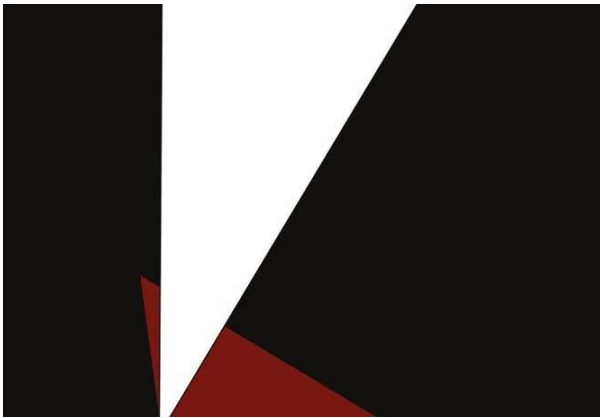


# Stalinism: Red Flag of Capital

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*Translated by the League of Internationalist Communists*

*(The following is our translation of an impressive booklet on Stalinism and the counter-revolution which was written by our comrades in Barbaria. You can find the original in Spanish here: <https://barbaria.net/2022/09/19/el-estalinismo-bandera-roja-del-capital/>.)*

## **Introduction**

The content of this booklet is essential for those of us who want to radically subvert this world. We are convinced that the social energy to deny and overcome capitalism will become stronger and stronger, but for this social energy to be fruitful it is important to link it to the historical programme of revolution and communism. And, through that, to demarcate the terrain of revolution from that of counter-revolution. This booklet is devoted to the theoretical, political, and historical origins of the main counter-revolution of the 20th century, what we call Stalinism out of convenience. The label itself is problematic. When we speak of Stalinism, we do not refer to the actions of one person, Stalin, a kind of supervillain, but to a political and practical programme that denied the foundations of communism as a real movement, inverting all its terms. Internationalism was replaced by socialism in one country and class independence by interclassism. The communist goal, a classless and stateless society, was swept away under the rubble of a capitalist primitive accumulation and an apology for piecework. With the Stalinist counter-revolution, we are witnessing a veritable Lexicon of Political Deceit [1], as Munis put it. All the terms of the revolution and of our historical movement have had their meanings changed into their

exact opposite. That is why it is so important to understand what we mean when we speak of communism and human liberation. Communism is a real movement, and not one idea among others, which denies the material and categorical foundations of the world of capital. Communism is the affirmation of the global human community, a community without money and commodities, without the state and without social classes. This was affirmed, based on the historical experience of our class and the rigorous study of the society of capital by our historical party starting from Marx. Communism as a world society requires an intermediate political phase which our comrades in the past called the dictatorship of the proletariat. The class dictatorship is the violence that the proletariat, constituted as a class and a party, exercises against capital and its categories, and against the bourgeoisie as a class. The existence of a class society always entails the domination of one class over another, of one mode of production over the affirmation of another. This class violence is fundamental and is harmonious and consonant with the final goal of communism. That is why the fundamental aim of the dictatorship of the proletariat is to extend the revolutionary process on a world level, to break down national frontiers, to reduce as far as possible the commodification and influence of capital on society, to reduce the working day, to express the conscious protagonism of the proletariat in the exercise of its own dictatorship—realities antagonistic to the consolidation of the Stalinist counter-revolution which strengthened nationalism, the defence of Russian borders as a “revolutionary”

bulwark, the subjection of the proletariat to hellish working hours in the name of the supposed construction of “socialism”, in reality of Russian state and capitalist industry, and the physical extermination of millions of proletarians all over the world.

That is why Marxism is a doctrine about the counter-revolution. Because it is important to separate emancipation from exploitation, communism from capitalism, if we are to overcome this catastrophic world that is reaching its inner limits and threatens the extinction of our species. Our comrades who undertook the task of separating themselves from counter-revolution in the 1930s, when it was midnight in the century, saw the imperative need to reconstruct our theory doctrinally, to go to its original foundations in order to demonstrate that Stalinism is the counter-revolutionary negation of our doctrine. It is not a child of ours; either legitimate or illegitimate. It is the total negation of our most basic, theoretical and physical foundations (one need only think of the Stalinist massacres against genuine revolutionaries). In these pages, we will try to reconstruct the important battles that our comrades waged against that great falsehood, against that bewildering lie which was and is, today to a much lesser extent, Stalinism, to paraphrase Anton Ciliga’s important book.

We live in turbulent times, interesting times. These are times of catastrophe and times of hope in a new world that can emerge. We have evidence of this, and not only of a negative nature. It is not only the negative examples of war, climate change or economic crises that are becoming more and more dramatic, we are also talking about social upheavals everywhere and the material possibilities of living in a communist society today. Capitalism negates itself. The principal reason for its crisis is that it is increasingly unable to compel society to dance the miserable rhythm of its social metric: exchange value and socially necessary labour time. Today it would already be possible to live globally in a society where labour time would be minimal and social production would be rationally distributed free of charge, without monetary or market mediation. It is capitalism and its contradictions that make communism a real objective and not an ideal or merely moral utopia, an adventure of the Don Quixote sort, as Marx said in the *Grundrisse*.

What is essential for the movements of future social polarisation is that they re-appropriate the historical programme of the past in order to reverse the abortive practices to which capitalism condemns us. Communism as a real movement demands a break with this capitalist practice, a break with commodity fetishism, placing at a certain point conscious communist objectives at the helm. That is why discussion with the past counter-revolution is so

important, and all the more so when, as another of the present positive motives, we glimpse a new generation coming up to the past debates of our class. It is to them that this text is addressed first and foremost. Many times, on social networks or in discussions in the street we hear talk of an International Communist Movement (ICM). What would this ICM be? A nominalist affiliation where a common name is enough to make us all more or less close relatives. To this sacred union we say, clearly and unequivocally: NO! And this is the vector that moves this booklet. To distinguish revolution from counter-revolution. To understand, to feel strongly, that Stalinism in its multiple variations—united by the programme of national “communism”, the alliance with the bourgeoisie and the factual construction of state capitalism—is a mortal enemy of the revolution and of the communists, a legitimate child of the world of capital. And capital, in whatever form, should be fought relentlessly and forcefully. That is why there is no us, but a radical antagonism, the antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat, between revolution and counter-revolution, between capitalism and communism. In that sense our critique of the counter-revolution is not a form of ‘anti-Stalinism’ in the usual sense but is derived from an uncompromising commitment to communism.

# **THE PRINCIPLES OF THE COUNTER-REVOLUTION**

## **Socialism in One Country**

This theoretical “innovation” of Stalin’s became the theoretical axis around which the Stalinist counter-revolution gravitated, and which continues to this day. The idea that socialism can be built and can be built in a single country, and on top of that with a backward and unequal capitalism like the Russian one of a hundred years ago. A position radically different from that of Marx or Engels—from the former’s Critique of the Gotha Programme to the latter’s Anti-Dühring—who had argued that communism, whether in its lower or higher phase, presupposes a society without social classes and the state, without mercantile mediation between the production and distribution of products, without money. Prior to this phase, after the triumph of a revolution in some territory, the political dictatorship of the proletariat rules with the aim of expanding worldwide in order to destroy capitalism and liberate the forces of communist society. Marx was always very clear about the antagonism between national socialism and communism. For example, in the Critique of the Gotha Programme and in relation to Lassalle he said:

*“In opposition to the Communist Manifesto and all previous socialism, Lassalle conceived the workers’ movement from the narrowest point of view, and after the activity of the International, we are still following in his footsteps!”*

*Obviously, in order to fight, the working class must organise itself as a class in its own country, for this is the immediate arena of its struggle. In this sense, its class struggle is national, not because of its content but, as the Communist Manifesto says, because of its form. But the framework of today’s national state, for example, the German Empire, is itself economically within the framework of a system of states. Every merchant knows that German trade is, at the same time, foreign trade, and Herr Bismarck’s greatness lies precisely in some kind of international policy.*

*And what does the internationalism of the German Workers’ Party boil down to? To the consciousness that the result of its aspirations “will be the international fraternisation of the peoples”, a phrase borrowed from the bourgeois League for Peace and Freedom, which it wants to pass off as equivalent to the international fraternisation of the working classes in their common struggle against the ruling classes*

*and their governments. Of the international duties of the German working class, therefore, not a single word is said!"*

Marx is crystal clear against the national socialism of which Stalin was an advanced and innovative heir. Capitalism is a world economic and political system, so the content of communism can never be national. Its form is global, as is that of capitalism. The global character of capital can only be counterposed to a class which is also global, precisely because it is the result of the development of capitalism itself: the proletarians who must sell their labour power in order to survive. It is the very development of capitalism, then, which imposes the need for world communism in order to break materially with the set of capitalist social categories, from the commodity to the nation-state. The unity of the international proletariat is not a mere humanitarian phrase, of the “we must get along and love each other like good friends” type; rather, it is, as Marx himself says, a common struggle against the whole of the ruling classes and their states which are also united, as a Holy Family, against the proletariat. It is a worldwide antagonism—class against class, mode of production against mode of production.

