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## **Gramsci and the Protracted Revolutionary People's War**

*The "war of position" of Gramsci is essentially a paraphrase of the more explicit expression of PRPW that we use, taking it from Mao. "(1)*

*We gladly publish the article by Comrade Folco R. which shows the contribution by Antonio Gramsci to the development of the strategy of the revolutionary people's war as a strategy of the socialist revolution in the imperialist countries.*

**Firstly**, because the communist movement in our country absolutely needs to refine his elaboration about the forms of socialist revolution. The more our fight progresses, the more widely the war that we started with the founding of the Party spreads, as the crisis of capitalism drives the masses to enlist in the PRPW, as in the 1943-1945 period a growing number of young people, workers, farmers and housewives joined the Resistance, the more it is necessary that the Party learns to put the general conception of PRPW in concrete initiatives: in campaigns, battles and operations until the mobilization of the broad masses that will establish socialism in Italy and so will give their contribution to the second wave of the proletarian revolution advancing worldwide.

**Secondly**, to give Antonio Gramsci the place he deserves in the Italian and international communist movement for the work he did. Against the misrepresentation of his work made by Togliatti and his accomplices and successors who have submitted Gramsci as a precursor of peaceful road to socialism, in practice of waiver of the socialist revolution. But also against the anti-Communist use of Gramsci the bourgeois left tries to make these years: it presents him in Italy and in the world as an opponent of the concept and the line personified by Stalin who led the Communist International and the Communist movement until 1956. While in reality it was Gramsci, even if he was segregated in fascist prisons, who developed, in the light of the tasks of the socialist revolution and the experience of the communist movement, the most comprehensive critique of Trotsky and Bukharin's conceptions who were the main opponents of Stalin about the orientation to be given to the revolution in the Soviet Union and internationally, and about the line with which pursuing it.

*These two reasons amply justify the publication of the contribution of the comrade, although his study of Gramsci's work is still in progress, which is also reflected by the uncertainty in pointing out the main texts among those relevant to the assimilation of the teachings of Gramsci about the PRPW.*

*the editors*

In issue n. 43 of *La Voce* Umberto C. writes that Gramsci, "the one and only communist leader ... which reflected on the form of the socialist revolution in the imperialist countries, ... developed (see the Prison Notebooks 7, (§ 16), 10 (§

9), 13 (§7), and others) the theory of the “ war of position”, which, freeing ourselves from the language imposed by fascist prison censorship, today we would call protracted revolutionary people’s war.”

The Protracted Revolutionary People’s War (PRPW) is socialist revolution that is being built. The PRPW, as conception, is opposed to the conception of common sense (that is to say the current ways of speaking and thinking, the result of clergy and bourgeoisie’s dominant role) that the socialist revolution would break out, that would be a spontaneous rebellion of masses of the people forced to intolerable conditions. The communist movement at its beginning (1848) inherited this conception and understood the socialist revolution as a revolution that breaks out, the way of the revolutions of the past. This conception of the socialist revolution, anyway, was at odds with the experience that the communist movement was developing. The Communists little by little realized this contrast between their conception of the socialist revolution and the practice of socialist revolution.

Engels was the first who, in 1895, exhibited in an organic way the concept that the socialist revolution was by its nature a form different from the revolutions of the past, that does not break out but it is being built.(2) But the socialist parties of the time (which were connected to each other in the Second International) did not accept his discovery. Even leaders of those parties who professed themselves Marxists, such as the German Social Democratic Party, joined Marxism in a dogmatic way, albeit in different gradations. Communism, socialism and socialist revolution were articles of faith, which were not put in the lines for guiding the current activity of the parties. Precisely for this reason they were unable to cope with their task, as the events of 1914 blatantly demonstrated. Among the socialist parties of the time, only Lenin’s party put Engels’ conception in his practice, but it did it without making Engels’ conception a weapon in the struggle against dogmatism, opportunism and economism.(3) He built the revolution in Russia as a PRPW, but without being aware of it (so confirming that the practice is generally richer than the theory). Similarly, Stalin and the Communist International in the early part of the last century led a successful socialist revolution internationally as PRPW of which the Soviet Union was the world red base, but did not reach full consciousness of what they were doing. This gave way in the Communist International to dogmatism, opportunism and economism that came to light openly in the 50s of last century.

Mao Tse-tung was the first party leader who developed the conception of the PRPW as a strategy of socialist revolution. Mao Tse-tung, however, enunciated this conception as a strategy of the revolution in China, tying it to the specific features of Chinese social and political situation (*Why Can Red Power Exist in China?* - October 1928 *Selected Works of Mao Tse -tung*, vol. 2 Editions Social Relations; available on the website of the (n)PCI <http://www.nuovopci.it/arcspip/article0c16.html> in Italian language). Later it was indicated as the strategy of the revolution for all the colonial, semi-colonial and neo-colonial countries in which the mass of the population was still made up of peasants. Only with the rise of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism as the third and higher stage of communist thought it was acquired the conception that the PRPW is the universal strategy of the socialist revolution, the strategy that the Communists must follow in every country in order to win.(4)

Gramsci in his condition as a prisoner of the fascists from 1926 to his death in 1937 did not lead the revolutionary process in Italy, but working out the experience of the socialist revolution in Italy and of the other imperialist countries and also analyzing the way in which the Bolsheviks had won in Russia, has brought important contributions to the formulation of the strategy of PRPW.(5)

Below I expose the main aspects of PRPW that Gramsci has more or less widely developed in his *Prison Notebooks*. The quotations from Gramsci or others are in italics. The emphases in bold are mine.

