



Alliance for Workers' Liberty

Day school on the Revolutionary Party, September 2006

General introduction:

Trotsky, The Class, The Party, and The Leadership

Max Shachtman, The Party We Need

1. Zinoviev/ Trotsky

Gregory Zinoviev, Theses of the 2nd Congress of the Communist International on **the Role of the Communist Party**

Leon Trotsky, Speech at the 2nd Congress

Leon Trotsky, The Lessons of October

2. Bordiga/ Gramsci

Amadeo Bordiga, Lyons Theses

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Left-Wing Communism: an infantile disorder

Leon Trotsky, An Open Letter to comrade Burnham

Antonio Gramsci, 1. Analysis of Situations: Relations of Force; 2. Some Theoretical and Practical Aspects of "Economism"; 3. Notes on Philosophy

3. Lenin/ Luxemburg

Leon Trotsky, Luxemburg and the Fourth International

Discussion points:

Session 1: "Zinoviev/ Trotsky"

A. Trotsky refers to revolutionaries active in the trade unions who said that they needed not to organise a political party but instead to work in the broad trade unions to imbue them with a revolutionary spirit. How did Trotsky answer that? Today, how would we answer similar arguments, or arguments like those of the Russian "Economists" who said that Lenin "floated in the sphere of theory while they, the 'Economists', proposed leading the concrete labour movement"?

B. Zinoviev implicitly proposes a different answer. What is it? What do you think of it?

C. The most common argument on the left today on "the need for a party", from the SWP for example, is an adaptation of Zinoviev's. It says the working class needs a disciplined, centralised party because it has to confront a bourgeoisie which has a disciplined, centralised state. What do you think of that argument? What connection or relation does it have with what's wrong with the SWP?

Session 2: "Bordiga/ Gramsci"

A. In what ways are Bordiga's ideas on the revolutionary party similar to Zinoviev's, and in what way different?

B. Bordiga argues for a party which rejects any common activity with other parties, and emphasises that the party must not chase after temporary popularity at the expense of its long-term aims. This seems like an "elitist" view. But then Bordiga argues against requiring a high level of "theoretical preparation" for party members, because this will "reduce" the party "to an elite, distinct and superior to the rest of the elements that compose the working class". By contrast, Lenin and Trotsky emphasise the importance of the vast amount of "theoretical preparation" in the early years of the Russian Marxist movement, and Gramsci argues that the party must make its worker members into "worker-intellectuals". Is there a paradox here? What, in general, is the answer to the argument that a revolutionary party is undesirable because it is "elitist"; it means a special group of people giving themselves the status of commanders of the working class.

C. Is there a difference between arguing the need to build a revolutionary party, and proposing "build the revolutionary party" as the slogan which answers current political problems?

Session 3: "Lenin/ Luxemburg"

What is, or has been, "Luxemburgism" on the question of the revolutionary party?

"Crib sheet": short selections from the texts

Trotsky:

Our sages tacitly accept the axiom that every class gets the leadership it deserves. In reality leadership is not at all a mere "reflection" of a class or the product of its own free creativeness. A leadership is shaped in the process of clashes between the different classes or the friction between the different layers within a given class. Having once arisen, the leadership invariably rises above its class and thereby becomes pre-disposed to the pressure and influence of other classes. The proletariat may "tolerate" for a long time a leadership that has already suffered a complete inner degeneration but has not as yet had the opportunity to express this degeneration amid great events... [And] even in cases where the old leadership has revealed its internal corruption, the class cannot improvise immediately a new leadership... such a party must be available prior to the revolution inasmuch as the process of educating the cadres requires a considerable period of time and the revolution does not afford this time...

Zinoviev:

The same class struggle demands in the same way the centralisation and common leadership of the different forms of the proletarian movement (trades unions, co-operatives, works committees, cultural work, elections and so forth). Only a political party can be such a unifying and leading centre. To renounce the creation and strengthening of such a party, to renounce subordinating oneself to it, is to renounce unity in the leadership of the individual battle units of the proletariat who are advancing on the different battlefields.

The class struggle of the proletariat demands a concerted agitation that illuminates the different stages of the struggle from a uniform point of view and at every given moment directs the attention of the proletariat towards specific tasks common to the whole class. That cannot be done without a centralised political apparatus, that is to say outside of a political party.

Trotsky:

It is self-evident that if we were dealing here with Messrs. Scheidemann, Kautsky or their English co-thinkers, it would, of course, be unnecessary to convince these gentlemen that a party is indispensable to the working class. They have created a party for the working class and handed it over into the service of bourgeois and capitalist society...

I see Scheidemann on the one side and, on the other, American or Spanish or French syndicalists who not only wish to fight against the bourgeoisie but who, unlike Scheidemann, really want to tear its head off... I prefer to discuss with these Spanish, American and French comrades in order to prove to them that the party is indispensable... I will try to prove this to them in a comradely way, on the basis of my own experience, and not by counterposing to them Scheidemann's long years of experience...

Trotsky:

The proletarian revolution is precisely distinguished by the fact that the proletariat - in the person of its vanguard - acts in it not only as the main offensive force but also as the guiding force. The part played in bourgeois revolutions by the economic power of the bourgeoisie, by its education, by its municipalities and universities, is a part which can be filled in a proletarian revolution only by the party of the proletariat.

Trotsky:

Each party, even the most revolutionary party, must inevitably produce its own organizational conservatism; for otherwise it would lack the necessary stability. This is wholly a question of degree. In a revolutionary party the vitally necessary dose of conservatism must be combined with a complete freedom from routine, with initiative in orientation and daring in action... [It is] almost an unalterable law that a party crisis is inevitable in the transition from preparatory revolutionary activity to the immediate struggle for power. Generally speaking, crises arise in the party at every serious turn in the party's course, either as a prelude to the turn or as a consequence of it...

Bordiga:

... the definition of the party as an organisation of all those who are conscious of the system of opinions in which is summed up the historical task of the revolutionary class and who have decided to work for the victory of this class... The communist parties must achieve an organic centralism which, whilst including maximum possible consultation with the base, ensures a spontaneous elimination of any grouping which aims to differentiate itself. This cannot be achieved with, as Lenin put it, the formal and mechanical prescriptions of a hierarchy, but through correct revolutionary politics...

The Marxist conception of the party... rejects every voluntarist conception, as regards individuals, according to which the qualities of theoretical preparation, force of will, and the spirit of sacrifice - in short, a special type of moral figure and a requisite level of "purity" - set the required standards for every single party militant without exception, reducing the latter to an elite, distinct and superior to the rest of the elements that compose the working class...

Gramsci:

... there is no understanding of the fact that mass ideological factors always lag behind mass economic phenomena, and that therefore, at certain moments, the automatic thrust due to the economic factor is slowed down, obstructed or even momentarily broken by traditional ideological elements - hence that there must be a conscious, planned struggle to ensure that the exigencies of the economic position of the masses, which may conflict with the traditional leadership's policies, are understood. An appropriate political initiative is always necessary to liberate the economic thrust from the dead weight of traditional policies...

... not in order to restrict scientific activity and preserve unity at the low level of the masses, but precisely in order to construct an intellectual-moral bloc which can make politically possible the intellectual progress of the mass and not only of small intellectual groups...

Trotsky:

The spontaneity confusionists have just as little right to refer to Rosa as the miserable Comintern bureaucrats have to refer to Lenin... Rosa Luxemburg exerted herself to educate the revolutionary wing of the proletariat in advance and to bring it together organizationally as far as possible. In Poland, she built up a very rigid independent organization. The most that can be said is that in her historical-philosophical evaluation of the labor movement, the preparatory selection of the vanguard, in comparison with the mass actions that were to be expected, fell too short with Rosa; whereas Lenin - without consoling himself with the miracles of future actions - took the advanced workers and constantly and tirelessly welded them together into firm nuclei...

Leon Trotsky: The Class, The Party, and The Leadership

<http://www.marxist.net/trotsky/cpl/index.html>

... We think it profitable to dwell upon this periodical's [Que Faire, a left-wing magazine in France in the late 1930s] appraisal of the causes for the collapse of the Spanish revolution [of 1936-7], inasmuch as this appraisal discloses very graphically the fundamental features now prevailing in the left flank of pseudo-Marxism.

We begin with a verbatim quotation from a review of the pamphlet "Spain Betrayed," by comrade Casanova: "Why was the revolution crushed? Because, replies the author (Casanova), the Communist Party conducted a false policy which was unfortunately followed by the revolutionary masses. But why, in the devil's name, did the revolutionary masses who left their former leaders rally to the banner of the Communist Party? 'Because there was no genuinely revolutionary party.' We are presented with a pure tautology. A false policy of the masses; an immature party either manifests a certain condition of social forces (immaturity of the working class, lack of independence of the peasantry) which must be explained by proceeding from facts, presented among others by Casanova himself; or it is the product of the actions of certain malicious individuals or groups of individuals, actions which do not correspond to the efforts of 'sincere individuals' alone capable of saving the revolution. After groping for the first and Marxist road, Casanova takes the second. We are ushered into the domain of pure demonology: the criminal responsible for the defeat is the chief Devil, Stalin, abetted by the anarchists and all the other little devils; the God of revolutionists unfortunately did not send a Lenin or a Trotsky to Spain as He did in Russia in 1917."

