, all the peasants non-catalogable in the labour force, the crowd of employees of the lower categories, etc.

These categories, especially that of workers in small towns and fields, would at the most be exploited as a blind tool and would end up being sacrificed. There would be “no more and no less than a new aristocracy, that of the workers of factories and large cities, with the exclusion of the millions who make up the rural proletariat and who will become precisely the subjects of the new great self-styled popular State.”⁷

The same Bakunin notes a little later how even for the city workers themselves the “new despotism” would be illusory, since they “could not exercise power directly but by proxy, entrusting it to a group of men elected by them to represent and

⁷ *M. Bakounine, Oeuvres*, vol. IV, p. 374.

It is known that Marxism is a theory that bases its arguments on documentary, scientific and statistical material, etc., almost exclusively reflecting the rise and development of large industry. Marx and Engels, almost always living in England, had an eye on a very rich and very important study material, almost inexhaustible, in the nation that was then the center of world trade, where industrialism was at the height of its power. Federico Engels was also an industrialist himself. When they had lived outside England, the countries they knew were those which followed most closely the British Empire in industrial progress: Rhenish Germany, Belgium and France.

No wonder then that, from their situation, the environment, the studies they were most comfortable doing, they were led to see in industrial civilization the apex of bourgeois power, after which should come its collapse and in a certain way the transition to the workers' society. Studying the process of capitalist production in the most fortunate place for it and in a period of growth, when it seemed that the accumulation of capital in a few hands no longer had obstacles ahead, one understands how they could arrive at the erroneous conclusion that this movement was to reach such a point of exaggeration as to provoke the proletarian revolution and the collapse of capitalist domination.

The Russian revolution has shown us that we can hope for the collapse of capitalism even if the process of accumulation of wealth does not happen, or stops or is not yet complete. In spite of this, and although subsequent history has shown that property does not follow constant laws and that if it accumulates on the one hand it splits on the other, the studies of Marx and Engels were nevertheless, on many other problems, a precious contribution to elaboration of socialist ideas. But in making use of it, the revolutionary, who wants not to remain in the abstract heavens of theory but descend to practical ground, must take into account the fact that Marx and Engels based their studies on a specific historical period, very

America with the various governments in the crime of war.¹¹ But let us also leave aside the recent past, and look to the future. What errors can a conception of the movement, based exclusively on the theory of economic determinism, lead to?

First of all, naturally, to a repetition of the mistakes of the past. Furthermore, by accustoming the socialist masses and the revolutionaries to the idea that, once wage-labor is abolished and property is socialized, all struggle is over and injustice and oppression deriving from other causes that are not only economic are also eliminated, it will happen that these causes are left standing and the revolution turns out incomplete, unprepared to solve all other problems of the complex social question. Whatever Engels has said, it is not at all true that religion, the family and the state, for example, are institutions that will disappear or transform themselves as a consequence of economic changes. The revolution, with different means depending on the nature of those institutions, must take charge of them directly, so that they do not become obstacles, hearths of reaction and perhaps a starting point for the reconstruction of the economic privilege demolished by the revolution.

This must be said especially for the state institute. But of this — of the fact that the State constitutes in itself, even independently of capitalism properly said, a privileged caste and a permanent cause of reaction, injustice, monopolies and political and economic enslavement — we have already spoken, and it would be superfluous to repeat ourselves.

¹¹ Objection will be raised with the example of Italian socialism and its political and economic organizations. We would be absolutely right for the [italian socialist] Party, but relatively for the *Confederazione del Lavoro* [Confederation of Labor], for which there would be several objections and exceptions. But one of the reasons why the Italian Socialist Party saved itself from the wreck was precisely that it was and is far less Marxist than it seems and wants to think.

govern them, which will certainly make them fall back into all the lies and servitudes of bourgeois representative regime.”⁸ But the industrial proletariat is the most inclined to fall into this illusion of domination by proxy and to adapt to an authoritarian regime, by its very composition, by the spirit of subjection acquired in the large factories, where the worker is educated, almost as if in the barracks, to forced and hierarchical discipline; where the mechanical and automatic work itself dispenses with thinking for themselves and makes them find it more comfortable to get back in the hands of the leaders and representatives.