This international character of the revolution was an unavoidable foundation for the Bolsheviks. For them, there was no such thing as a 'Russian Revolution' in and of itself. It was an episode of the world revolution which had to break out, and it broke out, having its next episode in Germany (November 1918). For example:

*“When, at the time, we started the international revolution, we did so not in the belief that we could anticipate its development, but because a whole series of circumstances impelled us to start it. We thought either the international revolution will come to our aid, and then our victories will be fully guaranteed, or we will carry out our modest revolutionary work in the conviction that, in case of defeat, and in spite of everything, we will serve the cause of the revolution, and our experience will be useful for other revolutions. It was clear to us that the victory of the proletarian revolution would be impossible without the support of the world revolution. Even before the revolution, and after it, we thought either the revolution would break out immediately, or at least very soon, in the other countries, more developed in the capitalist sense, or else we shall succumb.” [2]*

Lenin speaks in 1921 and affirms clearly that it was obvious to them that the victory of the proletarian revolution was impossible without the support of the world proletarian revolution. If the world proletarian revolution did not come to their aid, if it did not triumph on a world scale, the revolutionary movement in Russia would be doomed to perish, but in any case that is all right, because they would have served the cause of the revolution, and their lessons would be useful to the world proletariat: in short, an internationalist position with which Stalin would radically break. That is the deep, infamous and counter-revolutionary meaning of the theory of socialism in one country. As we said before, in relation to Marx, Lenin simply repeats what was said by the founders of our historical party. Already Engels in his *Principles of Communism*, prior to the *Manifesto*, declared:

*“Is such a revolution possible in one country? No. Great industry, by creating the world market, has already so closely united all the peoples of the globe, especially the civilised peoples, that each is dependent on what happens in the land of the other. Moreover, it has levelled social development in all civilised*

*countries to such an extent that in all these countries the bourgeoisie and the proletariat have emerged as the two decisive classes of society, and the struggle between them has become the main conflict of our day. Consequently, the communist revolution will not be a purely national revolution, but will take place simultaneously in all civilised countries, that is to say, at least in England, America, France and Germany.”*

And this in the moments before the bourgeois revolutions of 1848. Obviously, this position in 1917 and even more so today, with capitalism having become world capitalism, implies in turn a revolution which counterposes and defeats it on a world level as well. Even Stalin himself agreed up to 1924: just read his Fundamentals of Leninism, where he maintains that the Russian revolution established the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia but that its definitive triumph required world revolution. It was not until December 1924 that Stalin published an article in Pravda, The October Revolution and the Tactics of the Communists, and it was the first time that he spoke of building socialism in a single country. In 1925, it would appear as a preface to Stalin’s book October Road and in successive editions of Questions of Leninism. For Stalin, the Russian people cannot “vegetate in their contradictions and rot away waiting

for ‘the world revolution’”. In this way, as we shall see better below, he reconstructs and manipulates texts to bring them into line with the need for the evolution of the Russian state and its capitalist accumulation. The central thesis of socialism in one country is a counter-revolutionary inversion of what has been said so far: socialism is built in Russia and the proletariat must defend it in all countries. A hypothesis, that of socialism in one country inseparable from the failure of the world revolution, which experienced its last two major episodes in Germany in 1923 and in China in 1927. This isolation of the Russian revolution, in the face of the defeated world proletariat, creates national pressures within Russia for a normalisation of relations with the capitalist states on the diplomatic and economic level. That normalisation is what lies at the heart of the idea of socialism in one country. Let us concentrate on ourselves and our development. Let us give up the pipe dreams of a world revolution. Socialism must be built in Russia on the basis of the will of the workers and peasants embodied in the Party. And the world proletariat must pass from the active subject of the world revolution to the defender of the homeland of socialism, of the besieged Russian bastion.

Continuing the debate within the Russian Communist Party, it was Bukharin, who was much more theoretically competent than Stalin [3], that took up the perspective of socialism in one country and gave more theoretical weight to this idea during the XIVth Conference of the Russian Communist Party. Stalin took it up again definitively, and did not abandon it, in the context of the battle against Zinoviev and Trotsky. His text is important in this respect: the question of the triumph of ‘socialism in one country’. Stalin uses his typical prose full of simple questions that receive affirmative or negative answers. A prose that would create a school, the school of counter-revolution. Stalin begins with a self-criticism of when he argued that the triumph of socialism required the triumph of world revolution, a formula found in *The Foundations of Leninism*:

*“But overthrowing the power of the bourgeoisie and establishing the power of the proletariat in a single country does not yet guarantee the complete triumph of socialism. The main mission of socialism—the organisation of socialist production—remains to be accomplished. Can this mission be accomplished; can the final triumph of socialism be achieved in a single country without the joint efforts of the proletarians of a few advanced countries? No, it cannot. To*

*overthrow the bourgeoisie, the efforts of a single country are enough, as the history of our revolution indicates. For the final triumph of socialism, for the organisation of socialist production, the efforts of a single country, especially of such a peasant country as Russia, are no longer sufficient; for this the efforts of the proletarians of a few advanced countries are necessary.”*

Stalin says that this formula was just until the destruction of the opposition of Trotsky and Zinoviev within the Russian CP. Once it is destroyed it is clear that a complete socialist society can be built with the forces of Russia alone, and without outside help.

*“Its defect consists in the fact that it merges two different questions into one: the question of the possibility of carrying out the construction of socialism with the forces of a single country, a question to which an affirmative answer must be given, and the question of whether a country with a dictatorship of the proletariat can be considered completely guaranteed against intervention and, therefore, against the restoration of the old regime, without a victorious revolution in other countries, a question to which a negative answer must be given.*

*This, not to mention the fact that such a formulation may give reason to believe that it is impossible to organise a socialist society with the forces of a single country, which is, of course, false.”*

As we can clearly see, all the fundamentals of Stalinist national “communism” are already present in this formula. This is the nucleus of the counter-revolution. The patently false assertion of socialism in one country serves to reduce the world proletariat to a mere appendage in defence of the geo-political and imperialist interests of the USSR as a capitalist state. There is a radical inversion of the pyramid of proletarian internationalism, as Bordiga stated at the Sixth Enlarged Executive of the Communist International in 1926. The subject is no longer the world proletariat constituted as a class, through its party as a class organ, and seeking to achieve the triumph of world revolution. The proletariat is merely a passive agent supporting the Russian state as the fatherland of a self-proclaimed socialism. That would be the history of Stalinism from then on, the debasement of the communist parties to agents in defence of the economic and political interests of the Russian state. The latter, its political apparatuses and the Comintern itself would be constituted through the theory of socialism in one country as agents of

Russian impersonal capital and the world bourgeoisie. This is the secret of Stalinism and its counter-revolution embodied in socialism in one country.

First of all, it is important to keep reiterating that socialism in one country is impossible because socialism, as Zinoviev himself said in the discussion against Stalin, following Marx, means the abolition of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the extinction of social classes. Socialism, or the first phase of communism as Marx said, is a society where the capitalist categories no longer apply: wage labour, state, money and commodities, social classes. Stalin and Stalinism, as an unconscious expression of the impersonal forces of world capital, pass off as communism what is an expression of national capital. As we have already explained in our text Stalin's Capitalism, the latter proclaims that the existence of the law of value, of the accumulation of commodities at the right price—for this totalitarian Proudhonian capitalism monopolistic profits would be excessive—of the wage system as mediation between production and consumption, would be the construction of socialism in Russia, a socialism proclaimed by the father of counter-revolution as early as 1931.

This discussion is not merely terminological, for it involves the adulteration of the programme of communism. And it is an adulteration that continues to this day, albeit in a weakened form. We are witnessing young proletarians who become radicalised against capitalism and want to overcome it in a revolutionary way, but for this they find the instruments of counter-revolution embodied in various Stalinist apparatuses in their many families. But it also occurs even in leftist critics of Stalinism, such as the communisers, who confuse socialism with what Stalin said about it—i.e., a society where the law of value governs—affirming the need to overcome any transitional phase to communism, ignoring thereby the centrality of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a revolutionary political phase, and thus radicalising Stalin's voluntarist position. Communism would be immediately possible, without world revolution, not even on the national level, because it would assert itself in the struggle itself, in the insurrection itself. Without knowing it, these theories are the offspring of what they claim to criticize: the notions of counter-revolution, which they pass off as being those of Marx and our historical movement. No, socialism is already communism, it is not a society with social classes and a state; the class dictatorship as a transitional phase is another matter. And communism requires this

intermediate phase. It is not born of mere will as the communising ideology presupposes [4].

But to return to Zinoviev, in battling against Stalin's positions he already spoke of the Georgian's national narrowness and how it denied proletarian internationalism. Trotsky and Zinoviev, in their reaction against Stalinism, have many limits. We will elaborate what these are throughout our text and the lessons we have to draw today as communists, and we will also return to the limits of Lenin himself. But it is important to point out his reaction—the confused but just defence of the fundamentals of communism. Socialism is a classless and stateless society, as Trotsky would later remark in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936).

The final outcome of the Stalinist counter-revolution comes as no surprise to us as revolutionary communists trying to apply the materialist method to history. A proletarian revolution triumphant in one country, but isolated internationally, is doomed to die. That is the secret behind the Russian imbroglio. The Russian revolution was a proletarian revolution whose end was to achieve communism. That end is only possible after the development and triumph of a world

revolution, which indeed took place, but failed. As Rosa Luxemburg said in her analysis of the Russian revolution, the Bolsheviks carry with them the imperishable merit of having dared. But in doing so they posed a challenge that could only be taken up by the international proletariat and triumph in the world arena of class struggle. The isolation of the revolution strengthened the weight of world capitalism within Russia. As historical materialists we know that it could not be otherwise. The Russian revolution, unlike what the council communists later posited, was a proletarian revolution taking place in a capitalist context. It could not have been otherwise: it was the social reality of Russia and of any other country at the time—though obviously German development would have been beneficial as compared with the Russian situation—and it will be so in our time as well, even if capitalism has greatly developed the possibilities for communism. In any case, a triumphant revolution always implies a transitional political period characterised by the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.