The conclusion then follows: "This is what comes of seeking at any cost to force the ossified orthodoxy of a chapel upon facts." This theoretical haughtiness is made all the more significant by the fact that it is hard to imagine how so great a number of banalities, vulgarisms and mistakes quite specifically of a conservative philistine type could be compressed into so few lines.

The author of the above quotation avoids giving any explanation for the defeat of the Spanish revolution; he only indicates that profound explanations, like the "condition of social forces" are necessary. The evasion of any explanation is not accidental. These critics of Bolshevism are all theoretical cowards, for the simple reason that they have nothing solid under their feet. In order not to reveal their own bankruptcy they juggle facts and prowl around the opinions of others. They confine themselves to hints and half-thoughts as if they just haven't the time to delineate their full wisdom. As a matter of fact they possess no wisdom at all. Their haughtiness is lined with intellectual charlatanism. Let us analyse step by step the hints and half-thoughts of our author. According to him a false policy of the masses can be explained only as it "manifests a certain condition of social forces," namely, the immaturity of the working class and the lack of independence of the peasantry. Anyone searching for tautologies couldn't find in general a flatter one. A "false policy of the masses" is explained by the "immaturity" of the masses. But what is "immaturity" of the masses? Obviously, their predisposition to false policies. Of just what the false policy consisted, and who were its initiators: the masses or the leaders - that is passed over in silence by our author. By means of a tautology he unloads the responsibility on the masses. This classical trick of all traitors, deserters and their attorneys is especially revolting in connection with the Spanish proletariat.

In July 1936 - not to refer to an earlier period - the Spanish workers repelled the assault of the officers who had prepared their conspiracy under the protection of the People's Front. The masses improvised militias and created workers' committees, the strongholds of their future dictatorship. The leading organisations of the proletariat on the other hand helped the bourgeoisie to destroy these committees, to liquidate the assaults of the workers on private property and to subordinate the workers' militias to the command of the bourgeoisie, with the POUM moreover participating in the government and assuming direct responsibility for this work of the counter-revolution. What does "immaturity" of the proletariat signify in this case? Self-evidently only this, that despite the correct political line chosen by the masses, the latter were unable to smash the coalition of socialists, Stalinists, anarchists and the POUM with the bourgeoisie. This piece of sophistry takes as its starting point a concept of some absolute maturity, i.e. a perfect condition of the masses in which they do not require a correct leadership, and, more than that, are capable of conquering against their own leadership. There is not and there cannot be such maturity.

Our sages object: but why should workers who show such correct revolutionary instinct and such superior fighting qualities submit to treacherous leadership? Our answer is: There wasn't even a hint of mere subordination. The workers' line of march at all times cut a certain angle to the line of the leadership. And at the most critical moments this angle became 180 degrees. The leadership then helped directly or indirectly to subdue the workers by armed force.

In May 1937 the workers of Catalonia rose not only without their own leadership but against it. The anarchist leaders - pathetic and contemptible bourgeois masquerading cheaply as revolutionists - have repeated hundreds of times in their press that had the CNT wanted to take power and set up their dictatorship in May, they could have done so without any difficulty. This time the anarchist leaders speak the unadulterated truth. The POUM leadership actually dragged at the tail of the CNT, only they covered up their policy with a different phraseology. It was thanks to this and this alone that the bourgeoisie succeeded in crushing the May uprising of the "immature" proletariat. One must understand exactly nothing in the sphere of the inter-relationships between the class and the party, between the masses and the leaders in order to repeat the hollow statement that the Spanish masses merely followed their leaders. The only thing that can be said is that the masses who sought at all times to blast their way to the correct road found no new leadership corresponding to the demands of the revolution. Before us is a profoundly dynamic process, with the various stages of the revolution shifting swiftly, with the leadership or various sections of the leadership quickly deserting to the side of the class enemy, and our sages engage in a purely static discussion: why did the working class as a whole follow a bad leadership?

There is an ancient, evolutionary-liberal epigram: every people gets the government it deserves. History, however, shows that one and the same people may in the course of a comparatively brief epoch get very different governments (Russia, Italy, Germany, Spain, etc.) and furthermore that the order of these governments doesn't at all proceed in one and the same direction: from despotism - to freedom, as was imagined by the evolutionist liberals. The secret is this, that a people is comprised of hostile classes, and the classes themselves are comprised of different and in part antagonistic layers which fall under different leadership; furthermore every people falls under the influence of other peoples who are likewise comprised of classes. Governments do not express the systematically growing "maturity" of a "people" but are the product of the struggle

between different classes and the different layers within one and the same class, and, finally, the action of external forces - alliances, wars and so on. To this should be added that a government, once it has established itself, may endure much longer than the relationship of forces which produced it. It is precisely out of this historical contradiction that revolutions, coup d'etats, counter-revolutions, etc., arise.

The very same dialectic approach is necessary in dealing with the question of the leadership of a class. Imitating the liberals our sages tacitly accept the axiom that every class gets the leadership it deserves. In reality leadership is not at all a mere "reflection" of a class or the product of its own free creativeness. A leadership is shaped in the process of clashes between the different classes or the friction between the different layers within a given class. Having once arisen, the leadership invariably rises above its class and thereby becomes pre-disposed to the pressure and influence of other classes. The proletariat may "tolerate" for a long time a leadership that has already suffered a complete inner degeneration but has not as yet had the opportunity to express this degeneration amid great events. A great historic shock is necessary to reveal sharply the contradiction between the leadership and the class. The mightiest historical shocks are wars and revolutions. Precisely for this reason the working class is often caught unawares by war and revolution. But even in cases where the old leadership has revealed its internal corruption, the class cannot improvise immediately a new leadership, especially if it has not inherited from the previous period strong revolutionary cadres capable of utilising the collapse of the old leading party. The Marxist, i.e. dialectic and not scholastic, interpretation of the inter-relationship between a class and its leadership does not leave a single stone unturned of our author's legalistic sophistry.

He conceives of the proletariat's maturity as something purely static. Yet during a revolution the consciousness of a class is the most dynamic process directly determining the course of the revolution. Was it possible in January 1917 or even in March, after the overthrow of Czarism, to give an answer to the question whether the Russian proletariat had sufficiently "matured" for the conquest or power in eight to nine months? The working class was at that time extremely heterogeneous socially and politically. During the years of the war it had been renewed by 30-40 per cent from the ranks of the petty bourgeoisie, often reactionary, at the expense of backward peasants, at the expense of women and youth. The Bolshevik party in March 1917 was followed by an insignificant minority of the working class and furthermore there was discord within the party itself. The overwhelming majority of the workers supported the Mensheviks and the "Socialist-Revolutionists" i.e. conservative social-patriots. The situation was even less favourable with regard to the army and the peasantry. We must add to this: the general low level of culture in the country, the lack of political experience among the broadest layers of the proletariat, especially in the provinces, let alone the peasants and soldiers. What was the "active" of Bolshevism? A clear and thoroughly thought out revolutionary conception at the beginning of the revolution was held only by Lenin. The Russian cadres of the party were scattered and to a considerable degree bewildered. But the party had authority among the advanced workers. Lenin had great authority with the party cadres. Lenin's political conception corresponded to the actual development of the revolution and was reinforced by each new event. These elements of the "active" worked wonders in a revolutionary situation, that is, in conditions of bitter class struggle. The party quickly aligned its policy to correspond with Lenin's

conception, to correspond that is with the actual course of the revolution.

Thanks to this it met with firm support among tens of thousands of advanced workers. Within a few months, by basing itself upon the development of the revolution the party was able to convince the majority of the workers of the correctness of its slogans. This majority organised into Soviets was able in its turn to attract the soldiers and peasants. How can this dynamic, dialectic process be exhausted by a formula of the maturity or immaturity of the proletariat? A colossal factor in the maturity of the Russian proletariat in February or March 1917 was Lenin. He did not fall from the skies. He personified the revolutionary tradition of the working class. For Lenin's slogans to find their way to the masses there had to exist cadres, even though numerically small at the beginning; there had to exist the confidence of the cadres in the leadership, a confidence based on the entire experience of the past. To cancel these elements from one's calculations is simply to ignore the living revolution, to substitute for it an abstraction, the "relationship of forces," because the development of the revolution precisely consists of this, that the relationship of forces keeps incessantly and rapidly changing under the impact of the changes in the consciousness of the proletariat, the attraction of backward layers to the advanced, the growing assurance of the class in its own strength. The vital mainspring in this process is the party, just as the vital mainspring in the mechanism of the party is its leadership. The role and the responsibility of the leadership in a revolutionary epoch is colossal.

The October victory is a serious testimonial of the "maturity" of the proletariat. But this maturity is relative. A few years later the very same proletariat permitted the revolution to be strangled by a bureaucracy which rose from its ranks. Victory is not at all the ripe fruit of the proletariat's "maturity." Victory is a strategical task. It is necessary to utilise in order to mobilise the masses; taking as a starting point the given level of their "maturity" it is necessary to propel them forward, teach them to understand that the enemy is by no means omnipotent, that it is torn asunder with contradictions, that behind, the imposing facade panic prevails. Had the Bolshevik party failed to carry out this work, there couldn't even be talk of the victory of the proletarian revolution. The Soviets would have been crushed by the counter-revolution, and the little sages of all countries would have written articles and books on the keynote that only uprooted visionaries could dream in Russia of the dictatorship of the proletariat so small numerically and so immature...