## 1 . The proletarian revolution in the imperialist phase

Imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism, but it is also the last stage of class society and then it closes not only a secular, but millenary period, that is to say not only the period of capitalism but that of the division of human kind into classes of oppressed and oppressors, of exploiters and exploited. So, the socialist revolution is different from all other revolutions, in the precise sense that previous revolutions served to a class to seize power in a society that remained divided into classes of exploiters and classes of exploited; the socialist revolution instead serves to the working class to seize power at the head of the rest of the popular masses to manage a society that abolishes the division into classes step by step. The form of the revolution is therefore different: it is no longer an insurrection that breaks out, in which a class starts driving the revolt of the masses and uses it to install itself in the driving seat as a new exploiting class, but it is a revolution that is built up step by step, battle after battle, campaign after campaign, such as a war, during which the popular masses are transformed because, organizing themselves in the Communist Party and in mass organizations, they start to get the role of **conscious** creators of history. The socialist revolution then starts before the conquest of political power and in Italy is already going on. It is revolution under construction, conquest of hegemony as an extension and embedding of the New Power, which began as a PRPW with the foundation of the new Italian Communist Party in November 2004.

The power, what Gramsci called hegemony, in Italian society as in any modern society *is ultimately the direction of practical activity of the masses. The direction combines winning the hearts and minds of the masses with the exercise of coercion and with the organization of everyday life in all its aspects.*(6)

In our country the PRPW will follow a path determined by specific conditions, and that *is the way of the accumulation of revolutionary forces through the establishment and the resistance of the underground party and its direction on the popular masses to join in the mass organizations of all kinds necessary to satisfy their material and spiritual need, to participate in the bourgeois political struggle in order to subvert its course and to conduct claim struggle, until the beginning of the civil war. This in our country is the same of what is “encircling the cities from the countryside” in semi-feudal countries. To surround the cities from the countryside is impossible in the imperialist countries, but it is entirely possible, and the practice has shown it, to define the specific quantitative development which is the first phase of the PRPW and through which we are moving towards its second phase. With the civil war generated by the quantitative development, the second phase of the PRPW will begin. The beginning of the Civil War will be marked by the creation of the Popular Armed Forces that from that moment will contend the land to the armed forces of reaction.* (7)

## 2. The essence of the Protracted Revolutionary People’s War

*The essence of PRPW consists in the establishment of the communist party as the center of the new popular power of the working class, in the mobilization and increasing aggregation of all the revolutionary forces of society around the communist party, in the elevation of the level of the revolutionary forces, in their use according to a plan to weaken the power of the imperialist bourgeoisie and strengthen the new power, to overthrow the relations of forces, to eliminate the state of the imperialist bourgeoisie and to establish the rule of the dictatorship of the proletariat.*(8)

Gramsci describes these essential traits talking of

- 1) the party as *Modern Prince*,
- 2) the revolutionary forces that join together as a *national-popular collective will of which the party is both the organizer and the active and operating expression*

3 ) the elevation of the revolutionary forces as *intellectual and moral reform*,<sup>(9)</sup>

4) the use of the revolutionary forces until the establishment of the socialist state, that is, until the *completion of a higher and total* [i. e. covering all aspects of society, editor's note] *form of modern civilization*.<sup>(10)</sup>

The PRPW begins with the establishment of the Communist Party. The Communist Party is founded on the communist conception of the world: "*In practice, we need a cohesive, disciplined, strong party and in the long run a revolutionary party can be cohesive and disciplined only if its members are united on a conception of the world (movementists think that this smacks of the sect, but it is an accusation that the Communists have often heard) and if it personifies what unites the workers beyond the differences and contrasts of categories and crafts, culture, nationality, sex, traditions which establishes them as a new ruling class of the masses: the communist conception of the world.*"<sup>(11)</sup>

The communist conception of the world is the ideology that step by step unifies the masses by giving them a common goal. Gramsci speaks of it dealing with the Machiavelli's *Prince*: it is a living and concrete conception, which is materialized in practice, not a dogmatic abstraction.<sup>(12)</sup> It is dialectical materialism and its most advanced form is Maoism, third higher stage of communist thought .

Machiavelli shows as guide of community an individual, a leader, a Prince able to convince talking "to minds and hearts" of the masses, that is, with science and art, with scientist's detachment and artist's participation. Today the leadership of the masses can no longer be an individual, because the revolutionary transition is not to replace a leadership of those masses with another one, but to lead the masses to change until they'll be able to lead themselves by themselves. The subject that leads this process is therefore not an individual, but a collective, which already in itself, just because it's a collective, reflects the need (the possibility and, under certain conditions, the capacity ) that the collectivity rules itself and experiments how to do it within itself. This collective subject is the Communist Party and the revolution begins in the form of PRPW with its constitution.

