

A TEN-YEAR BALANCE-SHEET

«Bilancio di un decennio»

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It was in January 2005 that the first issue of *Prospettiva Marxista* (*Marxist Perspective*) came out.

Ten years could be seen as a long time, or not very much, depending on the processes that one wishes to analyse and the aspects of political works upon which one wishes to focus.

Ten years could be enough to fix some fundamental points of our analysis of certain basic aspects of the imperialist showdown, of the developments in the state of class relations in the Italian metropolis and of some guidelines for our militant commitment, formulated in the light of our assessment of imperialism's overall tendencies and their impact upon the Italian situation.

The analysis and elaboration of hypotheses regarding the 'European political cycle' that started with the end of the Yalta order and the German reunification have played a fundamental role in the process of founding our regroupment. A work of clarification has revolved around this theme, bringing about a split with the political formation from which the original nucleus of our regroupment came, i.e. *Lotta Comunista*.

The theoretical depth of this question, and the importance it has for the formulation of the hypotheses of the future showdown between the imperialist heartlands, enabled this process of separation, as well as a preliminary definition of an independent framework of activity, to take on the features of a valuable formative stage for the militants involved. So as this activity went forward, it had a deep imprint of understanding, acceptance and assimilation of the Marxist method.

Such understanding, acceptance and assimilation involve our full consciousness that we turn to Marxism with the modesty of militants who know that their theoretical growth and correct application of Marxism are not a forever-acquired reality.

This imprint undoubtedly represented one of the basic elements that enabled us to survive, as a small but consistent revolutionary subject, during years marked by a continuing stabilisation of bourgeois rule and the constant weakness and passivity of our class as a whole.

From this point of view, our subsequent break with *Pagine Marxiste* was not of great significance since it was, in the final analysis, just a sequel to our parting from some conceptions and habits of the organisation from which we had previously split.

As a matter of fact, dealing with the question of European political unification – that is, the possibility of the formation, in a pacific and consensual way, of one single European state capable of stably projecting itself in the imperialist confrontation, thus replacing the multiple state entities that still form the European Union – we were able to highlight and deal with other basic questions that were being brought to the fore by the European question and the discussion around it.

We were thus able to focus on the question of the *freedom of scientific hypotheses* – which is an invaluable factor for self-correction and for the political development of an effective cadre organisation – as well as on some of the fundamental problems relating to the notion of the party – a work that we subsequently summarised with our book, *Reflections on the Party Question*.

It is clear by now that our rejection of the thesis of a political unification articulated through a process whereby the European states renounce their to sovereignty – one both expressed and inexorably fed by the establishment of the single European currency, and which is underwritten by the tops of the European bourgeoisies' consciousness of the need to face the challenge of continental-sized imperialisms – has been confirmed by historical developments. A European entity that is able to organically express itself through one single foreign policy,

and to provide itself with an effective military instrument in place of the various national armies, is still a matter of unreality. Were these results ever to be attained, it would not happen on the basis of those mechanisms and constitutional processes (we need only remember the once-so-eulogised European convention) that were so prominent and so overestimated during the political cycle which ended with the 2003 US war against Iraq and with Washington's open realisation of the possibility of taking advantage of the deep national discords existing within the European Union.

Reducing these results to a 'private' theoretical victory of ours, however, would be both futile and a hindrance for understanding the theoretical importance of that question. In any case, it has been a confirmation of the validity of the Marxist method and of the possibility – even for a group of militants without a large organisational structure – to establish a firm attachment to this method.

European political unification, the formation of a politically-united European imperialism through a consensual and spontaneous renouncement of the sovereign prerogatives of the bourgeoisies managing to unite in the name of their achieved consciousness of a higher interest – in short, the end of bourgeois logics and of imperialist dynamics inside the European continent in order to favour its more effective outward projection – would have called into question the foundations of a revolutionary strategy based on the Marxist method. Thus a historical possibility would have opened for the bourgeoisie to act beyond its own class contradictions, in the name of the comprehension of an overall class interest that is only European today but, upon such a premise, could perhaps be further extended on a larger scale. Such an ability of the bourgeoisie did not manifest itself. The bourgeoisie's incapacity to avoid crises and clashes by understanding the need to safeguard its own general interests, and the inevitability of particular capitalist interests prevailing, even above the abstract needs for unification, stand at the heart of revolutionary strategy.