Our author substitutes mechanistic determinism for the dialectic conditioning of the historical process. Hence the cheap jibes about the role of individuals, good and bad. History is a process of the class struggle. But classes do not bring their full weight to bear automatically and simultaneously. In the process of struggle the classes create various organs which play an important and independent role and are subject to deformations. This also provides the basis for the role of personalities in history. There are naturally great objective causes which created the autocratic rule of Hitler but only dull-witted pedants of "determinism" could deny today the enormous historic role of Hitler. The arrival of Lenin in Petrograd on April 3, 1917, turned the Bolshevik party in time and enabled the party to lead the revolution to victory. Our sages might say that had Lenin died abroad at the beginning of 1917, the October revolution would have taken place "just the same." But that is not so. Lenin represented one of the living elements of the historical process. He personified the experience and the perspicacity of the most active section of the proletariat. His timely appearance on the arena of the revolution was

necessary in order to mobilise the vanguard and provide it with an opportunity to rally the working class and the peasant masses. Political leadership in the crucial moments of historical turns can become just as decisive a factor as is the role of the chief command during the critical moments of war. History is not an automatic process. Otherwise, why leaders? Why parties? Why programmes? Why theoretical struggles?

"But why, in the devil's name," asks the author as we have already heard, "did the revolutionary masses who left their former leaders, rally to the banner of the Communist Party?" The question is falsely posed. It is not true that the revolutionary masses left all of their former leaders. The workers who were previously connected with specific organisations continued to cling to them, while they observed and checked. Workers in general do not easily break with the party that awakens them to conscious life. Moreover the existence of mutual protection within the People's Front lulled them: since everybody agreed, everything must be all right. The new and fresh masses naturally turned to the Comintern as the party which had accomplished the only victorious proletarian revolution and which, it was hoped, was capable of assuring arms to Spain. Furthermore the Comintern was the most zealous champion of the idea of the People's Front; this inspired confidence among the inexperienced layers of workers. Within the People's Front the Comintern was the most zealous champion of the bourgeois character of the revolution: this inspired the confidence of the petty and in part the middle bourgeoisie. That is why the masses "rallied to the banner of the Communist Party." Our author depicts the matter as if the proletariat were in a well-stocked shoe store, selecting a new pair of boots. Even this simple operation, as is well known, does not always prove successful. As regards new leadership, the choice is very limited. Only gradually, only on the basis of their own experience through several stages can the broad layers of the masses become convinced that a new leadership is firmer, more reliable, more loyal than the old. To be sure, during a revolution, i.e., when events move swiftly, a weak party can quickly grow into a mighty one provided it lucidly understands the course of the revolution and possesses staunch cadres that do not become intoxicated with phrases and are not terrorised by persecution. But such a party must be available prior to the revolution inasmuch as the process of educating the cadres requires a considerable period of time and the revolution does not afford this time...

The historical falsification consists in this, that the responsibility for the defeat of the Spanish masses is unloaded on the working masses and not those parties which paralysed or simply crushed the revolutionary movement of the masses. The attorneys of the POUM simply deny the responsibility of the leaders, in order thus to escape shouldering their own responsibility. This impotent philosophy, which seeks to reconcile defeats as a necessary link in the chain of cosmic developments, is completely incapable of posing and refuses to pose the question of such concrete factors as programmes, parties, personalities that were the organisers of defeat. This philosophy of fatalism and prostration is diametrically opposed to Marxism as the theory of revolutionary action....

Max Shachtman, The Party We Need

<http://archive.workersliberty.org/wlmags/wl52/party.htm>

Suppose the organised labour movement does form a party. The understanding of the need for it, and the demand that it be set up, grows so strong among the membership of the unions that they override the opposition of the leadership. That is a big step forward, but far from enough.

The chances are that the labour bureaucracy, seeing that the workers are heading for a break with capitalist politics, follows its usual course. It tries to head the movement in order to head it off. How? In two ways.

First, it tries to establish and consolidate its leadership of the Labour Party. If it succeeds, it follows the same policy it does in the labour unions. It restricts the democratic rights and the power of the rank-and-file membership. It stands in the way of a bold and aggressive fight against the capitalist class, its parties and its government. It takes the steel out of the organisation and replace it with putty.

Second, toward the same end, it tries to water down the aims of the party, to make them as harmless as possible so as not to offend the "good capitalists". It writes the program and platform of the party in such a way as to keep it within the framework of capitalism. It resists a program for struggle against capitalism and for workers' power, and restricts the aims of the party exclusively to a little reform here and another one there. It makes the party a mere bargaining agency for miserable deals with the capitalist parties, instead of a fighting instrument against them. It tries to do to the Labour Party what it has done to the labour unions - make it tame, keep it in a state of bureaucratic paralysis, prevent it from fighting vigorously and consistently for the interests of the working class.

When it succeeds, the very aim of independent working-class political action is defeated in the end. We have a party be incapable of giving a radical solution of the social problem that is imperatively required. It is a reformist party. That is, it tries to tinker with the broken-down social system instead of replacing it with a new one. It tries to save the bankrupt society of capitalism, when it can be saved only at the expense of the workers and the middle classes. Its timidity only makes the capitalist class bolder and more confident, and encourages it to take the most reactionary steps against the working class. The same timidity prevents the working class from resisting this reaction successfully. The capitalist reaction says: If the Party of the workers is so afraid of taking political power, and so concerned with keeping capitalism alive, we can do anything we want and worry about nothing. The workers are confused, disorganised and discouraged.

We have seen this happen in one country after another, especially in times of social crisis. The reformist workers' parties either came to the rescue of capitalism, at great cost to the workers; or else, when capitalism was in such a crisis that it could no longer afford democracy, it crushed these parties and all other labour movements with the bloody aid of fascism. In either case, the reformist parties defeated the very aim of independent working class political action which is to raise the working class to political power - and brought terrible suffering to the working class itself.

Does this mean that the working class cannot establish itself as an independent political force, or that, if it does, this force is doomed to defeat under the leadership of reformism, Yes, this is exactly what it does mean, unless there is an organised, conscious, disciplined, militant force capable of counteracting the ideas and policies and

spokesmen of capitalism inside the working class. Without such a force, every forward step taken by the workers will sooner or later be cancelled out by a backward step and sometimes by two of them.

What is this force? It is the revolutionary socialist party. What kind of party is it, and why is it needed?

Capitalism, by its method of production, has brought isolated workers together and constituted them as a class in society. Capitalism has made the workers a class in themselves. That is, the workers are a distinct class in society, whether they recognise this fact or not. Historical development calls upon this class to reorganise society completely and establish socialism. To do this, the workers must become a class for themselves. They must acquire a clear understanding of their real position under capitalism, of the nature of capitalist society as a whole, and of their mission in history. They must act consciously for their class interests. They must become conscious of the fact that these class interests lead to a socialist society. When this takes place, the workers are a class for themselves, a class with socialist consciousness. How are the workers to acquire this consciousness - this clear, thoroughgoing understanding of capitalist society, their position in it, and the need to replace this society with socialism?

In the factory, the worker tries to get better wages and working conditions from the employer. If he or she cannot get them by a simple request, he or she soon learns the need of union organisation with which to enforce his or her requests and to defend himself or herself from attacks by the employer. He or she learns, too, that the workers must resort to political action in order to influence the government in their interests. Workers are forced by capitalism to engage in the class struggle.

But the fight of the working class up to this point is spontaneous, it is elementary. The thinking of the workers, which guides their fight, is based upon the ideas of the capitalist class, acquired directly from the capitalist press, schools and the like, or indirectly from the middle classes, the official leaders of the unions and the reformist parties of labour. What the workers still lack is a fundamental and thorough understanding of their real position in society and of their historic mission to establish socialism. This lack of a socialist consciousness reduces the effectiveness of their organisation, of their struggle, and prevents them from accomplishing their mission in society.

To imbue the workers with this rounded-out class consciousness, or socialist consciousness; to organise and lead the struggle for socialism - that is the specific function of the revolutionary socialist party. Such a party is therefore the vanguard of the working class. It is composed of those workers who already understand the nature of capitalism and the historical task of the working class. Their aim is to develop the same understanding among all the workers, so that they no longer fight blindly, or with only one eye open, but with a clear and scientific knowledge of what their class enemy is, of what the working class itself really is, and of what it can and must do in society. They and their party therefore have no interests separate from the interests of the working class as a whole. They merely represent its most advanced, most conscious, most militant section.

The revolutionary socialist party does not limit itself to preaching the great ideal of socialism. As an inseparable section of the working class, it takes an active part in every economic and political struggle of this class. It defends the working class from every capitalist attack. It supports every working class fight, even if the fight is led by conservative and anti-socialist labour leaders.