Where there is no Communist Party or where it is not yet strong enough to set itself up as a guide to the mobilization of the popular masses, they follow other guides, which can be backward or reactionary groups, or individuals who take the role of popular leader, as is the case for Beppe Grillo [an Italian comedian who has been able to gather wide masses and to get 27 % of votes in this year's national elections, Note of Translator]. Who criticizes the popular masses because they follow Grillo is a political illiterate or an incompetent who refuses to analyze its limits, that is to say he does not ask himself which are **his own limits** that make the popular masses follow Grillo and not him or his group. Consoling himself with the false idea that the popular masses are backward, he thinks in the same way of the imperialist bourgeoisie, that is to say he shares the contempt which the bourgeoisie has against the popular masses.

The party that describes Gramsci is now the new PCI with his caravan, that is to say, with the forces that share its journey in lands not yet explored, towards *concrete and really rational goals, but of a reality and rationality not yet been verified and criticized by a historical experience and effectual universally known*.<sup>(13)</sup> The caravan of the new PCI in fact is doing the revolution in an imperialist country, an enterprise new to the international communist movement, and it is experimenting a new method in an imperialist country, the PRPW. It cannot therefore rely on previous *effectual* experiences, namely, that have been effective. We have no **examples** to bring to those who hesitate or doubt.  
(14)

Those who continue to hesitate, to maintain reservations, to look with skepticism the passion that drives us, cannot remain what they are, because the progress of the crisis requires them to change. When the house is on fire you have to leave, says Buddha in the poetry of Brecht.<sup>(15)</sup>

Even if we cannot bring a certain outcome, because no one has yet done what we are doing today, anyway we bring the passion of those who discover new lands and build new things, knowing that we are realizing "the dream of one thing " that the world owns for a long time: the abolition of the division of human beings into classes of exploiters and

exploited.(16)

### 3 . The revolution is being built

According to common sense, the socialist revolution breaks out: it is therefore an event limited in time, an insurrection, a riot, a spontaneous popular uprising, as mentioned above. This conception has settled in the common sense because the revolutions up to a certain point in history, on the side of the popular masses, were always insurrections, spontaneous outbursts due upon the completion of the conditions that made it impossible the continuation of existing conditions. In the common sense, anyway, next to the conception of the “revolution breaking out“ the opposite conception of “ making the revolution” appears. In the first case, the masses rise up against a situation that has become intolerable. Their then is a **passive** movement: the popular masses are not moved by their internal transformation, but by external factors determined by the action of other classes, such as a body that moves driven by another. In the second case, the popular masses do (i.e., build) the revolution: their one is an **active** movement. The activity requires consciousness: inventing, planning, examination in the course of work, stock, determination, in short, to take up our intellectual and moral faculties at the highest level, because revolution is to discover new things and invent, and because the enemy class uses any means, infamy and cruelty to maintain its power .

The two ways of understanding the revolution stand as opposites because the first leads socialist revolution to **defeat**, the second leads socialist revolution to **success**. The first way worked actually and for millennia in class-divided societies, but it stopped working in a given historical moment, namely when the conditions were ripe for the abolition of class divisions, namely in Europe in the mid-nineteenth century. At this time the subject that leads the abolition of classes comes: it is the conscious and organized communist movement (with its political parties, trade unions and other mass organizations). The publication of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* of Marx and Engels in 1848 was its “birth certificate“. The conscious and organized communist movement began to **make** the revolution, it only won when more or less consciously **built** the revolution, and when it did not do it, it learned the hard way that the revolution, then, was no longer something that breaks out.

It was a breakthrough of historic significance. For the first time in human history, social change was thought by the popular masses implementing it, and not determined by causes outside of them. Consciousness (reason and will) of human beings, their conception of the world, had taken on an unprecedented role. We can, and then we must realize the old dream of building a society and a civilization with rational method, and it is up to the working class to lead this process.(17)

This conception of the world has its foundations in the knowledge that revolution develops (it is done) as war develops (as war is promoted and conducted), and today the knowledge that it is a PRPW, experienced in the oppressed countries in a conscious way by the Chinese Communist Party. Under the guidance of the experience of the socialist revolution in Europe in the early twentieth century, Gramsci explains that this strategy also applies to the imperialist countries, and also to Italy .

### 4 . The class struggle is a war

Gramsci describes the class struggle as a war. He says that the transition from war of maneuver (and from the frontal attack) to the war of position occurs also in the political field and criticizes Trotsky who, in one way or another, can be considered *the political theorist of the frontal attack in a period in which it is only cause of defeat*.(18)

With the *war of maneuver* or *of movement* Gramsci means the war of those who consider the attack as a quick and conclusive operation, as a people’s uprising in which the Communist Party took the lead. It’s a war doomed to failure in the face of an enemy which in turn carries out a planned war, with all the political and military means at its disposal in

large quantities.