But a balance-sheet cannot take the form of self-satisfaction over one's own correct assessments. We should also examine those aspects in our analysis that – even within the framework of a correct evaluation of the European question and of the importance, for the rhythms of the imperialist showdown, of the appearance of a single European actor on the global scene – did not find a confirmation or did not occur in the ways and with the effects we had foreseen.

We cannot hide to ourselves that even the non-existent formation of a European unitary state had a slackening effect on the rhythms of the imperialist global showdown – a slackening that we failed to anticipate, ten years ago, in the ways in which it later manifested itself. The absence of a European imperialist pole decisively contributed to leaving the other imperialist powers without an essential foothold, without a factor capable of catalysing in some way the pressure coming from several directions towards a strong questioning of US imperialism's supremacy.

Added to this, and very probably even because of this, there was a slowdown in the growth of those we recognised as the capitalist subjects that could open some cracks in the present world imperialist order. We need only think, for example, of the Brazilian social formation. The fact that in 2014 US imperialism, while remaining in the situation of a relative weakening, could still easily intervene as a front-rank player in such a properly European crisis as the Ukrainian one; the fact that it was still able to maintain its decisive grip over important dynamics in Latin America; and the fact that it could confront significant upheavals in the North-African and Middle-Eastern areas with no other imperialist poles being able to play the role of a clear and decisive alternative reference point in these contexts (even China, despite its increasing and substantial roots in the African continent, was unable to perform such a role) – all this created a scenario that did not entirely correspond with the analysis which inspired the organisation of our own work of study and elaboration.

In our Leninist viewpoint, the tempos of the revolutionary crisis are closely connected to the tempos of the crisis of balance in the relationships of force on the international level and the consequent inter-imperialist showdown. The reasons for such a delay, relative to our

forecasts, should therefore be seriously investigated. This delay, however, did not mean that the general picture remained stagnant, and nor does it deny per se the tendencies we had singled out; and the decline of Italian imperialism has proceeded in terms of its competition with the other imperialist heartlands. The effective inability of the political tops to deal with the central problems that so heavily weigh down on Italy's competitiveness – since a long time, and especially with regard to its more mature imperialist rivals – and the political weight of the petty bourgeoisie and of the exceptionally widespread and deep-rooted parasitic layers, point not only to the usefulness of undertaking a study and a reflection on the objective features of the Italian democratic state and the spectrum of the different bourgeois factions.

Rather, we should also note that such an inability led to a reiterated, constant pursuit of what was the most easily-accessible solution given the petty bourgeoisie's and parasitic layers' political influence and ability to resist, and the persisting substantial passivity of the Italian proletariat: namely, an assault on the living conditions of the labour force in order to achieve the possibility of extorting a higher quota of surplus-value, the main resource available given the retreat in international competition. From this standpoint, a balance-sheet of these ten years should take into account some interesting phenomena of proletarian struggle and organisation, albeit still confined in certain sectors – e.g. logistics and the co-operative societies – that, while being increasingly important within the Italian capitalist structure, can easily be marginalised from the rest of the proletariat as a whole.

The qualitative leap needed to turn these experiences into a premise and a reference pattern for larger and more crucial sections of the Italian proletariat did not happen as yet, despite the clear attempts by these new organisational forms to go in that direction. It should be remembered once more that the long-term confirmation of a situation or a tendency is not tantamount to sheer immobilism; but precisely a protracted confirmation tends to change the very environment where it occurs, as well as the elements involved.

Ten years of substantial passivity in our class's ability to react to the bourgeois attacks have led – in the collective perception, in the concrete mass experience – to a growing time and distance from the major phenomena of struggle and organisation for demands that ended more than thirty years ago. In the meantime, those generations of proletarians who have lived through that season of trade-unionist struggle, who were objectively the repositories of the memory and the lessons of that experience, have left the world of labour, causing deep changes even in the organisations for the economic defence of the labour-force.

The absence of collective action by our class on the stage of the life of the capitalist social formation led to results that could have seemed impossible to the previous generations: a trade-union personnel that has forgotten even the minimal notions of class defence and organisation, and that, whenever faced with the most dramatic events, adopts in perfectly good faith tasks and behaviours which are completely alien to a trade-unionist tradition and identity. In the already decade-long absence of the working class as a possible reference, even on the electoral plane, the party that was the largest Italian opportunist party has undergone a change of such a scope as to even suggest an abandonment of its own opportunist character, that is, as a force acting in a bourgeois sense specifically within the ranks of the proletariat.