As we say, a context of isolation of the world revolution inevitably leads to an accumulation of counter-revolutionary pressures which eventually triumphed. It is in these difficult conditions that the

Bolsheviks operate and that leads to a series of mistakes. In the midst of the isolation of the revolution, especially from 1921 onwards, the Bolsheviks concentrated on trying to develop the national economy through the NEP, a political programme of state capitalism, in order to generate capitalist development while awaiting the triumph of the world revolution. Lenin even goes so far as to define this state capitalism as an advance towards socialism, putting forth a perspective that focuses on national economic development as a royal road to socialism, whose pathways of development are without a doubt world-wide. Lenin asserts that the best thing he and the Bolsheviks can do at this time for the world proletariat is to concentrate on their own economic development:

*“We intervene in world politics with our economic policy; if we solve this problem we will win on an international scale for sure and definitively.” [5]*

What the Bolsheviks are looking for is a temporary reprieve, to hold out until the world revolution breaks out again, hence the importance that the Communist International will give in 1923 to the triumph of the German revolution. It seems to us very important to

emphasise the qualitative break implied by the Bolshevik perspective in relation to Stalinism. While we understand that these pressures were already there in the initial development of the Russian revolution, we also understand that they were inevitable pressures without a triumph of the world revolution. It is impossible to maintain a healthy proletarian power over time in the context of a capitalist world and national economy. Lenin, in any case, has the merit of calling the situation by its real name. What exists and is developing from the Bolshevik power is a form of state capitalism; full socialism is not being built nationally. He himself recognises that the carriage of the state is traveling in its own path, that the Bolsheviks do not control it. It would have been vitally important to be able to develop this notion more clearly in order to have saved the Bolshevik party and the Communist International from becoming instruments of the counter-revolution.

And yet the Bolsheviks were not clear enough, starting with Lenin. The focus on the development of a national economy while the world revolution breaks out would prove to be a fertile soil from which the Stalinist counter-revolution will later sow. It creates misunderstandings about the final horizon of the communist revolution, and generates a series of

tendencies which function automatically, impersonally and in their own right if they are not broken by the expansion of the world revolution and the international power of the proletariat. Without this, the very logic of the state and the capitalist economy would eventually engulf and break any revolutionary experience, which is what finally happened. The mercantile logic of capital accumulation and the geopolitical interests of the Russian state presented the account of its interests and found in Stalin and his circle the agents and functionaries of their logic [6]. We will return to these lessons later, but it seems to us very important to highlight them now. The problem was not the application of the NEP in 1921 or even Lenin's positions in favour of state capitalism—we do not share them, but they seem to us to be a tactical problem, other economic measures that would have encouraged consumption and proletarian leisure time as far as possible would have been better— such mercantile measures are inevitable in a social context that remains capitalist. What should have been emphasised more forcefully was that these measures had their days numbered without proletarian world revolution, that this must be the alpha and omega of revolutionary power and that for this very reason the Russian state and the Bolshevik party had to submit to the centralisation of the International, as Bordiga

emphasised during the Sixth Enlarged Executive of the Communist International. It was not possible to nourish the illusion of being outside commodity exchange and that its whirlwind would not end up fatally dragging the revolution along with it. If the world revolution did not put an end to capitalism, then capitalism, as actually happened, would end up settling accounts with it in Moscow [7]. And it was necessary to take into consideration that when the time came, political power had to be renounced so that it would not crush and deform the class organ, the world party. Not taking this perspective into account is what would end up ruining the process and generating a capitalist counter-revolution, but with a red flag that has crushed the revolutionary possibilities of the proletariat for decades. That is why today it is so important to clearly grasp the lessons of the Russian revolution and, above all, of the counter-revolution that crushed us.

On these points, Lenin and the Bolsheviks are not clear enough. Their righteous will to hold out and resist does not sufficiently take into account the dangers that are being unleashed nor the way in which the logic of capital and international diplomacy will engulf them. From very early on, the two logics are already coexisting. One is that of the Communist

International and the other that of the international treaties in which the Russian state tries to obtain recognition by the community of bourgeois states. The first revolutionary impulses were dying out. Chicherin and Litvinov (Commissars of Foreign Affairs of the USSR) are very different from the Trotsky who claimed that he was going to use his post to spread revolutionary propaganda among German and Austrian soldiers, only to close the door of the ministry. Now, in the early 1920s, what the Russian state is after is international recognition, and it achieves it in Rapallo in 1922. It no longer publicised secret agreements, but made them: for example, a secret protocol with Weimar Germany in which the USSR authorised the construction of factories for the clandestine arming of the German army; or the USSR's withdrawal of support for the Soviet Republic of Gilan in northern Iran because of the 1921 agreement between Russian and British diplomacy; or the 1921 Moscow Treaty with Atatürk's Turkey, which will involve Soviet military support for the Turks at war with the Greeks, while Atatürk persecuted the Turkish communists.

We can see, then, a close relationship between the movements of Russian state diplomacy, the linkage to the community of capitalist states through

international treaties and how this dynamic progressively confronts the interests of the world revolution. Understanding this is the decisive aspect, and the Bolsheviks, despite their internationalism, were not clear about this. It is this lack of clarity, together with the international dynamic of isolation of the revolution, that led to the emergence of a section of the Russian party that embodied the interests of the automatic dynamic of international capitalism.

### **Interclassism as an Alliance with the Progressive Bourgeoisie**

We have already analysed in depth the mainstay of the Stalinist counter-revolution: socialism in one country, which is the logical coronation of the interests of the Russian capitalist state ahead of those of the world proletariat. It is the theoretical cause which confirms a practical dynamic, that of the destruction of the communist party, which is transformed from a proletarian organ into an instrument of the world bourgeois counter-revolution. This counter-revolutionary position would be instituted as a necessary condition for membership of the Russian CP at its XVth Congress in 1927 and of the Communist International at its VIth Congress in 1928. From then on, the affirmation of the necessity of socialism in one country became a dogma of faith of the counter-revolution.

And this is very important, in view of what we said in the introduction to this text. A good number of the organisations that call themselves communist today are in reality national-“communist”. They are the heirs of this counter-revolution which has, in principle and practice, gangrened the proletarian movement. That is why, as we said, it is so important to dissociate ourselves from these forces, to visualise them in the enemy camp and to characterise them as counter-revolutionary.

In the lexicon of political deceit used by Stalinism, socialism becomes nationalism and internationalism becomes the defence of the geopolitical interests of the Russian state, as we have said. To be an internationalist is not to uphold class solidarity and combat against the world bourgeoisie, but to defend the homeland of socialism.

As we can already sense, this has a direct influence on the international politics of the Stalinist Comintern. The Third International was born in 1919 as an expression of the world party of the proletariat. Undoubtedly, with all its limits and hesitations, it was a very clear demonstration of the internationalism intrinsic to the Russian revolution and the Bolsheviks. The policy of socialism in one country transforms

everything, since then what is central is the defence of the interests of the Russian state and the alliances it establishes with the national bourgeoisies in numerous countries. Since 1927 the communist parties have been appendages of the counter-revolution.

We should stop here for a moment, in order to prove the above statement, within different revolutionary processes and in what will be the opportunist and criminal policy of the Communist International. We will speak about the process of Bolshevisation of the Communist International since 1923-24, the Anglo-Russian Committee of 1925/26, the Chinese revolution of 1927 and the zigzags of the Stalinist policy from the theory of social-fascism to popular-frontism and anti-fascism as an alliance with the democratic bourgeoisie. In a future section we will discuss other processes of Stalinism's infamous policy, such as the episode of Spain in 1936.

The Communist International underwent a process of Bolshevisation of all communist parties from 1923-1924 which culminated in 1926. Under this process the pyramid of the International is completely inverted. As Bordiga said at the Fourth Enlarged Executive:

*"We can compare our international organisation to a*

*pyramid. This pyramid must have a top and sides tending towards that top. This is how unity, and the necessary centralisation can be represented. But today, because of our tactics, our pyramid rests dangerously on its top. The pyramid must therefore be inverted [...]. The whole system must be modified from top to bottom”.*

Bordiga clearly expresses the principles of organic centralisation which the International must have. It must rest on its base and on a two-way movement, from bottom to top and from top to base, which allows for a unity based on common positions as communists. Against this, Bolshevisation—a term used by the French communist Albert Treint—means the creation of an internal discipline that would gangrene the revolutionary spirit of the communist parties and the Communist International. And as the Italian left affirmed in the same Executive:

*“Discipline is a point of arrival, not a point of departure; it is not a kind of immutable platform. On the other hand, this corresponds to the voluntary character of adherence to our party organisation. For this reason, a kind of party penal code cannot be a remedy for the frequent cases of lack of discipline. A regime of terror has recently been instituted in our parties, a kind of sport which consists in intervening,*

*punishing, repressing and annihilating. And all this with a very particular pleasure, as if this were the ideal of party life.”*

The anthropological type of the Stalinist militant was born here, but it was a break with the revolutionary traditions of the early years of the Communist International. The Rubashov in Koestler’s novel, *Zero and Infinity*, is already someone broken by this artificial discipline, made up of infamies, betrayals and denunciations, which corrupt and break from the inside the link to a true revolutionary programme and a discipline that has to be conscious. Bolshevisation and its triumph at the expense of the militants who represented the authentic traditions of our class is what explains the organisational and moral logics of Stalinism: from the purges to the continuous zigzagging of tactical positions and principles. And all this in the name of defending the USSR as the homeland of socialism, of defending “our people” in order not to give arms to the enemy. In other words, all this at the cost of burying the real communist programme and objectives. It is thus stated:

*“A method of personal humiliation which is a deplorable method, even when it is used against political elements that deserve to be fought hard. I do not think it is a revolutionary method. I think that most*

*of those who today prove their orthodoxy by amusing themselves at the expense of sinners and persecuted people are most probably composed of former opponents humiliated at the time [...]. This self-immolation mania must cease if we really want to put forward our candidacy for the leadership of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat.”*

The logic of criticism and self-criticism was already described in 1926 as something that had to be fought radically in the name of the communist programme, as a sign that, while counter-revolution is a question of content and not of form, the methods that build communist organisation and militancy are not unrelated to these contents, but inseparable from them. There is a permanent relationship between means and ends. And the ends of Stalinist bourgeois counter-revolution are matched by means denunciation and self-immolation, the destruction of collective reflection and artificial discipline, personalism and the relentless persecution of sinners. A logic that is diametrically opposed to the organisation of communists. Aims and means are inseparably linked in Stalinism, and its methods are not a congenital evil of our movement or of Bolshevik centralism more specifically but are its very negation as a product of counter-revolution.