Since, in the middle of the nineteenth century, in Europe the conditions for the abolition of classes became ripe, the bourgeoisie has fielded political and military means to prevent this from happening. In the regimes of preventive counter revolution they are mainly political instruments.(19) The more the crisis progresses and the pillars of preventive counter revolution crumble, the more the class struggle openly expresses his character of class warfare (and the clearer it becomes the inconsistency of movementism).(20) Here, says Gramsci , *we pass to siege, compressed, difficult, warfare, in which exceptional qualities of patience and inventive spirit are needed.*(21) The *siege war*, or *war of position* is the PRPW against the imperialist bourgeoisie, and the Communist Party that leads it must have *patience*, strategic firmness facing any enemy attack and ability to fight for as long as necessary, and *inventive spirit*, tactical flexibility and innovative capacity which is necessary for those who go in unexplored land, as the caravan of the new PCI is doing.(22)

## 5 . War and crisis

In § 17 of Notebook 13, the theme is *Analysis of situations: relations of forces.*(23) Gramsci describes the situation in which the war between classes takes place. It is the revolutionary situation that develops in conjunction with the general crisis for absolute overproduction of capital: Gramsci refers to the first crisis of this kind. There are clear parallels with the situation today, the second general crisis .

Gramsci talks of the ideological, religious, philosophical, political controversies which take place around a thousand phenomena in which the crisis occurs (the various forms in which the resistance of workers, laborers and popular masses is expressed, the various forms of social massacre of the governments of the imperialist bourgeoisie which can be summarized in an undeclared war of extermination waged against the popular masses and, as regards the most striking phenomena, suicides, killing of women, etc.) These controversies make sense only if they **are convincing** and eventually they show to be **true** only when they **win**. In the clash, the Communists are both convincing and winners because they combine the occasional phenomenon to the general issue, namely the crisis; because they have a conception of the world that on one hand has knowledge of the nature of the crisis, on the other hand has a strategy to overcome it (the PRPW). To convince, that is to win “hearts and minds“ of the popular masses, decides the outcome of the war. Suffice it to look at all the apparatus fielded by the imperialist bourgeoisie to convince the masses that it is right they go to misery and death to save a decaying political class and the financial system that is behind it, run by a lowest group of criminals at the international level and in every country, passing themselves off as the international community (as they pass their wars off as peace missions).

“Once given the objective conditions of socialism, which in Europe have existed for more than a century, the decisive factor for the victory of the socialist revolution, is the subjective conditions.“(24) The conscious and organized communist movement therefore can build the socialist revolution. Gramsci confirms this by saying that there are *the conditions necessary and sufficient for certain tasks can and therefore must be resolved historically*, adding that this must be done because *every failing in the historic duty increases the necessary disorder and prepares more serious disasters*, namely, that the reactionary mobilization of the masses prevails, that the bourgeoisie is able to impose fascism and war.

Communists **must solve their tasks historically**, Gramsci says: not doing it prepares *more serious disasters*. That is to say, the task that the Communists have to solve are posed by the course of history and identifiable by studying the course of history. These tasks must be fulfilled. The society that does not fulfill them incurs disasters more and more severe. The crisis **requires** that we strive to make Italy a new socialist country. The ruling class and common sense see the negative aspects of the crisis, but all the negative aspects of the crisis originate in the refusal to do what the crisis

requires to do, in wanting to persist in this economic, social and political system, in wanting to keep this material condition, in not wanting to believe and realize the possible future that the crisis requires as necessary.

The economists, unable to see beyond the phenomenon, and the dogmatists, which replace the examination of reality with their own schemes are neither convincing nor winning.

Gramsci insists that it is absolutely necessary to take into account the link between the general crisis and its single manifestations (single local phenomena, of a sector, of the hour, etc.). Only in this way we are able to effectively attack the enemy. Forcing our action within the details, dispersing ourselves in the single struggles is a weapon of war in the hands of the enemy. Who suffers the ideological influence of the bourgeoisie (the left bourgeoisie and his followers ) easily fall victim to this weapon of the enemy, because the bourgeoisie itself does not have theoretical knowledge of the relationship between general and particular, because they do not have and cannot have a science of the economic, social and political reality (that science would show that bourgeoisie's reign is over). The theoretical analysis of reality made by the bourgeoisie is always analysis of details (one-sided analysis), it does not show the link between them, the only one link that allows to understand the true role and meaning of every single detail. To take into account the link between each event and the general crisis means to frame every single battle, every single campaign within the overall strategy of the PRPW, to build the revolution , because *here the question is not to reconstruct the past history but to build the present and future one.*

After *the analysis of the situation* Gramsci goes on to examine the *relations of forces*, which are divided into *moments* . The first of them is the starting point, i.e. the relations of forces between classes in relation to the objective situation, to the economic set up of society and the consequent class composition.

The second moment is when a class begins to become aware of itself as a class, and here it moves firstly on the ground of claims and then on that of the political struggle, that is to say, that the of bourgeois political struggle . This step is shown in the MP as a **transition from claim struggle to political struggle** in Europe and takes place at the end of the nineteenth century with the formation of large unions and the socialist parties of the Second International.

The third moment is **transition from the political struggle to the revolutionary struggle**. The working class understands that to defend its interests it is not enough to act in the political context predetermined by the bourgeoisie. The MP explains it as follows: *“With Marxism workers reached the full consciousness of their social situation. Their struggle became more conscious, until it assumed a superior character. It became a revolutionary political struggle, the struggle to overthrow the rule of the bourgeoisie, to build their own state and, thanks to the power gained, to create a new system of production and a new social order, to eliminate exploitation and its historical expression: the division of society into classes.”*(25) In this *third moment* the working class understands that its own class interests are the interests of the whole society .