But the revolutionary socialist party also has a special function in every one of these working class struggles. It makes clear to the workers the full meaning of their fight. It shows how even the local struggles, against one capitalist,

are really class struggles against capitalism; how the local struggles must be extended on a national and international scale if the workers are to win a lasting victory. It points out the political meaning of the economic struggle. It shows how the workers must organise as a class to take political power, and use it to inaugurate socialism. It combats the open and the insidious ideas of capitalism so that the working class as a whole may be better equipped to fight its enemy. It aims to improve the position of the working class, to strengthen it, to clarify it and supply it with the most effective weapons in the struggle, to lead it in every battle in order that it may most speedily and successfully win the final battle for socialism.

The revolutionary socialist party supports every step forward, no matter how small, that the working class can take. If the capitalist class and the capitalistic labour leaders resist the efforts of the workers to establish an Independent Labour Party, the revolutionary socialist party does all it can to help the progressive workers break this resistance. If a Labour Party is formed under a conservative leadership, the revolutionary socialist party works with the progressives for a militant leadership, just as it does in the labour unions themselves. If a Labour Party is formed with a reformist program that does not meet the requirements of the working class, the revolutionary socialist party works for the adoption of a program based on the class struggle. Against the ideas of capitalism and reformism in the working class, the revolutionary party works for the ideas of socialism.

To put it briefly, a revolutionary socialist party is needed to win the working class to the principles of socialism, to socialist methods of struggle against capitalist exploitation and oppression, and finally to the socialist victory itself. Socialism will never come by itself. It must be fought for. Without an organised, conscious, disciplined, active revolutionary socialist party, the triumph of socialism is impossible.

There are several parties which proclaim the same socialist goal. This is often very confusing to a worker. He will say: "How am I to tell which party is the right one for me to join or support?" Or, "Why don't all those who are in favour of socialism unite into a single party?" Or, "If you cannot agree among yourselves, how do you expect me to agree with any of you?"

It should not be too hard to answer these questions. When a worker learns that a tool is useful and necessary, he does not throw up his hands in despair merely because there are many varieties of that tool offered to him. He reads carefully the claims made for each variety and the description given of what it can do, and he judges from experience which one really serves the purpose best.

If there is sickness in the family, he learns that there are all sorts of "schools" of healing. One insists that illness can be cured by the science of modern medicine; another emphasises adjustment of the bones; still another, pressure on nerve centres, a fourth, treatment by sun rays; a fifth, treatment by the faith of mind and heart; and there are the believers in cures by magic incantations and movements of the hand. He would not, because of all this, cry out: "Why don't they all get together on the question of cures?" Or, "How am I to tell which to choose?" Instead, he would examine to the best of his ability the methods and the results of each "school," making the most scientific possible test of which is most scientific.

It is not so very much different in politics. To judge the different parties, it is necessary to check on their words and their deeds. That is, to examine the programs of the different parties, what they are for and what they are against, and to see if what they do in practice corresponds to what they say in words. On that basis, it is easy to conclude which one best serves the interests of socialism.

We represent a long and rich tradition. We are proud of the fact that our principles and program are founded on the teachings of the greatest scientific thinkers and leaders of the international working class, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, V I Lenin and Leon Trotsky. Marx and Engels laid the foundations of the scientific socialist movement. Their analysis of capitalist society has never been successfully refuted. The principles they set forth for the working class struggle to achieve socialism have passed the most critical tests a hundred times over. Lenin and Trotsky applied the analysis of Marx and Engels to modern capitalism, strengthened the fundamental principles of scientific socialism, and successfully applied them in the great Russian Bolshevik Revolution.

We are called a Marxist, or Leninist, or Trotskyist, or Bolshevik party. These names are quite applicable. They merely signify that we stand firmly on the basic principles of the greatest teachers in the history of the working class. (The name "Bolshevik" is used by the capitalist press like the word "red" - to scare little children. In itself, "Bolshevik" is simply a Russian word meaning "a member of the majority". It was the name given to those who supported the majority in the split that took place in the Russian socialist movement in 1903. Politically, of course, it means a socialist who stands solidly for the principles of Karl Marx, and of Lenin, who was the leader of the majority in the split.)...

Our organisational structure corresponds to our political principles and its aim.

The fight for socialism is not a parlour game but the most serious struggle in history. A party that aims to lead this fight must be constructed accordingly. It must have firm and tested principles. It must have its army of militant adherents and a leadership, which work out the strategy and tactics of the fight. It must have discipline, so that everyone is not working at cross-purposes. It must have the fullest democracy, so that everyone contributes freely to working out the program and plan of action of the party and understands them intelligently. The socialist who is merely obedient and disciplined, and has no conscious understanding, cannot work to make non-socialist workers conscious of their task. The socialist who understands the principles, but does not work for them in a disciplined way, cannot hope to overcome the tremendous power of the class enemy.

We are a strictly disciplined organisation, but not a totalitarian organisation based on the unquestioning obedience of the parade-ground or the blind obedience of the membership to the Fuhrer. We are a democratic organisation, but not a loose collection of talkers who do nothing, or who act in the labour movement in any way they please.

As a militant part of the working class and an active participant in the class struggle, we require full responsibility and systematic activity of all our members. Reformist parties are constructed differently. Their members are not organised to work and fight in the labour movement for socialist principles, because these parties do not want to come into conflict with the conservative labour bureaucrats. Their members are not organised to participate militantly in the daily class struggle, because these parties are primarily election machines, which operate once a year to gather votes for their candidates. The rest of the year is devoted mostly to discussing the results of the last election and planning for the next one.

We favour active participation in election campaigns. We do not deceive people into believing that socialist freedom can be achieved by nothing more than a ballot. But we seek to utilise every election campaign to acquaint workers with our program, to mobilise them for class political action, and to elect the greatest number of workers' representatives who can use their office to work

for labour's interests and to tell the truth to wider masses of people.

Election campaigns are not the only, or even the most important, form of political action. Meetings, delegations, public demonstrations, strikes and other methods of struggles are just as important, and often far more important, political activities for the working class.

We are therefore a self-disciplined, democratic organisation which requires of our members continual education, responsibility, and systematic, organised participation in the class struggle. By our day-to-day activity in the class struggle, by showing in practice our devotion to the interests of the working class, our militancy, our readiness to sacrifice, the superiority of our program, we seek to demonstrate that we deserve the confidence and support of the workers.

Our principal field of activity is in the labour unions. Every member who is qualified is obliged to join a union and to be active in it. Our aim in the unions is to win the workers to the principles of socialism and the conscious, militant waging of the class struggle. We are therefore active in building up the unions, in uniting those that are divided, and in organising those workers who are still unorganised. We support every progressive movement inside the unions aimed at strengthening them organisationally and politically. We work to eliminate from the union movement all capitalist ideas, capitalist methods, capitalist politics and capitalist politicians.

We are irreconcilable opponents of bureaucratism and bureaucrats in the labour movement, and supports every effort of the membership to establish democratic control over its organisations.

Socialism cannot be achieved, and the workers cannot effectively promote their interests, without class consciousness. Class consciousness means an understanding working class, a self-confident and self-reliant working class. Bureaucratism is a capitalistic substitute for the self-reliance of the working class and an obstacle to it. It relies on bureaucratic maneuvers at the top, on ordering the membership around "for its own good", in place of the conscious, mass action of the workers themselves. It seeks to preserve its special privileges by curbing and stifling the workers and preventing them from acting independently with their organised strength. The fight for democracy in the unions and against bureaucratism is regarded by us as an inseparable part of its fight for the interests of the working class and the victory of socialism.

We are not a sectarian organisation that stands aloof from the daily struggles for the daily needs of the working class and confines itself to the preaching of the socialist ideal. We not only participate actively in every daily struggle, but have a program of action to meet the requirements of the people while capitalism still prevails. This program of action is the "minimum program," containing our immediate demands. In many cases, the same demands are presented by other labour organisations and parties. Where this is the case, we are ready to join with all other organisations to achieve the demand they make in common.

However, there is an important difference between us and the other organisations even when they advocate the same immediate demand. We believe that even the most modest demand or reform put forward by the workers can be realised soonest, most thoroughly and most durably only by the method of independent class struggle. The reformist organisations seek to achieve such demands by the method of "class collaboration." Also, these organisations aim at reforms in order to convince the workers that capitalism is fundamentally sound, or that it can be made to work in the interests of the people by means of a series of reforms. To us, the fight for reforms is

aimed at improving the position of the workers as a class, at heightening their class consciousness, confidence and militancy, at creating more favourable conditions for the continuation of the class struggle, which means more favourable conditions for continuing the struggle for socialism.

We are an internationalist party. Capitalism is a world system, and it can be thoroughly destroyed only on a world scale. We are internationalist because we consider national chauvinism reactionary and the sisterhood and brotherhood and equality of all peoples of the human race the highest social aim. We are internationalist because we consider that national frontiers have become a reactionary obstacle to further economic and social progress and a direct contributing source to imperialist conflicts and wars.