The process of Bolshevisation described above had already been going on for three years. It is the result of the slow assertion of the counter-revolution which makes the Bolsheviks retreat into their besieged fortress, and from there leads them to try to control the Communist International in order to put it at the service of the fatherland of socialism. Paradoxical, in this sense, is what happened in the Communist Party of Italy (PCdI) where the left leadership was replaced by Moscow in 1923 and headed up by Gramsci, who from then on became the defender of Moscow's line, which tried to lessen the revolutionary intransigence of the Italian party—then opposed to the policy of united fronts and the so-called “workers’ government” or the fusion with Serrati’s socialists[8]. Gramsci, who is obviously very different from the infamous Togliatti, would relentlessly carry out the control of the party by the Communist International, even with a party police that tried to check the documents and papers carried by the militants to prevent factional logics and with such undemocratic methods as giving the leadership all the votes that could not be expressed, due to the clandestinity of the party under Fascist Italy. And, despite all this, at the Como Conference (1924) the left was still in the majority, and it was not until 1926 that the party was totally under Moscow’s control through Gramsci. And, as we said, there still remained a certain logic and spirit of

comradeship which would be definitively crushed in the 1930s within the Italian party as in the rest of the communist parties.

What we have just indicated for Italy, which also serves to discredit today's sweetened image of a Gramsci dressed up in all the academic trappings, can be generalised, in different ways and with different clarifications, to all the communist parties of the world. In France, the leadership of Boris Souvarine, Rosmer and Monatte was abruptly changed by the figure of Albert Treint, who was later eliminated in favour of Maurice Thorez. In Germany, the KPD under Paul Levi will first purge the majority of its militancy, who will go on to reconstitute themselves as the KAPD. After the failed revolution of 1923, Brandler was replaced by the "leftists" Maslow and Ruth Fischer, and finally the disciplined and submissive Thälmann prevailed. This is the secret of the Stalinist leaders, products of the counter-revolution, submissive people who know how to say yes to Moscow and who in turn are hailed as little fathers or mothers of the proletariat: from Dolores Ibárruri to Tito, from Mao to Thorez, from Dimitrov to the Hungarian Rákosi. In some cases, these are intelligent and infamous figures, like Togliatti, who use their intelligence in the service of the counter-revolution, and who survive the purges by a

combination of luck, docility and above all a high dose of infamy. In other cases, the children would rebel against their parents. This is what Tito does with Stalin, Mao with Khrushchev or Carrillo with Ibárruri. But the counter-revolutionary logic is identical, the national-“communist” programme drives them, and they simply claim their own share of the cake. But we will come back to that later. For the moment, we want to emphasise how both the Bolshevisation of the Communist International, and the Bolshevisation of the Russian Party itself, were an essential task for the success of the counter-revolution in progress.

The first example about which we wish to stop to closely examine the consequences of this interclassist and conciliatory policy of the Comintern is the British case. In April 1925, an agreement, known as the Anglo-Russian Committee, was signed between the Soviet and British trade union leaders who had turned to the “left”. In fact, this agreement is inseparable from previous diplomatic moves. In January 1924, the first ever Labour government came to power and diplomatically recognised the USSR on 1 February 1924. Soviet diplomats, including Tomskey, the trade union leader, arrive on British soil in May 1924. British trade union leaders visit the USSR at the end of 1924 and, as we said, in April 1925 the famous Anglo-Russian Committee between the Soviet and

British trade unions is signed. These agreements meant the subordination of the autonomy of the British Communist Party (GBCP) to that Committee and to the trade union logic of the British left-wing leaders: radical in words and absolutely cowardly in their actions. In short, a logic typical of trade unionism which takes the radicalism of the workers' movement and integrates it into the political framework of the bourgeois state, and this is, in fact, what they would succeed in doing with the help of the USSR. Lloyd George, the famous liberal politician, had already spoken to the trade union leaders in 1919 to tell them that their function was to maintain social order. It is well known that the function determines the organ, in this case the trade union organ [9].

In 1926 in Britain, we witnessed a major wave of strikes in anticipation of the miners' struggle. On the first day of the strike, 4 May, the strike was total. Everything was silent as a sign of the potential power of the proletariat in struggle. There was a complete stoppage of the country's transport, only 3.5% of the passenger trains and 2-3% of the freight trains were running. At the same time the GBCP were a weak party completely subordinated to the trade union leaderships and were quickly absorbed into the voluntarism of the Third International to create revolutionary situations through shortcuts. But here

we enter a qualitative leap, since the Comintern's policy is subordinated to the perspective of socialism in one country and to the geopolitical interests of the Russian state.

The British government and the trade unions were terribly afraid of the radicalisation and the proletarian offensive that was manifesting itself every day on the streets. After just over a week of strike action, on 12 May they called an end to the strike in order to break the process of class radicalisation and try to steer the process back towards the order of capital. The miners continued the strike alone, but in isolation. In mid-October 1926, 200,000 miners went back to work, and by the end of the year all of them. The 1926 strike was the defeat of millions of proletarians in struggle, due to the very political weakness of the proletariat in struggle, but also because of a policy of the Communist International which subordinated the class struggle to the logic of the British trade unions and therefore to the political framework of British capital. For Stalin, the priority was to ensure a policy of the communist parties which would guarantee the security of the USSR. In this sense, the Anglo-Russian Committee serves as an instrument of the Russian state in its geopolitical game with British imperialism.

More important, from the point of view of the world

revolution, are the events in China from 1925 to 1927. There, we witnessed a real proletarian radicalisation which ended in much bloodshed, due to the policy of the Third International that subordinated the Chinese proletariat to the national bourgeoisie, then represented by the Kuomintang (KMT). The policy of the leadership of the Third International, already subordinated to the logic of socialism in one country and to a vision of the world revolution in stages and as national revolutions, which separates one revolution from another into watertight compartments, was applied with dire consequences in China. The first, the idea of a revolution in stages, meant reducing the Chinese revolution to a bourgeois revolution of an anti-imperialist character. In this sense, it was necessary to seek an alliance with the rest of the national classes against foreign imperialism—a policy which would later be developed by Mao in the 1930s and 1940s, in view of the fully Stalinist character of Chinese bourgeois nationalism. That is, to seek an alliance first and foremost with the national bourgeoisie represented by the KMT, the party founded by Sun Yat Sen and which, after his death in March 1925, had Jiang Jieshi as its most important leader at that time. The Stalinist Third International forced the young Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to subordinate itself fully to the KMT. So much so that the CCP dissolved within the KMT, participated in its

structures without a political physiognomy of its own, and the KMT was even invited to the meetings of the Third International. They go so far as to propose that Jiang Jieshi should be vice-president of the Third International. In this way, an anti-imperialist united front policy is applied, which the Third International would also apply in other colonial and semi-colonial countries with the same (predictably) disastrous consequences.

Alongside the stagist subordination and bourgeois programme of the CCP, the Chinese revolution is understood and conceptualized in exclusively national terms. This is a direct effect of the counter-revolutionary strategy of socialism in one country. The Chinese revolution is not thought of as an episode of the world revolution that broke out in 1917, but as a revolution trapped within its exclusive national borders. And yet it is impossible to understand anything about the Chinese revolution if we do not think of it as a moment in the overall process of world revolution, as a decisive moment that could have reversed the revolutionary ebb that had been underway since 1921. With its limits and weaknesses, the young CCP timidly discusses these positions coming from the Third International. And, of course, the process of constituting itself as a class—as a conscious political force—by the Chinese proletariat

through the occupation of land, wildcat strikes and the formation of armed militias was counterposed to the capitalist character of the Chinese social formation. The principal task for Chinese workers, as the Italian communist left in exile maintained at the time, was to establish their class and organisational independence from the bourgeoisie and to affirm the dictatorship of the proletariat in China as part of the world revolution [10].