In this third moment, the relationship between classes is inevitably bound to result in a relation of war in the classical sense, that is to say, the relation of military forces. Gramsci indicates that military confrontation is a necessary step for the socialist revolution. Just this point was the main misrepresentation of Gramsci by the modern revisionists, from Togliatti on, from the eighth congress of the Italian Communist Party (1956) which established the peaceful and parliamentary socialism as the official doctrine of the party.

As for those who, unlike the revisionists, are for the socialist revolution, but not for the socialist revolution which is built as a war but for the socialist revolution that breaks out, Gramsci shows that, according to the experience, it is not foregone that the economic crises automatically generate uprisings. The worsening of the economic conditions do not necessarily generate the mobilization of the popular masses in a revolutionary sense. On the contrary the mobilization of the popular masses in a revolutionary sense does not require that the economic conditions are to a certain degree of intolerability. That revolutionary mobilization depends on the action of a party that leads their course from battle to

battle, from a campaign to another *culminating in the decisive military relationship*, that is to say, until the time when the imperialist bourgeoisie who defends its own regime is forced or to leave the field or to resort to civil war. This course is described by Gramsci in detail: we must find *the least resistance* of the enemy, where the shot is more effective, we must understand what are the *immediate tactical operations*, ... *how you can best set up a campaign of political turmoil, what language will be better understood by the multitudes etc.* .

All this is precisely the development of the PRPW in an imperialist country like Italy, of which here Gramsci describes the first stage, the stage of strategic defensive, when the superiority of the bourgeoisie is overwhelming. The Communist Party must accumulate the revolutionary forces. It must gather the revolutionary forces around him (in the mass organizations and in the front) and within itself (in the Party organizations), expand its presence and its influence, and educate the revolutionary forces in the fight leading them to fight. The progress of the new power is measured by the amount of the revolutionary forces gathered in the front and by the level of the forces themselves. In this phase, the main objective is not the elimination of enemy forces, but to gather the revolutionary forces among the masses, and to extend Communist Party's influence and leadership, raising the level of the revolutionary forces: to strengthen their conscience and their organization, to make them more capable to fight, to make their struggle against the bourgeoisie more effective, to raise their level of combativeness.(26)

## 6 . The socialist revolution does not breaks out

There is spontaneity and there is spontaneism. Gramsci criticizes those who refuse to give conscious direction to the revolutionary process on principle,(27) those who believe that such a direction means to imprison, to schematize, to impoverish the revolutionary process, to take credit of it. Current example of this movementist trend is the attempt to build an Anti-capitalist and Libertarian Movement (Assembly of Bologna, May 11, 2013 )(28).

It proclaims itself a **movement**, not in the sense that it just wants to unite different organizations and classes, regardless of their particular orientations in other fields, into a concrete political battle, but in the sense that wants to declare itself against the current state of things (capitalism), but refusing the establishment of socialism, the Communist Party and the communist conception of the world (that is to say, it stands on the ground of the bourgeois left).

It is **against** something (against capitalism), but not **for** something (socialism and communism). Who wants to be “for”, must make plans, organize himself, as well as everybody must do whenever he want to build something, whatever it may be.

It is **libertarian**, that is to say it proclaims freedom in general, but it does not say “freedom of the masses from capitalism”. It uses the term “libertarian“ because it is the term used by the anarchist tendencies that reject any scheme, organization, order, rule, discipline, by anybody: even the one that a collective chooses for itself, even the one that the struggle itself requires. It rejects them so far as to give up the fight and remain within capitalism.

The **freedom** and the **movement** they are dealing with in this umpteenth attempt are those of the water that is free to move downwards. There is no thought, no reflection, no stock of the experience of those who have struggled before us, why and where they won or lost, there is no plan for the future, and therefore there is no momentum. Everything is reduced, at the end, to the opposite of freedom, to a mechanical reaction (i.e. the way in which a part in a mechanism does not move for its proper motion, but for the pulse it receives from another) to the attack of the enemy, which instead has organized armies (which since the ancient Rome times and even earlier have shown always to be able to win disorganized masses in revolt even if they were in number ten and more times greater), and a plan to maintain his power, etc.

Gramsci explains that this supposed freedom is reversed in mechanical response and expression of subordination to the class enemy, because it does not qualify for itself, for what it wants to build, but for the enemy he opposes , and

therefore **depends** on the enemy to the way a worker **depends** on his master. If a group does not strive to create its own science of reality and history, finally its analyses are those of bourgeois propaganda, they are taken from bourgeoisie's newspapers and books, even if they read them "upside down" (criticizing them, being outraged, denouncing them, etc.) Those who move in this sense *does not even suspect that their story may be of any significance*, says Gramsci here. As for the content, they deal with this story using in economic, political, philosophical field criteria and data provided by the bourgeoisie, conform to the bourgeois conception of the world. As for the form, they speak but not act and so they do not run the risk of being proven wrong, or they separate speech from acting, they do not reflect on their own practice, they do not learn from mistakes. When they are successful, they do not use it as a base to build the New Power, they do not even use as a base to move to a higher level of fighting. We saw it clearly last year: after the great demonstrations of 31 March and 27 October 2012, the predominant mood among the promoters was: "And now what do we do?"