We are internationalist because we understand that the classless socialist society cannot be established within the framework of one country alone. The workers of one country can begin the work. They can lay the foundations of socialism. But socialism cannot be established on a lower plane than capitalism. If capitalism has developed a world market and become the dominant world order, socialism cannot conceivably be restricted to one country, no matter how big it is. Socialism is world socialism, or it is not socialism at all. Just as a socialist economy could not exist side by side with a capitalist economy in one country, so a socialist nation could not exist side by side with capitalist nations in one world. One or the other would have to win in the end.

That is why we endeavour to promote the international organisation, unity and solidarity of the working class. We are only one link of a world chain of similar parties and organisations that aim to establish an international union of revolutionary socialists.

Finally, it is well to emphasise once more that we do not limit ourselves to preaching the ideal of a socialist tomorrow. We support and take an active part in every daily and immediate struggle of the working class. We take part on the basis of our own principles and our own program. We endeavour at all times to widen the struggle and make it more clear-cut. Our activities are based on the knowledge that the class struggle, followed through logically and consistently, necessarily brings the workers to the establishment of their own government and to the inauguration of those economic and political measures that lead to socialism....

Gregory Zinoviev, Theses of the 2nd Congress of the Communist International on the Role of the Communist Party

<http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/2nd-congress/ch03a.htm>

The Communist International rejects most decisively the view that the proletariat can carry out its revolution without having an independent political party. Every class struggle is a political struggle. The aim of this struggle, which inevitably turns into civil war, is the conquest of political power. Political power can only be seized, organised and led by a political party, and in no other way. Only when the proletariat has as a leader an organised and tested party with well marked aims and with a tangible, worked-out programme for the next measures to be taken not only at home but also in foreign policy, will the conquest of political power not appear as an accidental episode but serve as the starting point for the permanent communist construction of society by the proletariat.

The same class struggle demands in the same way the centralisation and common leadership of the different forms of the proletarian movement (trades unions, co-operatives, works committees, cultural work, elections and so forth). Only a political party can be such a unifying and leading centre. To renounce the creation and strengthening of such a party, to renounce subordinating oneself to it, is to renounce unity in the leadership of the individual battle units of the proletariat who are advancing on the different battlefields. The class struggle of the proletariat demands a concerted agitation that illuminates the different stages of the struggle from a uniform point of view and at every given moment directs the attention of the proletariat towards specific tasks common to the whole class. That cannot be done without a centralised political apparatus, that is to say outside of a political party. The propaganda carried out by the revolutionary syndicalists and the Industrial Workers of the World against the necessity of such a party therefore contributes and has contributed objectively only to the support of the bourgeoisie and the counter-revolutionary 'social democrats'. In their propaganda against a Communist Party, which they wish to replace exclusively by trades unions or some formless 'general' workers' unions, the syndicalists and industrialists rub shoulders with open opportunists. For several years after the defeat of the 1905 revolution the Russian Mensheviks preached the idea of the so-called Workers' Congress, which was supposed to replace the revolutionary party of the working class. The 'yellow Labourites' of every kind in Britain and America preach to the workers the creation of formless workers' organisations or vague, merely parliamentary associations instead of the political party and at the same time put completely bourgeois policies into deeds. The revolutionary syndicalists and industrialists want to fight against the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, but do not know how. They do not see that without an independent political party the working class is a rump without a head.

Leon Trotsky, Speech at the 2nd Congress

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1924/ffyci-1/ch11.htm>

There is a rather sharp contradiction between the march of historical events and the opinion expressed here with such Marxist magnanimity to the effect that the broad masses of workers are already excellently aware of the necessity of the party. It is self-evident that if we were dealing here with Messrs. Scheidemann, Kautsky or their English co-thinkers, it would, of course, be unnecessary to convince these gentlemen that a party is indispensable to the working class. They have created a party for the working class and handed it over into the service of bourgeois and capitalist society.

But if what we have in mind is the proletarian party, then it is observable that in various countries this party is passing through different stages of its development. In Germany, the classic land of the old Social Democracy, we observe a titanic working class, on a high cultural level, advancing uninterruptedly in its struggle, dragging in its wake sizable remnants of old traditions. We see, on the other hand, that precisely those parties which pretend to speak in the name of the majority of the working class, the parties of the Second International, which express the moods of a section of the working class, compel us to pose the question whether the party is necessary or not.

Just because I know that the party is indispensable, and am very well aware of the value of the party, and just because I see Scheidemann on the one side and, on the

other, American or Spanish or French syndicalists who not only wish to fight against the bourgeoisie but who, unlike Scheidemann, really want to tear its head off-for this reason I say that I prefer to discuss with these Spanish, American and French comrades in order to prove to them that the party is indispensable for the fulfillment of the historical mission which is placed upon them - the destruction of the bourgeoisie. I will try to prove this to them in a comradely way, on the basis of my own experience, and not by counterposing to them Scheidemann's long years of experience and saying that for the majority this question has already been settled...

Comrades, the French syndicalists are conducting revolutionary work within the syndicates [trade unions]. When I discuss today, for example, with Comrade Rosmer, we have a common ground. The French syndicalists, in defiance of the traditions of democracy and its deceptions, have said: "We do not want any parties, we stand for proletarian syndicates and for the revolutionary minority within them which applies direct action." What the French syndicalists understood by this minority was not clear even to themselves. It was a portent of the future development, which, despite their prejudices and illusions, has not hindered these same syndicalist comrades from playing a revolutionary role in France, and from producing that small minority which has come to our International Congress.

What does this minority mean to our friends? It is the chosen section of the French working class, a section with a clear program and organization of its own, an organization where they discuss all questions, and not alone discuss but also decide, and where they are bound by a certain discipline. However, proceeding from the experience of the proletarian struggle against the bourgeoisie, proceeding from its own experience and the experience of other countries, French syndicalism will be compelled to create the Communist Party...

When Comrade Pestaña [a Spanish revolutionary syndicalist at the Congress] returns to Spain with these decisions his comrades will want to know: "What did you bring back from Moscow?" He will then present them with the theses and ask them to vote the resolution up or down; and those Spanish syndicalists, who unite on the basis of the proposed theses, will form nothing else but the Spanish Communist Party...

Leon Trotsky, The Lessons of October

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1924/1924-les.htm#a8>

There has been some talk lately in our press to the effect that we are not, mind you, in a position to tell through what channels the proletarian revolution will come in England. Will it come through the channel of the Communist Party or through the trade unions? Such a formulation of the question makes a show of a fictitiously broad historical outlook; it is radically false and dangerous because it obliterates the chief lesson of the last few years. If the triumphant revolution did not come at the end of the war, it was because a party was lacking. This conclusion applies to Europe as a whole. It may be traced concretely in the fate of the revolutionary movement in various countries.

With respect to Germany, the case is quite a clear one. The German revolution might have been triumphant both in 1918 and in 1919, had a proper party leadership been secured. We had an instance of this same thing in 1917 in the case of Finland. There, the revolutionary movement developed under exceptionally favorable circumstances, under the wing of revolutionary Russia and with its direct

military assistance. But the majority of the leaders in the Finnish party proved to be social democrats, and they ruined the revolution. The same lesson flows just as plainly from the Hungarian experience. There the communists, along with the left social democrats, did not conquer power, but were handed it by the frightened bourgeoisie. The Hungarian revolution triumphant without a battle and without a victory 'was left from the very outset without a fighting leadership. The Communist Party fused with the social democratic party, showed thereby that it itself was not a Communist Party; and, in consequence, in spite of the fighting spirit of the Hungarian workers, it proved incapable of keeping the power it had obtained so easily.

Without a party, apart from a party, over the head of a party, or with a substitute for a party, the proletarian revolution cannot conquer. That is the principal lesson of the past decade. It is true that the English trade unions may become a mighty lever of the proletarian revolution; they may, for instance, even take the place of workers' soviets under certain conditions and for a certain period of time. They can fill such a role, however, not apart from a Communist party, and certainly not against the party, but only on the condition that communist influence becomes the decisive influence in the trade unions. We have paid far too dearly for this conclusion 'with regard to the role and importance of a party in a proletarian revolution 'to renounce it so lightly or even to minimize its significance.

Consciousness, premeditation, and planning played a far smaller part in bourgeois revolutions than they are destined to play, and already do play, in proletarian revolutions. In the former instance the motive force of the revolution was also furnished by the masses, but the latter were much less organized and much less conscious than at the present time. The leadership remained in the hands of different sections of the bourgeoisie, and the latter had at its disposal wealth, education, and all the organizational advantages connected with them (the cities, the universities, the press, etc.). The bureaucratic monarchy defended itself in a hand-to-mouth manner, probing in the dark and then acting. The bourgeoisie would bide its time to seize a favorable moment when it could profit from the movement of the lower classes, throw its whole social weight into the scale, and so seize the state power. The proletarian revolution is precisely distinguished by the fact that the proletariat - in the person of its vanguard - acts in it not only as the main offensive force but also as the guiding force. The part played in bourgeois revolutions by the economic power of the bourgeoisie, by its education, by its municipalities and universities, is a part which can be filled in a proletarian revolution only by the party of the proletariat.