Matteo Renzi's Democratic Party is by now clearly, explicitly able – without needing to resort to opportunist formulas and references – to play a leading role in the offensive against our class, an offensive that has just a few examples of such magnitude, at least over the latest decades.

The rhetoric of the turn and reforms vaunted by a new generation of bourgeois politicians only brought the reoccurrence of the same old script: having realised the high political price of an assault on the petty bourgeoisie and the parasitic layers, they took the offensive against the proletariat, seeking to gain from the increased exploitation of this latter some respite for an Italian capitalism that is unable to solve its own structural tangles. That's the same old script, indeed, but in this case, too, we are not confronted with a simple repetition within the framework of a situation that remains unchanged. The script repeats itself, but in order to do so within the framework of a worsening of the competitive conditions of Italian capitalism, it

must repeat itself more heavily and brutally, biting deeply into the living flesh of our class. Acting as a revolutionary nucleus in this situation poses difficulties that are somewhat unheard-of, in their scope, at least, in the history of mature Italian capitalism. Acting as revolutionary subjects in the trade-union organisations, which are spontaneous forms of economic organisation of the proletariat, often means seeking and fighting in order that they did not get lost or fall prey to forms of action and conceptions that belonged to the early days of the workers' movement, and keeping alive the slender flame of a minimum class consciousness, instead of bringing the elements of a revolutionary consciousness into a movement of struggle and immersing them into it. At the level of bourgeois politics, the de facto disappearance of effective opportunism – something that might at first sight appear entirely favourable – cannot hide the fact that the reason why it faded away lies in the Italian bourgeoisie's falling, and almost disappearing, need for an opportunism that could control and divert the proletarian struggle.

This is therefore a confirmation – a ten-year long confirmation – that the priority task is to train people in Marxist theory, to educate and self-educate them in the ability of grasping the inner contradictions of the capitalist formation and the historical need for a revolutionary solution through the lenses of theory. As a matter of fact, if the theoretical dimension is at every stage a central and inescapable element for Marxist party membership, in a social context marked by the persistent absence of large and prolonged phenomena of proletarian struggle and by periods of crisis of the bourgeois power's endurance, the key to a theoretical understanding of the laws of capitalism virtually becomes the only way to head toward an effective consciousness of the historic soundness of the revolutionary perspective.

In certain respects, such a task of eminently theoretical political education has become more difficult over the last decade. In fact, the decay of the public debate in Italy has continued, thus meaning that any political activity is regarded by the collective perception as an exercise of an ever-weakening rhetoric and as a deployment of abilities and instruments that are almost completely aimed at more impressive marketing campaigns and centred around the most vacuous personalisms.

We need only think of the nearly irrelevant weight – in a political debate that was full of coarse score-settlings and clashes that were as noisy as they were superficial – of such an important fact as the intervention of other imperialisms in what was one of the last, true areas of Italian imperialism's influence: Libya. So much the better, one might conclude, arguing that this would be less likely to serve as a breeding-ground for producing capable bourgeois politicians or opportunist experiences having the same influence they had in the past. Maybe that will be so, but this will depend a lot on the ability of the revolutionary subjects to take advantage of that period, to gain ground as against the training of bourgeois cadres.

The fact remains that such a generalised lowering of the political level certainly does not help those who have to turn the assimilation of the theoretical body of Marxism into the basis of their own political identity. Once more, we are often faced – even before the question of knowledge of, and adherence to, Marxism could be raised – with the need to recover the basic criteria of a serious political commitment, the consciousness of the importance of studying the historical dynamics that led to the present situation and in which we must act, and the very notion of political militancy.

Thus we discovered – in a milieu that, at the beginning of our activity as *Prospettiva Marxista*, we had singled out as the object of our specific, primary attention – that precisely the notion of militancy, of a militant political practice, had in fact disappeared or, in the rare instances of its survival, it had been put in the service of projects and views that had nothing to do with Marxism. In view of the fact that the time at our disposal was necessarily shorter than the period upon which Arrigo Cervetto and Lorenzo Parodi could count when – after a preliminary reconnaissance stage – they started an independent work to lay the foundations of a Leninist presence in Italy, we deemed it more useful and effective – in the perspective of building a revolutionary party – to turn to political subjects who were already trained and experienced, instead of setting up an organisational mechanism through which we could have

proceeded toward the education of subjects with no political experience.