The objective conditions that drive the popular masses to mobilize to create the new society (that make necessary its creation because not doing it leads to more serious disasters ) are existing for a long time, that is why popular masses' movement is spontaneous as the water of the river that goes to the sea. But it is different from the water of the river that goes to the sea, because it regards human beings. They need to represent the way they follow: the water goes to the sea only under certain conditions.

*This unity of "spontaneity" and "conscious direction", that is of the "discipline" is precisely the real political action of the subaltern classes, as mass politics and not just an adventure for groups that appeal to the mass*, Gramsci says, and adds that *to renounce to give them a conscious direction, to elevate them to a higher level* is to leave the way open to the imperialist bourgeoisie, which deflects the mobilization of the masses in a reactionary direction. The mobilization of the masses in a reactionary direction (fascism, war) is *the result of the resignation of the groups responsible for* [the Communists, editor's note] *giving conscious direction to the spontaneous movements and so make them become a positive political factor*. Those who deny the principle that the revolution is being built, that must be directed, and directed as a revolutionary people's war, who is waiting for "the masses to move" and does not see that **the masses are moving** (but obviously the way which the oppressed masses can move until they have no conscious and just goal, nor organization or direction), leaves a space that is occupied by the reaction. All those who today can take the role of government in the country, in National Liberation Committees, in Local Emergency Administrations, in a Government of National Salvation, in short, in organizations that mobilize the masses against the war that the imperialist bourgeoisie moves against them, and hesitate to do so, the more they hesitate the more they are objectively liable for the reactionary mobilization of the masses.

The movementists are opposed to making plans. According to them, says Gramsci, *any set plan is utopian and reactionary*.(29) Everybody who has gone to movementists showing them as necessary a path to the goal of revolutionary transformation, has been told that the path indicated was an imposition, an attempt to cage, to clip the wings of spontaneous movement, and therefore the plan was *reactionary* and planning a concrete path toward the revolution was unrealistic .

This type of response is an expression of a general trend, among the popular masses and it is an expression of their subordination, expression of their being still under the influence of the bourgeois conception in their consciousness. It is clear that the bourgeoisie is interested in fighting the development of any plan to overthrow its power, and it is even clearer its interest to declare impossible the goal of overthrowing his power. The most that the imperialist bourgeoisie may grant to the popular masses is the dream of revolution as something that would be needed, but that will never be. Acceptable heroes are those who believed it possible and lost (they were defeated), which proves that theirs was an impossible dream. Rosa Luxembourgh and Che Guevara are the best known examples. Who has instead led the masses to victory, like Stalin, who led the victory against the fascists, is "dictator" and "reactionary" for bias .

Who is only **against**, waits for insurrection and does not make plans, stands contemplating every spontaneous mobilization of the popular masses then fall into depression when the mobilization ceases. It is inevitable that it ceases: if it is assumed to be a natural thing, it has its beginning and its end, as in the case of a storm, *scattering in an infinite number of individual wills*, says Gramsci.(30) This is the story of many attempts of coordination in past two years here in Italy: they arise for certain contingencies ("against the crisis", "we shall not pay the debt", etc.), they produce initiatives where the participation of the masses exceeds their expectations (demonstrations with hundreds of thousands participants), which they are not able to handle precisely because they do not have a line, they do not have a "set plan", hence the promoters hold back as apprentice sorcerers unable to manage the "simple and magical powers" of which on 6 April 2013, on occasion of an important workers' assembly in Southern Italy, a fifth-grade child was able to speak referring the working class.

In short, **for** not wanting to get rules in line with the needs reality imposes, that is, **for** not wanting to learn the dialectic between freedom and necessity, **for** wanting to stay "free" in the sense that they do not want to frame in any party, that they do not want to follow any plan, much less therefore to attempt an experience until today not successful, the revolution in an imperialist country, something so new and full of risks that to propose it without analysis and without plan is irresponsibility that borders on crime, **for** wanting to keep this childish attitude unacceptable in any human activity minimally complex, they end up being the opposite of free, that is to say, being puppets in the hands of the enemy.

In § 7 of the Notebook 13 Gramsci says that the revolution as insurrection works for the bourgeoisie from the French Revolution (1789) until the time when the working class breaks as a new revolutionary class (1848). After this date the bourgeoisie therefore ceases to be revolutionary class struggling against the clergy and the nobles and stands in battle against the working class. The bourgeoisie prepares *minutely and technically in peacetime* the war against the working class, with lots of *trenches and fortifications within the massive structure of modern democracies, both as State organizations or as complex of associations in civil life*.(31)

This *massive structure of modern democracies* is the regime of preventive counter-revolution. The revolution presses, it is an objective movement, and the bourgeoisie builds an apparatus well finished to the least detail to prevent the will and the need for participation and self-government of the popular masses, against the single not enslaved union representative, against the self-managed social center, against any political force that does not accept the pre-arranged canons to participate in the petty theater of the bourgeois political struggle, and especially against the Communist Party, highest expression of the autonomy and independence of the working class and popular masses,. This apparatus is precisely the regime of preventive counter-revolution, applied in the imperialist countries. Against this apparatus, the strategy of the Communists is the PRPW, in which the accumulation of forces and the conquest of new territory (the expansion of hegemony over the popular masses at bourgeoisie's expenses) is an equally meticulous work that step by step arrives at the actual military conflict.