The capitulationist and counter-revolutionary position of the Third International would generate counter-tendencies not only in China but internationally. The Left Opposition which begins to link up with Trotsky, and for a time with Kamenev and Zinoviev, confronts the suicidal and criminal policy of Stalin and Bukharin. They do not go so far as to argue for an organisational break with the KMT, but they do defend the need for the independence of the policy of the CCP, which must defend its own proletarian programme in China. This, for Trotsky, means the development of a permanent revolution which gives a communist character to the Chinese revolution, albeit embellished with democratic and bourgeois slogans [11]. These very important limits of his position cannot hide from us the radical differences with Stalin's policy. For Trotsky, the element that gives meaning to the Chinese movement is understood from

its international character as part of the world revolution and by communist aims: that is to say, the revolution is directed towards the dictatorship of the proletariat and the expropriation of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat in struggle.

Very similar positions, hesitantly, would be held by some CCP leaders. For example, Li Dazhao, the main leader of the time along with Chen Duxiu, clearly linked the Chinese and British proletariat as part of the same world class struggle. Chen Duxiu and the rest of the CCP initially opposed joining the KMT, as it created confusion and subordinated proletarian politics to the KMT. However, the Chinese leaders yielded to the pressure and discipline of the Comintern, and the CCP, as a party of the proletariat, debased itself to become part of the left wing of the national bourgeoisie. Li Dazhao confessed to Peng Suzhi that they were doing the work of nationalists and not communists, that they had abandoned their party, the CCP, in exchange for the KMT. The background of the political and programmatic discussions gives us a better understanding of the historical events that were novelised by André Malraux in his novels, *The Conquerors* and *The Human Condition*. On May 30, 1925, a strike broke out in Canton and Hong Kong that gave rise to the first proletarian soviet in China, a strike that came

about as a result of the murder of 10 workers by the police. A soviet is created, as we say, with armed proletarian militias that control the movement of people and the circulation of goods, that is, with territorial control and power. This logic of class autonomy and defence of their immediate and historical interests as proletarians is broken by their submission to the KMT and its nationalist and bourgeois programme.

But the needs of the Russian state are essential to Stalin and his policies, going so far as to assert that the KMT will end the rule of imperialism in the East, as if it were possible to end imperialism without ending capitalism. Stalin was interested in seeking a political ally in China in order to defend the geopolitical and economic interests of the Russian state. In this way he accepted that the CCP would hand over its lists of militants to the KMT, which would be crucial in the later massacres. The revolution takes its own course out of class radicalisation, landless proletarians occupy land in Hubei and Hunan, and organise armed militias. But the centre of the Chinese revolution is in Shanghai, where hundreds of thousands of armed workers control the city in 1927. On 21 March 1927, after a previous failed attempt a month earlier, 500,000 to 800,000 workers seize the city, armed with guns, sticks and knives. However,

Jiang Jieshi is at the gates of the city and the workers in arms, advised by the CCP, consider him a friend. At 4 a.m. on 11 April 1927, Jiang launched a military offensive against the Shanghai commune, which led to a brutal massacre of proletarians. From then on, the repression spread like an oil slick. Under the orders of Jiang Jieshi, whom the criminal policy of Stalin and company had proposed as vice-president of the Comintern, at least 547,000 workers and peasants are murdered [12]. This disaster and the failure of the Chinese revolution are entirely due to the policy of the Communist International, to its idea of a revolution in stages, a revolution understood in isolation and in purely national terms. In seeking alliances with the national bourgeoisies, which in reality conceals the imperialist interests of the Russian state itself. The study of the past and of the Chinese revolution of 1927 must serve us to draw revolutionary lessons for the present and the future. And, in the case that summons us in this text, to understand the intrinsically counter-revolutionary character of Stalinism from its earliest beginnings.

We have discussed at length the Chinese case because it allows us to better understand the constant zigzags of the Stalinist Comintern's policy from this point in history onwards: zigzags which hide, if we scratch the surface, the geopolitical interests of the Russian state;

the attempt to avoid war with the rest of the imperialist powers to achieve diplomatic and geopolitical alliances. And for this, the world proletariat is to be used as cannon fodder.

Thus, at the Sixth Congress of the Communist International in 1928, which made socialism in one country a pillar of obligatory acceptance by all “communist” militants, the policy of social fascism was launched. Capitalism, the Stalinised Comintern said, has entered a third period after the stabilisation period of 1924, which would inevitably bolster the revolutionary waves of the (prior) 1918 period, either because of the crisis of capitalism or because of the radicalisation of the proletariat. The confusion in the ranks of the Third International is total in the face of the continuous swings; even someone as clever and dastardly as Togliatti says to himself in a letter that he wishes Bordiga were present because, at least, he would tell them what was going on. Well, what was happening was that the Comintern was already an instrument of the counter-revolution in action, staffed by useful fools fed from the apparatus of power. The main line of the Third Period is that of social-fascism, which Stalin expresses with his usual mediocre clarity: “Social democracy is objectively the moderate wing of fascism... they are soul mates”. In the face of the new zigzagging, new leaderships were born in the

local CPs—Togliatti with his usual skill managed to save himself—which represented the new line. For example, Bullejos in Spain represented this line, under the surveillance and control of the Argentine Codovilla.

The position on social fascism is a theoretical absurdity. Social democracy is a bourgeois current, but it is neither part of fascism nor its soul mate. In reality, this position is not so different from what Stalinism would later adopt with anti-fascism. It is always looking for a lesser evil to beat and defeat. First, it was social democracy—the KPD will go so far as to make an alliance with the Nazis in a referendum in Prussia against Otto Braun’s regional government—and later fascism with the policies of the popular fronts. Thus, the struggle against capitalism is not organised on the basis of the class struggle, but exclusively against “social fascism”. It is no longer the bourgeoisie that is being fought, but only one of its wings, social democracy. And all this with the aim of carrying out a “national emancipation”, which led the KPD to have a policy in concurrence with that of the Nazis, and all this in order to bring Germany closer to an alliance with the USSR [13]. After the tactic of social-fascism came a new turn. It is anti-fascism, the politics of the popular fronts—the existential enemy is now fascism. It is

necessary, therefore, to ally with the anti-fascist national bourgeoisies, they would argue. In 1935 Stalin signed an agreement with the French Prime Minister Pierre Laval. Thus Stalin, and through him the PCF, approved the French policy of rearmament and national defence. Let us give Stalin's satraps the floor to understand the meaning of the new policy, whose compass is socialism in one country:

*“Today the interests of the defence of the USSR determine the fundamental line of the world proletariat in the face of the war.[14]*

*The Soviet Union is the cause of the world proletariat, the country where socialism is being built and realised, it is the socialist fatherland of all countries.”*  
[15]

Only if we understand this logic, that of socialism in one country, can we understand the continuous swings of the national “communist” parties and the Comintern. What makes sense of these zigzags are the interests of the USSR as a capitalist power. The last of these swings came as a surprise to many activists: the Molotov-Von Ribbentrop Pact, which was the alliance between Stalin's USSR and Hitler's Germany at the beginning of the Second World War. In this way the USSR defends its capitalist and imperialist interests.

Under this agreement, after the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, the USSR occupies the Baltic countries and the eastern part of Poland. The concord between the two states is made through reciprocal “gifts”. For example, Stalin handed over 570 German and Austrian communists to Hitler’s Gestapo, a criminal pact between equally bourgeois politicians [16]. Moreover, for a time, the USSR and Nazi Germany negotiated the extension of the Tripartite Pact (Germany, Italy and Japan) to the USSR. Hitler’s invasion of the USSR in June 1941 broke off those negotiations, and Stalin’s USSR would then switch to the opposing imperialist side in World War II. As we can see, only an understanding of the imperialist character of the policy of socialism in a one country makes it possible to understand the material roots of Stalinist politics.

## THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE COUNTER-REVOLUTION

In the last section of this writing, we would like to return to the programmatic contributions made by the comrades of the Italian left in exile in the 1930s. It seems to us that they made fundamental contributions to understanding the Stalinist counter-revolution and, moreover, to preparing us for the future class confrontations which will confront us with difficulties similar to those of the revolutionary wave of 1917-1921. Not by chance, the name of the journal published by these comrades was *Bilan*, French for “balance sheet”, a programmatic balance sheet of the revolution and counter-revolution, always with the perspective of the struggle for communism and the need to go deeper strategically and theoretically into the practical problems involved, which is a fundamental methodological lesson as communists.

The first text we want to refer to is that of Mitchell, a Belgian comrade, entitled *The Problems of the Transitional Period* [17]. Mitchell studied the economic problems during the dictatorship of the proletariat on the basis of the Russian example. What is fundamental in this text is how he recognises that in such a political period the economy remains capitalist, inevitably, and that a communist society—already in

its lower stage—implies the negation of money, commodities, value as a measure of social wealth. In doing so, he polemicises with an important text of the same period: Jan Appel and Henrik Canne-Meyer's *Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution*. In it, the aforementioned council communists attempt to separate themselves ideally from the concrete problems of the period of transition to communism. They recognise the existence of the market and money, but do not deduce from this the domination of value in the production and reproduction of the social structure. A kind of market socialism is thus presupposed, where every producer would receive the product of his labour. This ideal distribution of the product excludes, as we say, that in the transition period the capitalist influence dominates the economic forms of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is the great problem and the greatest challenge from which only the world revolution can save us.