The role of the party has become all the more important in view of the fact that the enemy has also become far more conscious. The bourgeoisie, in the course of centuries of rule, has perfected a political schooling far superior to the schooling of the old bureaucratic monarchy. If parliamentarism served the proletariat to a certain extent as a training school for revolution, then it also served the bourgeoisie to a far greater extent as the school of counterrevolutionary strategy. Suffice it to say that by means of parliamentarism the bourgeoisie was able so to train the social democracy that it is today the main prop of private property. The epoch of the social revolution in Europe, as has been shown by its very first steps, will be an epoch not only of strenuous and ruthless struggle but also of planned and calculated battles - far more planned than with us in 1917...

Each party, even the most revolutionary party, must inevitably produce its own organizational conservatism; for otherwise it would lack the necessary stability. This is

wholly a question of degree. In a revolutionary party the vitally necessary dose of conservatism must be combined with a complete freedom from routine, with initiative in orientation and daring in action. These qualities are put to the severest test during turning points in history. We have already quoted the words of Lenin to the effect that even the most revolutionary parties, when an abrupt change occurs in a situation and when new tasks arise as a consequence, frequently pursue the political line of yesterday and thereby become, or threaten to become, a brake upon the revolutionary process. Both conservatism and revolutionary initiative find their most concentrated expression in the leading organs of the party...

The experience of the European struggles, and above all the struggles in Germany, when looked at in the light of our own experience, tells us that there are two types of leaders who incline to drag the party back at the very moment when it must take a stupendous leap forward. Some among them generally tend to see mainly the difficulties and obstacles in the way of revolution, and to estimate each situation with a preconceived, though not always conscious, intention of avoiding any action. Marxism in their hands is turned into a method for establishing the impossibility of revolutionary action. The purest specimens of this type are the Russian Mensheviks. But this type as such is not confined to Menshevism, and at the most critical moment it suddenly manifests itself in responsible posts in the most revolutionary party.

The representatives of the second variety are distinguished by their superficial and agitational approach. They never see any obstacles or difficulties until they come into a head on collision with them. The capacity for surmounting real obstacles by means of bombastic phrases, the tendency to evince lofty optimism on all questions ("the ocean is only knee deep"), is inevitably transformed into its polar opposite when the hour for decisive action strikes. To the first type of revolutionist, who makes mountains out of molehills, the problems of seizing power lie in heaping up and multiplying to the nth degree all the difficulties he has become accustomed to see in his way. To the second type, the superficial optimist, the difficulties of revolutionary action always come as a surprise. In the preparatory period the behavior of the two is different: the former is a skeptic upon whom one cannot rely too much, that is, in a revolutionary sense; the latter, on the contrary, may seem a fanatic revolutionist. But at the decisive moment, the two march hand in hand; they both oppose the insurrection. Meanwhile, the entire preparatory work is of value only to the extent that it renders the party and above all its leading organs capable of determining the moment for an insurrection, and of assuming the leadership of it. For the task of the Communist Party is the conquest of power for the purpose of reconstructing society.

Much has been spoken and written lately on the necessity of "Bolshevizing" the Comintern. This is a task that cannot be disputed or delayed; it is made particularly urgent after the cruel lessons of Bulgaria and Germany a year ago. Bolshevism is not a doctrine (i.e., not merely a doctrine) but a system of revolutionary training for the proletarian uprising. What is the Bolshevization of Communist parties? It is giving them such a training, and effecting such a selection of the leading staff, as would prevent them from drifting when the hour for their October strikes. "That is the whole of Hegel, and the wisdom of books, and the meaning of all philosophy..."

On the basis of our experience - even taking only one year, from February 1917 to February 1918 - and on the basis of the supplementary experience in Finland, Hungary, Italy, Bulgaria, and Germany, we can posit as

almost an unalterable law that a party crisis is inevitable in the transition from preparatory revolutionary activity to the immediate struggle for power. Generally speaking, crises arise in the party at every serious turn in the party's course, either as a prelude to the turn or as a consequence of it...

Amadeo Bordiga, Lyons Theses

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/bordiga/works/1926/lyons-theses.htm>

The key doctrines of the communist party are founded on Marxism, which the struggle against opportunist deviations reinstated and set in place as the cornerstones of the 3rd International. These consist of: Dialectical Materialism as the method of conceiving of the world and human history; the fundamental doctrines contained in Marx's Capital as method of interpretation of present-day capitalist economy; the programmatic formulations of The Communist Manifesto as the historical and political plan of emancipation of the world working class...

Every class struggle is a political struggle; that is to say, it has the tendency to end up as a struggle for the conquest of political power and control of the new State organism. Consequently, the organ which leads the class struggle to its final victory is the class political party, which is the sole possible instrument firstly of revolutionary insurrection and then of government. From these simple but brilliant assertions of Marx, brought into maximum relief by Lenin, arises the definition of the party as an organisation of all those who are conscious of the system of opinions in which is summed up the historical task of the revolutionary class and who have decided to work for the victory of this class. Thanks to the party, the working class acquires the knowledge of the way forward and the will to take it. Historically, the party therefore represents the class in the successive stages of the struggle, even if only a greater or smaller part of the class is regrouped in its ranks...

The party's power of volition, as well as its consciousness and theoretical knowledge are functions that are exquisitely collective. Marxism explains that the leaders in the party itself are given their job because they are considered as instruments and operators who best manifest the capacity to comprehend and explain facts and lead and will action, with such capacities nevertheless maintaining their origin in the existence and character of the collective organ.

By way of these considerations, the marxist conception of the party and its activity, as we have stated, thus shuns fatalism, which would have us as passive spectators of phenomena into which no direct intervention is felt possible.

Likewise, it rejects every voluntarist conception, as regards individuals, according to which the qualities of theoretical preparation, force of will, and the spirit of sacrifice - in short, a special type of moral figure and a requisite level of "purity" - set the required standards for every single party militant without exception, reducing the latter to an elite, distinct and superior to the rest of the elements that compose the working class.

The fatalist and passivistic error, though it might not necessarily lead to negating the function and the utility of the party, at the very least would certainly involve adapting the party to a proletarian class that is understood merely in a statistical and economic sense. We can sum up the conclusions touched on in the preceding theses as the condemnation of both the workerist conception, and that of an elite of an intellectual and moral character. Both these

tendencies are aberrations from marxism which end up converging on the slippery slope to opportunism.

In resolving the general question of tactics on the same terrain as that of the nature of party, the marxist solution must be distinguished both from that doctrinal estrangement from the reality of the class struggle which contents itself with abstract lucubrations, whilst negating concrete activity, and from sentimental aestheticism; which aspires, with the noisy gestures and heroic posturing of tiny minorities, to bring about new situations and historical movements. Also, it must be distinguished from opportunism, which neglects the link with principles, i.e. with the general scope of the movement, and, keeping in view only an immediate and apparent success, is content to clamour for isolated and limited demands without bothering about whether these contradict the necessity of preparing for the supreme conquests of the working class.

The party cannot and must not restrict its activity either to merely conserving the purity of theoretical principles and organisational structure, or to achieving immediate successes and a numerical popularity regardless of the cost. At all times and in all places, it must consolidate the following three points:

- a) The defence and clarification of the fundamental programmatic postulates, that is, the theoretical knowledge of the working-class movement, in relation to new events as they arise;
- b) The assurance of the continuity of the organisational unity and efficiency of the party, and its defence against contamination by extraneous influences opposed to the revolutionary interests of the proletariat;
- c) The active participation in all the struggles of the working class, including those that arise out of partial and limited interests, in order to encourage their development. Emphasis however must constantly be placed on the factor of their links with the final revolutionary aims, and with the conquests of the class struggle presented as stepping-stones on the way to the indispensable combat to come. This means denouncing the perils of abandoning ourselves to partial accomplishments as though they were points of arrival, and the danger of bartering these for the conditions of class activity and combativity of the proletariat which are the autonomy and independence of its ideology and its organisations, most important of which is the party...

It isn't even possible to establish in a general way that the most propitious conditions for communist party work to bear fruit are to be found under certain types of bourgeois regime, e.g. the most democratic. For whilst it is true that the reactionary and "right-wing" measures of bourgeois governments have often obstructed the proletariat, it is no less true, and in fact occurs far more often, that the liberal and left-wing politics of bourgeois governments have also stifled the class struggle and diverted the working-class from taking decisive action. A more accurate evaluation, truly conforming with Marxism's breaking of the democratic, evolutionist and progressive spell, maintains that the bourgeoisie attempts, and often succeeds, in alternating its methods and parties in government according to its counter-revolutionary interests. All our experience shows us that whenever the proletariat gets enthusiastic about the vicissitudes of bourgeois politics, opportunism triumphs.

Secondly, even if it were true that certain changes of government within the present regime made the further development of proletarian action easier, there is clear evidence that this would depend on one express condition: the existence of a party which had issued timely warnings to the masses about the disappointment which would inevitably follow what had appeared to be an immediate success; indeed not just the existence of the party, but its capacity to take action, even before the struggle to which

we refer, in a manner which is clearly perceived as autonomous by proletarians, who follow the party not on the basis of schemes which it might be convenient to adopt at an official level but because of the party's down-to-earth attitude.