In addition to all this, and taking into account what we have said above, can it really be argued that the “proletariat” is everywhere the majority of the population? And even where it is, it faces a minority that is significantly large and strong, which it cannot fail to take into account, and from which it has indeed an interest in gaining the sympathy, support and help. By relying on class interest alone, it is doubtful that the effective majority of the people can be counted on for revolution.

If the revolution only counted on the industrial proletariat and industrialized rural agencies; or if that proletariat, on the contrary, exploited the first revolutionary impulse of the generality of the masses, but pretended to become the only collectivity in charge of wealth, and in a certain way the ruling class of tomorrow, the revolution would run the double danger of, on the one hand, throwing the foundations for a new class domination, and on the other hand, of arousing such a number of enemies against itself, even among those who had an interest in its flare up, as to be suffocated and defeated.

The same one-sidedness can be observed for the theory of historical materialism.

⁸ Idem, idem — p. 376.

According to Karl Marx, the materialistic conception of history would be this: that the mode of production of material life generally dominates the development of social, political and intellectual life; and also, Federich Engels adds, of religious, philosophical, moral, etc. ideas of each historical period. In all this there is an undeniable truth, which others before Marx or his contemporaries had affirmed, but which Marx had the merit of giving greater prominence: that of the importance of economic factors and their enormous influence on historical events.

This truth serves, in the interests of the working class, to demonstrate how in order to eliminate most of social evils caused by poverty, it is essential to transform the system of production and distribution of wealth, that is, the entire economic organization of society; without which all the efforts on the political, religious, moral, etc. terrain, all evangelical preaching, utopian experiments, appeals to state intervention, various forms of workers' legislation, and so on, are condemned to run out in vain or with completely derisory results.

These ideas of Marx are reflected in the famous "Recitals" with which the 1st International was declared as constituted in 1864, and were developed in its "Inaugural Address", as they had been given in another form in the "Communist Manifesto" sixteen years earlier.

Mikhail Bakunin, as we have mentioned, shared his adversary's thoughts on this, repeatedly noting that "the discovery and demonstration of this truth is one of the greatest merits of Karl Marx."⁹ But it was not concealed, while agreeing with historical materialism, that "this principle is profoundly true when it is considered in its proper light, that is, from a relative point of view; but seen and put in an absolute way, as the only

⁹ *M. Bakounine, State and Anarchy* (in Russian) p. 223–224. — *La Théologie politique de Mazzini et l'Internationale*, Neuchâtel, p. 69 and 78. — We take these quotes from the well-known libel of Plekhanov, *Anarchismo e Socialismo* (Edit. Critica Sociale, Milan, p. 51).

foundation and source before all other principles, it becomes completely false."¹⁰

Indeed, the truth contained in the materialistic conception of history is *a truth, not the whole truth*; and Marxists instead fall into the error of subordinating all the other factors to the economic factor, not only admitting the greater importance of the latter in certain historical periods (such as, for example, that of industrial civilization), but even making it the sole engine of history, and seeing in all the other social factors derivations, consequences, facts in turn determined by the economic fact. It is a historical error, since, if in every event the economic factor has its influence, not all historical events are determined mainly by the economic factor or by it alone; in some, indeed, it is subordinated to factors of another kind.

But, apart from history of the past, which would be too long to discuss here, the Marxist error consists in not taking due account of the other factors of the social movement, also very important, even if to a lesser extent (not always though); once neglecting those factors, things are no longer seen in their reality, but in a one-sided and therefore false light, which can lead in practice to equally false steps. It is in these false steps, to which Marxist dogmatism can lead, that we see a danger for the revolution.

Yes, it is not bad to remember how this excessive subordination of all questions to the economic question, passed from theory to practice, which has become a guide to the conduct of the second International, was one of the reasons for the disastrous end of it, together with the other reason of parliamentary politics. If the latter was the main cause of the failure of socialist parties, the excessive economism, the guidance by the sole reasons of immediate economic utility for the organized working classes, was one of the strongest causes of the deplorable collaboration of all trade union organizations of Europe and

¹⁰ *M. Bakounine, Oeuvres* – vol. III, p. 11.