Trotsky's position is not so dissimilar, albeit from another perspective. For Trotsky, too, a type of economic policy integrally in line with socialist principles would be possible. This can be seen in the economic disputes in the 1920s between the Left Opposition and the Stalin-Bukharin group. The former would defend the need for a socialist original

accumulation—an expression that Preobazhensky, their theoretician, would say, in reality means capital accumulation—which would allow Russia to industrialise. While Bukharin theorised that socialism would be achieved at a snail's pace through the commodification of the countryside, i.e., continuing Lenin's NEP. Finally, the imbalances due to the scissor-like evolution of prices between town and countryside would force Stalin to modernise industry and initiate the five-year plans and the collectivisation of the countryside, a brutal policy of primitive capital accumulation that would be directly responsible for the death of millions of proletarians and peasants. The important thing is to understand the capitalist nature of this economic policy, something Trotsky does not conceive of because he was still imprisoned by a vision that identifies socialism with state ownership of the means of production. Thus, in *The Revolution Betrayed* he defends the productive advances of the USSR as an example of the economic superiority of socialism—without understanding that such advances are characteristic of a youthful capitalism such as Russia's, and that the increase in the production of capital goods merely reflects its very capitalist nature. As Mitchell says, polemicising with Trotsky, the important thing is not to accelerate production but to transform social relations, which requires a world revolution. Only on a global level is communism

possible.

And the latter is central. We cannot delude ourselves about the existence of capitalist social relations in the period of transition to communism. We can and should try to lessen the burden of the commodification of society as much as possible, to reduce the working time that allows the proletariat to play a leading role in the dictatorship of the proletariat, as advocated by Bilan or other comrades like Munis. But we cannot delude ourselves about the nature of the economic social relations that will continue to prevail in the transitional phase. Socialism in one country is not possible. In a very different way from Stalin, this is paradoxically what Trotsky is unclear about when he speaks of the USSR as a bastion of socialism and of a socialist economic structure—because of the state management of the means of production and the monopoly of foreign trade—and council communists themselves when they ignore the operation of the law of value in the transitional period.

As Bilan forcefully argues in all their texts of the period, there are no mature and immature countries for socialism: the world distribution of the productive forces makes communism possible for both “advanced” and “backward” countries. And this precisely because the terrain of socialism is global—it

is world revolution. As Mitchell says, proletarian power must develop an economic policy in accordance, as far as possible, with communist aims, but the central thing is the development of world revolution, which destroys the primary political centres of the world bourgeoisie. Only from this world revolution can communism be born, and social relations be transformed. That is why, in the face of Bolshevik weaknesses, there is no competition between socialist and capitalist economy. What exists is an antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The world revolution is the only means by which the proletariat can finally unleash the forces of communism. The great fallacy is to believe that the economic foundations of socialism can be built.

And this internationalism, as a basic communist position, is strongly taken up again in the following articles, which we are going to comment on. They are written by the main animator of Bilan, Ottorino Perrone, known by the pseudonym Vercesi. We refer to the article Party, International, State and an earlier article published in the journal Octobre entitled The Question of the State, a text which takes up the same conclusions as the first.

So, what are the main theses that Vercesi developed?

The world revolution and the revolution of the International have priority over the national parties. The aim of a victorious class dictatorship is not economic reorganisation to increase economic output, but to give the civil war of the proletariat the widest possible scope. The opposite is to seek compromises with the enemy classes, just at the moment when revolutionary needs call for an all-out struggle against capital. The centre is always the world proletariat and its activity.

What is essential is always the content of the communist programme and this, in turn, explains why expanding the revolution is also essential. The revolution is a question of content, although it cannot be separated from its harmonious forms.

As he would later write in Octobre, Leninist voluntarism[18] implies a mystification of the violence that would allow the problems of the transitional period to be solved, whereby the party's control of the state would allow the inevitable problems of the isolation of the revolution to be dealt with through the use of violence, which, when exercised against the proletarian class itself, entails abandoning class principles. Vercesi explicitly refers to the Bolshevik repression of movements like that of Makhno in the Ukraine or Kronstadt in 1921. In this

way, the substance and basis of the state was altered in a bourgeois sense. What he says in the text published in Octobre is very important in this respect:

*“When it comes to fundamental problems, we cannot hesitate: it is better to face the battle despite the certainty of defeat than to remain in power by renouncing our proletarian principles”.*

In other words, repression against the proletariat entails the renunciation of proletarian principles. At such moments, a partial defeat from which to draw lessons for the future is better than the sacrifice of class positions. The latter is what finally happened, making the Bolshevik party and the Communist International instruments of the counter-revolution. This position of Bilan, in the 1930s, is very important for its coherence. What is central is the International and the triumph of the world revolution. You can lose a battle, an episode in the world revolution—in this case the class dictatorship in Russia—but the important thing is to maintain coherent revolutionary positions in the International and in the parties as class organs, unlike what happened in the USSR, where in the end it was the relationship with the rest of the bourgeois states that determined the line of action. That is why, as Vercesi said, it is important to prevent the proletarian state from relating to the rest of the

bourgeois states.[19] The proletarian state must be prevented from relating to the other bourgeois states.

The comrades of the Italian left in exile question the equivalence between state and class dictatorship. The state is always coercion and social preservation. That is why it is always opposed to the realisation of the communist programme. The strength of the class dictatorship, Bilan insists again, is the International and the expansion of the world revolution. It is from there, from coherence with the communist programme, that the dictatorship of the proletariat can and must be exercised, and the autonomisation of state and bourgeois logic avoided. In the absence of world revolution, the internal and external pressures of capitalism tend to subsume the party and the class dictatorship under the logic of capitalism and the state. Socialism in one country is an attempt to artificially separate the USSR, where socialism is supposedly realised, from the rest of the world. In this way, all class principles are reversed. The problem of the degeneration of the Russian revolution is not a personal one. Whether of exceptionally good leaders (Lenin) or of emissaries of the devil, of degeneration and perversion (Stalin). In Lenin, as we have seen, there are already limits which express the objective dynamic of isolation of the revolution, as can be seen in his text *On Cooperation* (1923). It is no coincidence

that the falsifiers rely on them to outline the theory of socialism in one country. But Stalin is the expression of the social forces gaining strength from the isolation of the Russian revolution, from the ebb of the revolutionary wave since 1921. The new circumstances had robbed the class dictatorship of its natural support, the world proletariat, which had been defeated by the enemy. The attempt to hold on to power at all costs in these circumstances would more and more widen the gulf between the reality and nature of that power and communist principles. Stalin and his capitalist dictatorship were born in this chasm. And finally, the Russian state became an expression of the logic of capital, as did the Bolshevik party, which went from being the formal party of the proletariat to being the party of the bourgeoisie [20]. Hence, “the causes of the present degeneration are to be found in the terrain of the class struggle and not in the individuals”.

We have summarised in a very synthetic way the contributions of Bilan, which seem to us to be very important for preparing the battles of tomorrow which will bring us back to problems analogous to those that our comrades from a hundred years ago had to face. This, acknowledging that, as Vercesi himself said, the principles of the Russian revolution and of the Third International must not be considered as an end point,

but as one more step on the road that the proletariat must take on the path of its emancipation.

## **EIGHT STEPS TO BUILD THE COUNTER-REVOLUTION**

We have seen, so far, the foundations on which Stalinism as the red flag of capital is constructed: socialism in one country and interclassism as a policy of alliances with the international bourgeoisie. Now let us focus, in a cursory way, on some logical and historical consequences of these positions, which explain to us what Stalinism was historically.

### **Diplomacy takes Center Stage**

We have already seen that the Russian state and its needs for defence or conquest move to the command post. This is the centre of the international policy of Stalinism. Communist parties and “Marxist” ideology are used to defend these interests. We are thus witnessing a work of falsification unparalleled in history. It is this work of counterfeiting that Orwell had in mind in his metaphor of 1984. We have already seen some examples in early Stalinism: the alliance of the Comintern with the KMT and the subsequent subordination and massacre of the CCP, the alliances with the Western democracies against fascism and with Hitler against those same Western democracies, now called plutocracies. But the examples are infinite, although little known due to leftist mystification over time. For example, there is the support given by USSR and Cuba to Videla’s Argentina—yes, the one

governed by a murderous military junta—and Mao’s China defended Pinochet’s bloody dictatorship, becoming interchangeable with its great national-“communist” rival (the USSR) in the defence of a military dictatorship. In return for this defence given to Pinochet, the United States, allied with China, also supported the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. The entire history of Stalinism is replete with such examples, which have built a leftist logic that defends the worst bourgeois satraps in the name of anti-imperialism: from Gaddafi to Saddam, from the Syrian al-Assad to Sandinista Nicaragua or Chavist Venezuela.

### **The Construction of National Capitalism**

We already know that when we speak of building socialism in a single country, we are actually speaking of building national capitalism. That is what Stalin built with his five-year plans and the processes of forced collectivisation: 8.5 to 9 million deaths due to the general famine, which gives us an idea of what this mass primitive accumulation of capital entailed [21]. All the states where so-called “really-existing socialism” triumphed are but examples of this development of a national capitalism, where all the categories of capital are maintained: value, commodities, money, wage labour, the logic of enterprise, and where important quotas of private property also prevail within the countryside, for

example, in the kolkhozes (farm cooperatives) or in a multitude of subcontractors who relate through agreements with the state enterprises to provide them with commodities. A capitalist logic that is less competitive than that of the West and which ultimately led to the collapse of most of the “really existing socialist” economies, which were unable to adapt to the greater efficiency and productivity of the United States. Other Stalinist capitalist economies such as China and Vietnam have been able to evolve. But these are always capitalist economies; economies that maintain the basic categories of the only type of capitalism that exists, beyond the peculiarities that may occur in the reproduction of the same abstract categories.