Gramsci explains why it is impossible to imagine a war of maneuver that breaks through enemy lines and thereby takes over the centers of power when behind enemy lines there is a whole array of which the lines are just the first front.(32) He says that society *has become a very complex structure resistant to catastrophic "raids" of the immediate economic element (crises, depressions); the superstructures of civil society are similar to the system of trenches in modern war ... nor the assaulting troops, due to the crisis, organize themselves in a flash in time and space, much less they get an aggressive spirit*. Gramsci recommends to study the October Revolution in the light of the theory of PRPW. To this we can add that after the victory of the October Revolution the imperialist bourgeoisie has taken all countermeasures it can take to avoid to be caught by surprise by any insurrection .

Those who presume to break into the enemy camp, to sow irreversible panic and confusion in the enemy soldiers, to

organize their troops suddenly, as suddenly to create the cadres or putting existing cadres in leading positions immediately recognized by a population in revolt, those who presume to join immediately this population toward a common goal, they are mystic, says Gramsci.(33) In fact, those who think in these religious terms, they are still waiting for someone else to begin, or for someone to come from outside to bring the revolution, from Russia or China yesterday, from the oppressed peoples today (from Palestine, India, Nepal, or from countries like Venezuela or Cuba, depending on the trends they prefer).(34)

The examination of the positions of Gramsci confirms its anticipation of one of the foundations of the revolutionary theory, that is the strategy of the PRPW, one of the most important contributions of Maoism to the revolutionary science, to the communist conception of the world.(35) Gramsci, in addition to this one, has given other very important anticipations. The ongoing study of the work of Gramsci is recovery of these valuable anticipations that Gramsci worked out, in order to give the right light to his stature as a leader of the communist movement at national and international level and especially to continue his work until the attainment of the objectives for which he gave his life .

*Folco R.*

## Notes

1. *La Voce del (nuovo)Partito comunista italiano*, n. 43, March 2013, p. 5. The texts of *La Voce*, and the *Manifesto Program of the (new) Italian Communist Party*( MP), often quoted in this article are all available on the site [www.nuovopci.it](http://www.nuovopci.it) (see references in **Appendix** at the end of this article).

2. *Manifesto Program of the new PCI*, Edition Social Relations, Milan, 2008, in <http://www.nuovopci.it/eile/en/in080619.html>. From here on MP .

3. Three deviations constantly present also in the parties of the imperialist countries even though they declare themselves Marxist.

*Dogmatism*: to have a relationship towards Marxism similar to that of a believer towards religious doctrines, taking it as a description of the world but not as science guiding action to transform it.

*Opportunism*: to participate in the bourgeois political struggle solely or principally to seize the opportunities it creates to improve the conditions of workers in the framework of the system of bourgeois social relations .

*Economism*: to limit the class struggle to the claims of better wages and working conditions .

4. See in this regard *The Eighth Discriminating Factor*, published in *La Voce* n 9, November 2001 and n. 10, March 2002, available in <http://www.nuovopci.it/eile/en/discr8/firstprt.html>.

5. Gramsci speaks about the transformation of capitalism into imperialism and of the change of the form of the revolution in Prison Notebook [from now on, PN] 8, § 236 and in PN 10, § 9 .

6. MP, page 80, in PDF version (see Appendix; from here on the page numbers are referred to that PDF version).

[You may compare this passage in MP with this one by Amil K.: “**Hegemony: Coercion & Consent**: Beginning first with the question of *hegemony*: Dominant social groups maintain their power in two distinct ways: through **domination / coercion**, and through **intellectual-moral leadership / consent**. Dominant social groups dominate the classes with which they have an antagonistic relationship by liquidating or subjugating them through armed force (57); but they lead “kindred and allied groups” by providing moral and intellectual direction.” (in [www.ri-ir.org](http://www.ri-ir.org), *Gramsci's Prison Notebooks: Towards a War of Position*) – Editor's Note]

7. *La Voce del nuovo PCI* , n . 17, July 2004, p . 31.

8. MP , pages 80-81.

9. Gramsci speaks explicitly of the need to give conscious direction to the spontaneous movements of the masses, to raise them to a higher plane in PN 3, § 48 .