Such a mechanism, if aimed at the formation of a cadre party, besides requiring huge efforts – all the more burdensome for a small regroupment as ours, which, contrary to Cervetto's, clearly has no possibility to intersect with a large-scale upswing of social conflictuality within a short time – also requires, particularly at the present stage, such a long time that – despite our evaluations at the beginning of this decade – the tempos of imperialist confrontation could not grant to us.

We therefore resolved to turn to the political milieu that we felt most akin to ours from the standpoint of its history and assessments on certain crucial questions of Marxist theory and on the vicissitudes of the international workers' movement. To cite but one of the most significant areas in which we hoped to bring together the available energies, we thought we could seek common ground and useful contributions for an in-depth study and clarification work on the origins, the premises, and the specific reasons for the specific forms and effectiveness of the Stalinist counterrevolution. We developed this matter in our text, *The Unseen Enemy*. We therefore sought to establish contacts and collaborations with the various expressions of what is commonly defined as 'Bordigism' – an imprecise term which is nonetheless useful for grasping the matter.

It would be useless to conceal that from this point of view our balance-sheet is disastrous. It would be useless, along the path of our balance-sheet reflections, to dwell on the many instances in which our contacts vanished, nearly always because of their unwillingness or long-acquired inability to place themselves on the ground of a militant work for the building of the revolutionary party – notwithstanding their eulogisation of the party's oft-cited indispensability. This would be a rather sad recollection of anecdotes, bound together by a recurring tendency to discover bottomless theoretical differences whereas the simple mutual acquaintance should have been followed by the inception of a serious militant commitment, even if only in the work of clarification of the real differences.

It would suffice to point to the more historically deep-rooted aspect which stands at the basis of such an involutive process: the combination and mutual fostering of the devastating results of Stalinist counterrevolution, which has not been understood completely, with the abandonment – theorised through a rigid determinism that is no longer dialectical – of the attempt, however risky and difficult, to build a party that is able to express a genuine vitality and a capacity of training new comrades during a counterrevolutionary period. Finally this is combined with a social practice that, with the passing of time, has more and more drifted apart from the criteria and values of party membership and, furthermore, it has discovered in some of the most authoritative surrenders an arsenal for 'theoretically' justifying their dull adherence to a political activity conceived in the very fashionable and well-known terms of an individualist interest and of a pastime enabling them to carve out their own sphere of personal satisfaction and praise – a role-playing game to be played within the narrow circle of amateurs.

The conclusion of our decade-long explorations in this milieu is that it is very unlikely that it can be able to produce something healthy in terms of revolutionary party membership. It would be necessary to find different ways to help and hasten the formation of the preconditions for the revolutionary party. But turning such a balance-sheet of our experiences into a pedestal from which we could celebrate our alleged superiority – promoting our 'shop' in competition with others and vaunting ourselves by denigrating our 'competitors', something that would be all the more ridiculous and absurd if we consider the generally awful health conditions of the political milieu which claims to be Marxist – would be a denial of that very revolutionary party spirit to which we must devote our existence.

The degenerations and regressions that we have observed and experienced – and, whenever possible, opposed – cannot be reduced to the perverse action of misled or debased individuals. They are the manifestation of the conditioning power that capitalism could exert in the context of a counterrevolutionary period of a unheard-of duration. They are a result of the energy with which the antibodies of the capitalist organism can attack, in the most varied

ways, the revolutionary elements who are acting within its tissues.

We are not at all immunised from this influence, from the risks of a degeneration and abandonment of Marxism. But Marxism has also shown – over a span of time that already encompasses many generations – that it can be a weapon, a formidable instrument for understanding reality and acting upon it. The challenge of the education of cadres – the trainer who trains himself by training others – is to get hold of that weapon. The ability to take on that challenge is an integral and central part of the work around our journal and for its publication, which is specifically devoted to the education of cadres. We never claimed to be the only ones who can carry out such a great, difficult but passionating task, and we will go on trying not to neglect the energies that may flow from other paths into that direction.

In any case, we will do everything possible to steadily carry on our commitment to a consistent Marxist allegiance, seeking to avoid the ‘quagmire’ that, as Lenin taught us, the bourgeois society ceaselessly prepares for revolutionists. Even if we will be alone in carrying out such a task in the Italian capitalist reality – and we hope not to be alone – we would not have the right to withdraw from attempting to give our contribution, however modest, to what will be – as a consequence of a crisis and a global showdown of imperialism – an international revolutionary process.