### **The Rhythms of Work: Stakhanovism**

One of the aspects in which capitalist logic is most visible in the Stalinist countries is the brutal working rates demanded of the proletariat. The primitive accumulation of capital, which gave meaning to Stalin’s five-year plans, involved a huge concentration of piecework. The construction of an entire infrastructure of capital goods to increase Russian competitiveness was done on the basis of the massive extraction of absolute surplus value from the Russian proletariat. It was done by means of infernal working hours—from 15-16 hours a day, according to H.

Schwartz—by piecework wages for 50-60% of the proletarians in the mines and big industries, rising to 90% in 1928 for the workers in the latter, and by increasing the scale of wages to 17 different degrees. There were also work brigades and model workers as “labour heroes” like Stakhanov, the idealised figure of the proletarian who exploited himself at wild rates and in return received a higher wage. Meanwhile, foodstuffs accounted for 40-50% of family income, and housing prices tripled between 1921 and 1925, so that the population had on average only 6 square metres per head.[22]

The penal code is fully adapted to this capitalist logic, where the defence of bourgeois property, whether private or state owned, is central. Anyone can be imprisoned from the age of 12 and the penalty inflicted on anyone who steals is higher than the penalty for kidnapping a child. The changes in the family code were equally brutal, generating a counter-revolutionary involution both in women’s rights and culminating in the implementation of laws persecuting homosexuality during the period in which Stalin was in power [23], through a decree of law issued by Stalin in 1936 and the family edict of 1944.

But let us continue with some of the offences covered by the Soviet penal codes: the so-called “five ears law” of August 1932, which condemned to death those guilty of petty theft to avoid starvation; the anti-labour decrees of 1940, which likened any delay in work of more than 20 minutes to an act of sabotage; the decree of 4 June 1947, derived from the law of 7 August 1932, which sent tens of thousands of women to the gulag for petty theft of milk or bread to feed their starving children.[24]

Food for machines, hunger for mankind is a phrase that perfectly sums up the logic of capitalism, a logic that the USSR carried out with a relentless repressive dynamic. Its capitalist character is clearly seen in how it prioritises the accumulation of the means of production over the production of consumer goods:

	1913	1928	1932	1937	1940
<b>Means of production</b>	44.3%	32.8%	53.3%	57.8%	61%
<b>Consumer Goods</b>	55.7%	67.2%	46.7%	42.2%	39%

Thus, the consumption of milk per person per year in 1928 was 189 litres, while in 1937 it was only 132 litres, while the consumption of meat per person per year was 27.5 kg in 1928, while in 1937 it was only 14 kg. All this gives an idea of the standard of living of the Russian proletariat in the “fatherland of socialism”. In other countries of so-called “really existing socialism” we will witness similar phenomena, as is shown by the constant class struggle in defence of immediate needs which runs through all countries: one need only think of Berlin in 1953 to Poznań in 1956, where proletarian outbreaks occurred because of a loss of purchasing power of up to 30-40% in the case of the revolt in the German capital.

### **State Totalitarianism**

The USSR in Stalin’s time was a veritable concentration camp. But as we have seen, we cannot separate this concentration camp from its material bases, a counter-revolution against the revolutionary movement of 1917 and a brutal affirmation of the primitive accumulation of capital. The USSR was a concentration camp that was deployed through repression and the brutal accumulation of capital. If in 1928 in the USSR there were 30,000 inmates in prisons and labour camps, there were already 5 million in 1933-1935 and 9 million in 1939. The Stalinist gulags are the expression of an obvious class

violence against the proletariat and of a precise ideology dedicated to justifying the accumulation of capital in the 1930s, an ideology which was therefore anti-communist. In order to push through the five-year plan in June 1929, it was decided that with more than 3 years of imprisonment one goes directly to the labour camps run by the GPU. In 1934 the gulags and their system of concentration camps were administratively created. The sentences could be for making an unauthorised change of occupation, violation of passport regulations, ill-defined hooliganism, parasitism or profiteering, damage to or theft of socialist (read: State) property. The reasons for these convictions reveal the true class nature of this state.

Between 1930 and 1953, 1,800,000 people perished. This does not include government executions, for example, the 750,000 between August 1937 and November 1938, during the period of the Great Purges and the Moscow Trials: these 750,000 executions amount to an average of 50,000 a month, or 1,600 a day. One percent of adult Russians were murdered in cold blood by the “classic”, execution-style shot in the back of the head, to which must be added 800,000 people sentenced to more than 10 years of hard labour

in the gulag. In 1951, two years before Stalin's death, 2,700,000 people remained in the gulag.

The repressive fever can be explained by counter-revolutionary voracity. Stalin's regime knew it was weak and, above all, it had to erase any kind of opposition reminiscent of the revolutionary past. To do this, it also had to surround itself with the submissive militant Stalinist anthropology of which we have spoken above. Stalin did not have it all his own way. At the 17th Congress of the CPSU (1934), 292 delegates crossed his name out of the Central Committee. Stalin was the least voted candidate on the single list for the Central Committee. Of the 63 members of the Electoral Commission which organised the Congress, 60 were killed during the purges. The various trials are not only in Moscow and in the USSR, or against internationalist revolutionaries in all parts of the world—from Spain to Greece, from Italy to France, from China to Vietnam—but within the ranks of the Stalinist Third International itself. As we said earlier, Stalin massacred as many KPD leaders as Hitler and even handed many of them over to him so that the German strongman could finish the job. He exterminated the leadership of the Polish party—with the authorised signature of Togliatti and with the commendable work

of the anti-fascist Dimitrov, who organised the appointments in his office, where the official executioner of the time, Djezov, was to be found—as well as almost all the Latvian and Turkish exiles, 2,000 Italian Communists, 1,000 Bulgarian Communists, 800 Yugoslavs, etc. Nobody in the middle or upper echelons of international Stalinism was unaware of such a degree of infamy, an infamy that molded a certain submissive militant and servant of the counter-revolution.[25]

### **Voluntarism**

A profound idealism cloaks the theory of Stalinist counter-revolution. The idea that socialism can be built in a single country, even if it is isolated, is already indicative of the subjectivism that constantly permeates this conception. Stalin went so far as to say that to reject the theory of socialism in one country was to have no confidence in the power of the Russian proletariat and peasantry. His opponents would be nothing but defeatists giving in to Western capitalism. The apology for the power of great men, of brilliant leaders, of the “fathers of the nation”, is therefore also at the heart of the theory of counter-revolution. The leaders are capable of everything through the force of their will. The proletariat owes everything to them. That is why canonisation and the cult of personality are elements that are intrinsically born from the very

being of Stalinism itself. It is not only Stalin; all national-“communist” parties tend to idolise their leaders, from Dolores Ibárruri to Ceaucescu, from Kim Il Sung to Ho Chi Minh. It would in fact be one of Mao’s responses to Khrushchev: the reaffirmation that Stalin is a great Marxist-Leninist [26]. Hence the stereotyped phrases in Stalinism that speak of “Mao Tse Tung Thought” or “Gonzalo Thought” to allude to the Peruvian leader of the Shining Path, Abimael Guzman. The cult of personality is a constant feature of Stalinism and derives from its very counter-revolutionary political essence. The elimination of the theoretical bases of Marx’s work, of his study of the categories of capital and communism as a negation and dissolution of these categories, demands that the criterion of truth be placed in the tactical and brilliant intelligence of the leader of the day. What is important is no longer the critical and rigorous study of the anatomy of bourgeois society; no, what matters is instead what the brilliant leader says, who—as in the case of Stalin—knows everything, like a deity made flesh.

That is why it is so important to return as communists to the theoretical doctrine Marx put forth for the study of class societies and their dissolution in communism. This theoretical doctrine is based on the materialist

conception of history, on the critique of political economy and on the method of materialist dialectics. That is our impersonal foundation and not the all-knowing words of some “great man”.

### **The Subjugation of the Communist International to Moscow’s Directives**

We have already seen that another characteristic of early Stalinism is the inversion of the pyramid. Everything rests on an apex which decides everything and everyone. That is what explains the Communist International’s transformation from a world organ of the proletariat in struggle into an apparatus at the service of Russia’s imperialist interests. We have already alluded to various examples above: from England in 1926 to China in 1927, from Germany in the 1930s, to the whole policy of the USSR during and after the Second World War.

We would like to elucidate this same fact in the case of the Spanish Civil War. In this episode, the PCE was not an autonomous party which made its decisions on the basis of its own analysis of the situation. No, the PCE was a party directed from Moscow by envoys from the Comintern: first the Argentine Codovilla and then Palmiro Togliatti (who calls himself Alfredo from 1937 onwards) seconded by other emissaries such as

the Bulgarian Stepanov, the Hungarian Erno Gerö—the sinister ‘Pedro’ who will act against the genuine revolutionaries in Barcelona in 1936/37—or the NKVD agent who would make Nin and other militants disappear, Orlov. Stalin feared what was happening on the ground in Spain. He feared, above all, a revolutionary upsurge of the Spanish proletariat. He feared that the revival of the authentic traditions of internationalism would call into question the counter-revolution under way. Hence the importance it attaches to the intervention in Spain. It was not an example of altruistic solidarity, as naïve leftists believe. No, it was a conscious intervention to leave the class struggle where it was, on the terrain of counter-revolution, at Midnight in the Century as Victor Serge’s novel of the same name pointed out. Stalin’s intentions were counter-revolutionary and were thanked as such by all Spanish republican and bourgeois politicians. Moreover, it was explicit. It is enough to read Stalin’s letter in 1936 to the Spanish Prime Minister of the Second Republic, the socialist Largo Caballero:

“We consider it our duty, within our means, to help the Spanish government, which is leading the struggle of all the workers, of all Spanish democracy, against the military and fascist clique, which is nothing other

than an instrument of the international fascist forces. [...] The Spanish revolution is following paths which in many respects are very different from those followed by Russia. This is determined by the different historical and geographical social conditions, the needs of the international situation, which are very different from those which the Russian revolution had to face. It is quite possible that the parliamentary path in Spain will prove to be a more effective procedure of revolutionary development than it was in Russia... Special attention should be paid to the peasants, who are so important in an agrarian country like Spain. It would be desirable to enact agrarian and fiscal legislation to protect the interests of these labourers. It would also be desirable to attract these peasants to the army and to form with them, in the rear of the Fascist armies, guerrilla groups. [...] It would also be advisable to attract the small and middling bourgeoisie of the cities to the side of the Government or, at any rate, to give them the possibility of adopting an attitude of neutrality which would favour the Government, protecting them against attempts at confiscation and assuring them, as far as possible, freedom of trade ... There is no reason to reject the leaders of the Republican parties, but, on the contrary, we should attract them, bring them closer and associate them with the common effort of the Government ... It is necessary to prevent the enemies

of Spain from seeing in it a Communist Republic, thus preventing their declared intervention, which would constitute the most serious danger for Republican Spain.... The occasion should be sought to declare through the press that the Madrid Government will not tolerate any attack on the property and legitimate interests of those foreigners that reside in Spain...”.