10. PN 13, § 1.

11. MP, pages 64-65.

12. PN 13, § 1.

13. PN 13, § 1.

14. Of course in favor and “demonstration“ of our line we have to bring and we bring, in addition to the analysis of the class struggle going on today, the experience of the first wave of proletarian revolution, that is to say, both the experience of the successes achieved with the establishment of the first socialist countries (starting from the October Revolution and the creation of the Soviet Union), which for several decades played the role of red bases of world proletarian revolution, and the experience of the defeats we have suffered. We are strongly opposed to oblivion and even more to the denigration of the historical experience of the first wave of proletarian revolution and in particular also of that of the first socialist countries. Ours is a scientific position: we use experience, successes and failures to develop to a higher level the science of the transformation of bourgeois society in communist society, science with which we shall get victory. This attitude clearly distinguishes us from the bourgeois left, even from those of its members who almost call themselves Communist (see for example the founders of Ross@ meeting in Bologna in the Assembly of Saturday, May 11, 2013 ) and also those lovers of “socialism of the XXI century”, local or not, as Luciano Vasapollo and Martha Harnecker who deep down present the important struggle going on in Venezuela and in other Latin American countries primarily as an alternative and negation of socialism of the twentieth century, that of the first wave of proletarian revolution and of the first socialist countries. What would you say, in any other field of human activity, of people who declare that they are determined to pursue an objective, but that ignore, neglect or even denigrate the experience of all those who before them have pursued it because they did not get it?

15. “Not long ago I saw a house. It burned. The roof / lapped by flames. I went over and I perceived / that there were people in there. From the doorway / I called them, because the roof was burning, urging them / to go out, and soon. But they / did not seem to be in a hurry. One asked me, / while the blaze already was scorching his eyebrows, / what was the weather like, whether maybe was it raining, / whether maybe was wind blowing , if there was another house, / and so on. No answering / I went out there. Those people, I thought, / must burn before stopping with the questions. “ (B. Brecht , *The parable of the Buddha on the house on fire*).

16. “You will see then how long the world has the dream of one thing, of which he does have only the consciousness, in order to really own it. “ (K. Marx, *Letter to Ruge*, September 1943).

17. Building society and civilization as a rational method arouses horror in the field of the imperialist bourgeoisie. According to the bourgeois conception of the world this is “restriction of individual freedom“: it is actually denial of bourgeoisie’s freedom. The opposition to the use of the rational method in the construction of the socialist revolution, that is to say the position of those who consider this method restrictive of the “spontaneity“ of the popular masses and of their “insurrection they are waiting for” is an expression of bourgeois conception of the world.

18. PN 6, § 138. The *Prison Notebooks* contain the most comprehensive critique that as far as I know has been made of what Trotsky meant with the expression “permanent revolution” used by Marx and Engels and of the conception that Trotsky built under the banner of it. It is the most comprehensive in the sense that the criticism is made in the light not only of the tasks of the socialist revolution in Russia and tasks of the Communist International in the 20s, but of the entire historical experience of the communist movement in Europe and Russia since the its founding in 1848.

19 . What are the preventive counter revolution regimes is explained in MP, p. 18 ff.

20. Movementism means to limit the class struggle to the forms of action in accordance with common sense and relationships inherent in bourgeois society, excluding planning and even more the communist conception of the world . In essence it’s equivalent to spontaneism .

21. PN 6, § 138.

22. Gramsci goes back to the opposition between *war of position* and *war of maneuver or frontal*, i.e. between PRPW and the insurrection whose outbreak is waited by spontaneists , economists or movementists in PN 7, § 16. Here Lenin is shown as the one who led the PRPW . On the opposite side Gramsci puts Trotsky, Sorel, Rosa Luxemburg.

23. PN 13, § 17.

24. MP, p. 14.

25. MP, p.10.

26. see MP, p. 81. Gramsci refers to the accumulation of revolutionary forces talking about *forces permanently organized and prepared for years*. (NB 13, § 17 )

27 . NB 3, § 48.

28. See criticism by the new PCI in the *Notice to Mariners* 18, May 5, 2013 in [www.nuovopci.it/dfa/avvnav18/avvnav18.html](http://www.nuovopci.it/dfa/avvnav18/avvnav18.html). [in

Italian language].

**29.** PN 13, § 1.

**30.** *ibid.*

**31.** PN 13, § 7.

**32.** PN 13, § 24.

**33.** PN 14 § 68.

**34.** The exam is done on the Gramsci's references to the two opposed forms of strategy of the revolution, that is, the insurgency and the PRPW, listed in the items *war of movement* and *war of position* of the *Dizionario Gramsciano (Gramscian Dictionary)* by Guido Liguori and Pasquale Voza (Carocci publisher, Urbino, 2011).

## Appendix

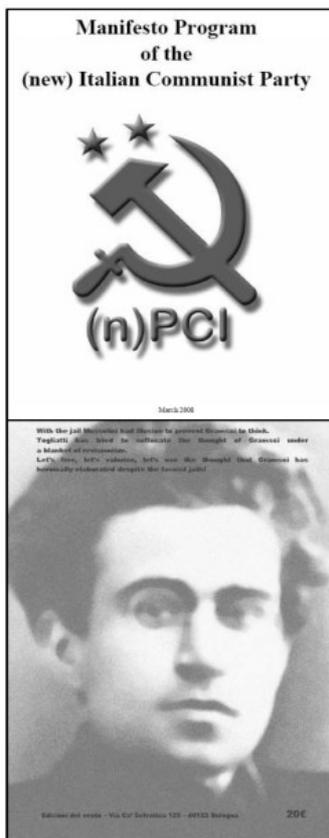
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