When faced with struggles unable to culminate in the definitive proletarian victory, the party doesn't turn itself into a manager of transitional demands and accomplishments which are not of direct interest to the class it represents, and neither does it barter away its specific character and autonomous activity in order to become a kind of insurance society for all the political "renewal" movements or political systems and governments under threat from an allegedly "worse government"...

Disciplinary sanctions are one of the elements that ensure against degeneration, but only on condition that their application remains within the limits of exceptional cases, and doesn't become the norm and virtually the ideal of the party's functioning.

The solution doesn't reside in a useless increase in hierarchical authoritarianism, whose initial investiture is lacking both because of the incompleteness of the historical experiences in Russia, impressive though they are, and because even within the Old Guard, the custodian of the Bolshevik traditions, disagreements have been resolved in ways which cannot be considered as a priori the best ones. But neither does the solution lie in the systematic application of the principles of formal democracy, which for marxism have no other function than as organisational practices which can be occasionally convenient.

The communist parties must achieve an organic centralism which, whilst including maximum possible consultation with the base, ensures a spontaneous elimination of any grouping which aims to differentiate itself. This cannot be achieved with, as Lenin put it, the formal and mechanical prescriptions of a hierarchy, but through correct revolutionary politics.

The repression of fractionism isn't a fundamental aspect of the evolution of the party, though preventing it is...

The united front tactic shouldn't be interpreted as a political coalition with other so-called workers' parties, but as a utilisation of immediate demands in particular situations to increase the communist party's influence over the masses without compromising its autonomous position.

The basis for the United Front must therefore be sought in the proletarian organisations which workers join because of their social position and independently of their political faith or affiliation to an organised party. The reason is two-fold: firstly, communists aren't prevented from criticising other parties, or gradually recruiting new members who used to be dependant on these other parties into the ranks of the communist party, and secondly, it ensures that the masses will understand the party when it eventually calls on them to mobilise behind its programme and under its exclusive leadership.

Experience has shown us countless times that the only way of ensuring a revolutionary application of the united front lies in rejecting political coalitions, whether permanent or temporary, along with committees which include representatives of different political parties as means of directing the struggle; also there should be no negotiations, proposals for common action and open letters to other parties from the communist party.

Practical experience has proved how fruitless these methods are, and even any initial effect has been discredited by the abuses to which they have been put.

The political united front based on the central demand of the seizure of the State becomes the "workers'

government" tactic. Here we have not only an erroneous tactic, but also a blatant contradiction of the principles of communism. Once the party issues the call for the assumption of power by the proletariat through the representative organisms of the bourgeois State apparatus, or even merely refrains from explicitly condemning such an eventuality, then it has abandoned and rejected the communist programme not only vis-à-vis proletarian ideology, with all the inevitable damaging consequences, but because the party itself would be establishing and accrediting this ideological formulation. The revision to this tactic made at the 5th Congress, after the defeat in Germany, hasn't proved satisfactory and the latest developments in the realm of tactical experimentation justify calls for the abandonment of even the expression: "workers' government".

As far as the central problem of the State is concerned, the party should issue the call for the dictatorship of the proletariat and that alone. There is no other "Workers' Government".

The slogan "Workers' Government" leads to opportunism, and to opportunism alone, i.e. support for, or participation in, self-styled "pro-worker" governments of the bourgeois class.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Left-Wing Communism: an infantile disorder

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/ch02.htm>

The first questions to arise are: how is the discipline of the proletariat's revolutionary party maintained? How is it tested? How is it reinforced? First, by the class-consciousness of the proletarian vanguard and by its devotion to the revolution, by its tenacity, self-sacrifice and heroism. Second, by its ability to link up, maintain the closest contact, and - if you wish - merge, in certain measure, with the broadest masses of the working people - primarily with the proletariat, *but also with the non-proletarian* masses of working people. Third, by the correctness of the political leadership exercised by this vanguard, by the correctness of its political strategy and tactics, provided the broad masses have seen, *from their own experience*, that they are correct.

Without these conditions, discipline in a revolutionary party really capable of being the party of the advanced class, whose mission it is to overthrow the bourgeoisie and transform the whole of society, cannot be achieved. Without these conditions, all attempts to establish discipline inevitably fall flat and end up in phrasemongering and clowning.

On the other hand, these conditions cannot emerge at once. They are created only by prolonged effort and hard-won experience. Their creation is facilitated by a correct revolutionary theory, which, in its turn, is not a dogma, but assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement.

The fact that, in 1917-20, Bolshevism was able, under unprecedentedly difficult conditions, to build up and successfully maintain the strictest centralisation and iron discipline was due simply to a number of historical peculiarities of Russia.

On the one hand, Bolshevism arose in 1903 on a very firm foundation of Marxist theory. The correctness of this revolutionary theory, and of it alone, has been proved, not only by world experience throughout the nineteenth century, but especially by the experience of the seekings

and vacillations, the errors and disappointments of revolutionary thought in Russia.

For about half a century - approximately from the forties to the nineties of the last century - progressive thought in Russia, oppressed by a most brutal and reactionary tsarism, sought eagerly for a correct revolutionary theory, and followed with the utmost diligence and thoroughness each and every "last word" in this sphere in Europe and America. Russia achieved Marxism - the only correct revolutionary theory - through the *agony* she experienced in the course of half a century of unparalleled torment and sacrifice, of unparalleled revolutionary heroism, incredible energy, devoted searching, study, practical trial, disappointment, verification, and comparison with European experience. Thanks to the political emigration caused by tsarism, revolutionary Russia, in the second half of the nineteenth century, acquired a wealth of international links and excellent information on the forms and theories of the world revolutionary movement, such as no other country possessed.

On the other hand, Bolshevism, which had arisen on this granite foundation of theory, went through fifteen years of practical history (1903-17) unequalled anywhere in the world in its wealth of experience...

Leon Trotsky, An Open Letter to comrade Burnham

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1942-dm/ch03.htm>

The chief argument of the "Economists" was that *Iskra* floats in the sphere of theory while they, the "Economists," propose leading the concrete labor movement. The main argument of the Social Revolutionists was as follows: *Iskra* wants to found a school of dialectic materialism while we want to overthrow Czarist autocracy. It must be said that the Narodnik terrorists took their own words very seriously: bomb in hand they sacrificed their lives. We argued with them: "Under certain circumstances a bomb is an excellent thing but we should first clarify our own minds." It is historical experience that the greatest revolution in all history was not led by the party which started out with bombs but by the party which started out with dialectic materialism.

Antonio Gramsci, Analysis of Situations: Relations of Force

http://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/prison_notebooks/reader/q13-17.htm

The most important observation to be made about any concrete analysis of the relations of force is the following: that such analyses cannot and must not be ends in themselves (unless the intention is merely to write a chapter of past history), but acquire significance only if they serve to justify a particularly practical activity, an initiative of will. They reveal the points of least resistance, at which the force of will can be most fruitfully applied; they suggest immediate tactical operations; they indicate how a campaign of political agitation may best be launched, what language will best be understood by the masses, etc. The decisive element in every situation is the permanently organized and long prepared force which can be put into the field when it is judged that a situation is favourable (and it can be favourable only in so far as such a force

exists, and is full of fighting spirit). Therefore the essential task is that of systematically and patiently ensuring that this force is formed, developed and rendered ever more homogeneous, compact, and self-aware.

Antonio Gramsci, Some Theoretical and Practical Aspects of "Economism"

http://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/prison_notebooks/modern_prince/ch07.htm

Economism appears in many other guises besides laissez-faire liberalism and theoretical syndicalism. All forms of electoral abstentionism belong to it... and there are many such forms, in the sense that there can be semi-abstentionism, 25 per cent abstentionism, etc. Linked with abstentionism is the formula "the worse it gets, the better that will be"... Economism is not always opposed to political action and to the political party, but the latter is seen merely as an educational organism similar in kind to a trade union. One point of reference for the study of economism, and for understanding the relations between structure and superstructure, is the passage in *The Poverty of Philosophy* where it says that an important phase in the development of a social class is that in which the individual components of a trade union no longer struggle solely for their own economic interests, but for the defence and the development of the organisation itself...

A few characteristics of historical economism:

1. in the search for historical connections it makes no distinction between what is "relatively permanent" and what is a passing fluctuation, and by an economic fact it means the self-interest of an individual or small group, in an immediate and "dirty-Jewish" sense. In other words, it does not take economic class formations into account, with all their inherent relations, but is content to assume motives of mean and usurious self-interest, especially when it takes forms which the law defines as criminal;

2. the doctrine according to which economic development is reduced to the course of technical change in the instruments of work.

It often happens that people combat historical economism in the belief that they are attacking historical materialism...In its most widespread form as economic superstition, the philosophy of praxis loses a great part of its capacity for cultural expansion among the top layer of intellectuals, however much it may gain among the popular masses and the second-rate intellectuals, who do not intend to overtax their brains but still wish to appear to know everything, etc. As Engels wrote, many people find it very convenient to think that they can have the whole of history and all political and philosophical wisdom in their pockets at little cost and no trouble, concentrated into a few short formulae. They forget that the thesis which asserts that men become conscious of fundamental conflicts on the level of ideology is not psychological or moralistic in character, but structural and epistemological; and they form the habit of considering politics, and hence history, as a continuous *market de dupes*, a competition in conjuring and sleight of hand. "Critical" activity is reduced to the exposure of swindles, to creating scandals, and to prying them into the pockets of public figures.

It is thus forgotten that since "economism" too is, or is presumed to be, an objective principle of interpretation (objective-scientific), the search for direct self-interest should apply to all aspects of history, to those who represent the "thesis" as well as those who represent the "antithesis". Furthermore, another proposition of the philosophy of praxis is also forgotten: that "popular beliefs" and similar ideas are themselves material forces. The search for "dirty-Jewish" interests has sometimes led to

monstrous and comical errors of interpretation, which have consequently reacted negatively on the prestige of the original body of ideas...

Confronted with [various right-wing popular movements], economism asks the question: "who profits directly from the initiative under consideration?", and replies with a line of reasoning which is as simplistic as it is fallacious: the ones who profit directly are a certain fraction of the ruling class. Furthermore, so that no mistake shall be made, the choice falls on that fraction which manifestly has a progressive function, controlling the totality of economic forces. One can be certain of not going wrong, since necessarily, if the movement under consideration comes to power, sooner or later the progressive fraction of the ruling group will end up by controlling the new government, and by making it its instrument for turning the State apparatus to its own benefit.

This sort of infallibility, therefore, comes very cheap. It not only has no theoretical significance – it has only minimal political implications or practical efficacy. In general, it produces nothing but moralistic sermons, and interminable questions of personality...

Economism [produces only] a moralistic accusation of duplicity and bad faith, or (in the case of the movement's followers), of naiveté and stupidity. Thus the political struggle is reduced to a series of personal affairs between on the one hand those with the genie in the lamp who know everything and on the other those who are fooled by their own leaders but are so incurably thick that they refuse to believe it. Moreover, until such movements have gained power, it is always possible to think that they are going to fail – and some indeed have failed (Boulangism itself, which failed as such and then was definitively crushed with the rise of the Dreyfusard movement...). Research must therefore be directed towards identifying their strengths and weaknesses.

The "economist" hypothesis asserts the existence of an immediate element of strength – i.e. the availability of a certain direct or indirect financial backing (a large newspaper supporting the movement is also a form of indirect financial backing) – and it is satisfied with that. But it is not enough. In this case too, an analysis of the balance of forces – at all levels – can only culminate in the sphere of hegemony and ethico-political relations...

One point which should be added as an example of the so-called intransigence theories is the rigid aversion on principle to what are termed compromises – and the derivative of this, which can be termed "fear of dangers". It is clear that this aversion on principle to compromise is closely linked to economism. For the conception upon which the aversion is based can only be the iron conviction that there exist objective laws of historical development similar in kind to natural laws, together with a belief in a predetermined teleology like that of a religion: since favourable conditions are inevitably going to appear, and since these, in a rather mysterious way, will bring about paligenetic events, it is evident that any deliberate initiative tending to predispose and plan these conditions is not only useless but even harmful.

Side by side with these fatalistic beliefs however, there exists the tendency "thereafter" to rely blindly and indiscriminately on the regulatory properties of armed conflict. Yet this too is not without its logic and its consistency, since it goes with a belief that the intervention of will is useful for destruction but not for reconstruction (already under way in the very moment of destruction). Destruction is conceived of mechanically, not as destruction/reconstruction. In such modes of thinking, no account is taken of the "time" factor, nor in the last analysis even of "economics". For there is no understanding of the fact that mass ideological factors

always lag behind mass economic phenomena, and that therefore, at certain moments, the automatic thrust due to the economic factor is slowed down, obstructed or even momentarily broken by traditional ideological elements – hence that there must be a conscious, planned struggle to ensure that the exigencies of the economic position of the masses, which may conflict with the traditional leadership's policies, are understood. An appropriate political initiative is always necessary to liberate the economic thrust from the dead weight of traditional policies – i.e. to change the political direction of certain forces which have to be absorbed if a new, homogeneous politico-economic historical bloc, without internal contradictions, is to be successfully formed.

Antonio Gramsci, Notes on Philosophy

http://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/prison_notebooks/reader/q11-12.htm

The relation between common sense and the upper level of philosophy is assured by 'politics', just as it is politics that assures the relationship between the Catholicism of the intellectuals and that of the simple. There are, however, fundamental differences between the two cases. That the Church has to face up to a problem of the 'simple' means precisely that there has been a split in the community of the faithful. This split cannot be healed by raising the simple to the level of the intellectuals (the Church does not even envisage such a task, which is both ideologically and economically beyond its present capacities), but only by imposing an iron discipline on the intellectuals so that they do not exceed certain limits of differentiation and so render the split catastrophic and irreparable...

The position of the philosophy of praxis [Marxism] is the antithesis of this Catholic one. The philosophy of praxis does not tend to leave the 'simple' in their primitive philosophy of common sense, but rather to lead them to a higher conception of life. If it affirms the need for contact between intellectuals and simple it is not in order to restrict scientific activity and preserve unity at the low level of the masses, but precisely in order to construct an intellectual-moral bloc which can make politically possible the intellectual progress of the mass and not only of small intellectual groups.

The active man-in-the-mass has a practical activity, but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his practical activity, which nonetheless is an understanding of the world in so far as it transforms it. His theoretical consciousness can indeed be historically in opposition to his activity. One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed. But this 'verbal' conception is not without consequences. It attaches one to a specific social group, it influences moral conduct and the direction of will, with varying efficacy but often powerfully enough to produce a situation in which the contradictory state of consciousness does not permit of any action, any decision or any choice, and produces a condition of moral and political passivity. Critical understanding of self takes place therefore through a struggle of political 'hegemonies', from opposing directions, first in the ethical field and then in that of politics, in order to arrive at the working out at a higher level of one's own conception of reality. Consciousness of being part of a particular

hegemonic force (that is to say, political consciousness) is the first stage towards a further progressive self-consciousness in which theory and practice will finally be one. Even the unity of theory and practice is not therefore a matter of mechanical fact, but a part of the historical process, whose elementary and primitive phase is to be found in the sense of being 'different' and 'apart', in a barely instinctive feeling of independence, and which progresses to the level of real and complete possession of a single and coherent conception of the world.

Leon Trotsky, Luxemburg and the Fourth International

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1935/1935-lux.htm>

Efforts are now being made in France and elsewhere to construct a so-called Luxemburgism as an entrenchment for the left centrists against the Bolshevik-Leninist...

There is no gainsaying that Rosa Luxemburg impassionately counterposed the spontaneity of mass actions to the "victory-crowned" conservative policy of the German social democracy especially after the Revolution of 1905. This counterposition had a thoroughly revolutionary and progressive character. At a much earlier date than Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg grasped the retarding character of the ossified party and trade-union apparatus and began a struggle against it. Inasmuch as she counted upon the inevitable accentuation of class conflicts, she always predicted the certainty of the independent elemental appearance of the masses against the will and against the line of march of officialdom. In these broad historical outlines, Rosa was proved right. For the Revolution of 1918 was "spontaneous", that is, it was accomplished by the masses against all the provisions and all the precautions of the party officialdom. On the other hand, the whole of Germany's subsequent history amply showed that spontaneity alone is far from enough for success; Hitler's regime is a weighty argument against the panacea of spontaneity.

Rosa herself never confined herself to the mere theory of spontaneity, like Parvus, for example, who later bartered his social revolutionary fatalism for the most revolting fatalism. In contrast to Parvus, Rosa Luxemburg exerted herself to educate the revolutionary wing of the proletariat in advance and to bring it together organizationally as far as possible. In Poland, she built up a very rigid independent organization. The most that can be said is that in her historical-philosophical evaluation of the labor movement, the preparatory selection of the vanguard, in comparison with the mass actions that were to be expected, fell too short with Rosa; whereas Lenin - without consoling himself with the miracles of future actions - took the advanced workers and constantly and tirelessly welded them together into firm nuclei, illegally or legally, in the mass organizations or underground, by means of a sharply defined program.

Rosa's theory of spontaneity was a wholesome weapon against the ossified apparatus of reformism. By the fact that it was often directed against Lenin's work of building up a revolutionary apparatus, it revealed - to be sure, only in embryo - its reactionary features. With Rosa herself this occurred only episodically. She was much too realistic in the revolutionary sense to develop the elements of the theory of spontaneity into a consummate metaphysics. In practice, she herself, as has already been said, undermined this theory at every step. After the revolution of November 1918, she began the ardent labor of assembling the proletarian vanguard. Despite her

theoretically very weak manuscript on the Soviet Revolution, written in prison but never published by her, Rosa's subsequent work allows the sure conclusion that, day by day, she was moving closer to Lenin's theoretically clearly-delineated conception concerning conscious leadership and spontaneity. (It must surely have been this circumstance that prevented her from making public her manuscript against Bolshevik policy which was later so shamefully abused)...

The latest spontaneity confusionists have just as little right to refer to Rosa as the miserable Comintern bureaucrats have to refer to Lenin. Put aside the incidentals which developments have overcome, and we can, with full justification, place our work for the Fourth International under the sign of the "three L's", that is, not only under the sign of Lenin, but also of Luxemburg and Liebknecht.