With all that we have been pointing out throughout this booklet, everything fits together: socialism in one country leads to a nationalist vision, which separates some revolutions from others; the stagism which reduces the revolution to the defence of the bourgeois and capitalist political framework; the geopolitical interests to reach agreements with bourgeois and capitalist powers. The apparent contradictions of the Stalinist discourse fit perfectly. There is no separation between its anti-fascism and the purges that exterminate “friends” and enemies everywhere. There is no separation or contradiction. It is always the same programme that operates: the uncompromising defence of the bourgeois and capitalist order, the implacable defence of its interests as a capitalist and imperialist power. To this end, it uses the proletarians all over the world as cannon fodder, and the “communist” parties as instruments with which to act within the national politics of the various bourgeois

states. Socialism in one country is the theoretical justification that allowed the counter-revolutionary edifice to stand, so it is vital to clarify what it really means: it is the theory of the capitalist counter-revolution, the red flag of capital.

### **National Roads to Socialism**

Stalinism carries within itself the seeds of disintegration. The defence of socialism in a single country implies, as we have seen, breaking up the unitary movement of the world revolution. The interests of every revolutionary and proletarian movement are generally thought of and understood in narrowly national terms. The USSR, as a capitalist and imperialist state, uses the Comintern for its own ends, but the countertendencies, whereby each communist party tends to emancipate itself from Moscow's control and seeks its own sources of power, are always a lurking danger. Stalin himself would do away with the Comintern in 1943 to ingratiate himself with his allies in World War II, to show them what they already knew: that the Third International was no revolutionary instrument. After the beginning of the Cold War and the extension of the USSR's imperialist camp to Eastern Europe, Stalin again rebuilt the Comintern, now under the name of Cominform (1947). But 1947 saw the first break within Stalinism: Tito's Yugoslavia. Josip Broz Tito had seized power

by his own means in Yugoslavia and wanted to assert that newly gained power, even at the cost of confronting Stalin. A relentless struggle would soon break out in all the communist parties of the world. Stalin's most beloved lieutenant, Tito, became the symbol of the enemy overnight in 1948. Tito defended himself by imprisoning Stalin's followers in Yugoslavia, locking up Italian national-“communists”, who were very numerous in the former country because of the existence of Italian-populated areas, in concentration camps. Stalin carried out a relentless persecution of alleged or potential Titoists within the communist parties. The trials returned, this time not in Moscow or Barcelona—against the POUM or the Trotskyists—but within Eastern Europe, which was under the control of the Russian army from 1950 to 1952. After Stalin's death and Khrushchev's confession of the errors of the personality cult at the 20th Congress of the CPSU (1956) [27], there was again a partial reconciliation between the League of Yugoslav Communists and the CPSU.

But new *casus belli* of disintegration arose within the counter-revolution [28], and here we are alluding to the Sino-Soviet conflict after Stalin's death. Once again, the cause is the same: Mao and his ilk want to assert the sources of their own political power

conquered during the civil war between 1946 and 1949. In addition, throughout the first five years of the 1960s, numerous territorial conflicts take place, causing thousands of armed incidents between the two armies. This is the real cause behind Mao's Stalinist orthodoxy, as opposed to the social revisionism of the Russians, as Mao, who had previously approved of Khrushchev's speech after the 20th Congress, had earlier said. It was only after the territorial incidents—and the need to distance himself from the Russian imperialist bloc—that he took the opportunity to break with Moscow in the name of Stalinist orthodoxy. And so, the denunciation of the personality cult at the 20th Congress of the CPSU is no longer “a great and courageous struggle” (The People's Daily, official newspaper of the CCP in 1956) because in another article in the same newspaper in 1963 it is stated that “Khrushchev covers Stalin with insults”. What has happened between now and then is the imperialist conflict between Russia and China. Mao comes to Stalin's defence with an aim towards defending his own capitalist interests.

As for the rest, Mao was a theoretical and practical Stalinist who always continued the teachings of his tutor, advocating socialism in one country and bourgeois stagism in the face of revolution:

*“Can a communist, who is an internationalist, be at the same time a patriot? We maintain that not only can he be, but that he must be. The concrete content of patriotism is determined by historical conditions. There is the “patriotism” of the Japanese aggressors and of Hitler, and there is our patriotism. The Communists must resolutely oppose the “patriotism” of the Japanese aggressors and Hitler [...]. Therefore, we Chinese Communists must combine patriotism with internationalism. We are both internationalists and patriots, and our slogan is “to fight the aggressor in defence of the fatherland”. For us, defeatism is a crime, and striving for victory in the War of Resistance is an inescapable duty. For only by fighting in defence of the motherland can we defeat the aggressors and achieve national liberation, and only by achieving national liberation will it be possible for the proletariat and all the working people to win their own emancipation. The victory of China and the defeat of the imperialists invading it will be a help to the peoples of the other countries. Hence, in the wars of national liberation, patriotism is the application of internationalism. For this reason, every Communist must deploy all his initiative, march courageously and resolutely to the battlefield of the*

*war of national liberation and aim his guns against the Japanese aggressors.” [29]*

As we see, the struggle for communist revolution dissolves into a patriotic war of national liberation directed towards a New Democracy where, in Mao’s words, the main contradiction is no longer between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, but between us, the people, and imperialism. That us, the people, is made up of the bloc of the four national classes, including the bourgeoisie, which are represented by the four yellow stars on the official flag of the present Chinese bourgeois state. Mao’s whole theoretical rhetoric: his idea of New Democracy, the existence of principal and secondary contradictions which change according to circumstances, his “internationalism” which led him to support regimes like Reza Pahlevi’s or Pinochet’s, etc., make Mao a worthy heir of Stalin [30].

We wrote at the beginning of this pamphlet that we should not make an equality between Stalinism, as a theoretical and political current of counter-revolution, with the figure of Stalin. Stalinism is a counter-revolutionary and bourgeois programme of building “socialism” (capitalism) in one country and of alliance

with the national bourgeoisie under the red flag of the proletariat. That is its mystification: a nationalist and inter-class mystification [31]. Hence it seems to us of special importance in this section to understand that by Stalinism we do not refer only to those who explicitly mention Stalin approvingly. We are referring to a programme characterised by nationalism—which masquerades as a class discourse—and by the alliance, logically enough, with bourgeois factions. This programme is shared by numerous currents today which, beyond their differences, are heirs to the same programme: from the Maoists to the Spanish Stalinists of the PCPE-PCTE, from the heirs of Eurocommunism [32], such as Podemos or the official communist parties almost everywhere, to Roberto Vaquero and his ilk, who are misguided followers of Enver Hoxha.

### **An Ethical Inversion**

Communism is a question of content and not of form. But, as we have already seen at length in this text, content and methods cannot be separated. Communist militancy pushes forward, in a practical way, the struggles of the proletariat and always defends its general and historical perspective and interests. It is the expression, at every historical moment, of that long chain which, since the emergence of the species from cooperation, seeks to overcome the exploitation

and oppression of class societies in order to achieve integral communism. It is the expression of the tendency of the proletariat to constitute itself as a class and a party, as an organ of the class which, in coherence with its programme, tries to prefigure, from now, the communist society for which we are fighting.

We find ourselves at the extreme opposite of Stalinist duplicity, of its corridor manoeuvres, of imposed discipline, of servility to the great leaders, of concomitant personalism, of purges and massacres in the name of the glorious future—a future consisting of the same social forms and principles as capital. This question seems to us particularly important because it draws an impassable barrier between revolution and counter-revolution, and because it establishes this coherence between methods and programmes as an important element of the programme for communism.

## CONCLUSION

We have now reached the end of this text. The central aim is to be able to encourage processes of clarification and theoretical enlightenment about the nature of communism. We speak of communism as a real movement and a living programme, and not as a name that has been expropriated by its greatest enemies, those who relentlessly contributed to the destruction of the revolutionary wave of 100 years ago. To do this, we have tried to consistently use our theoretical method, a materialist view of history that explains and makes the reason for the counter-revolution understandable, the programme that defines it and opposes it to communism.

Today, fortunately, Stalinism has mostly confessed its bourgeois nature. The multitudinous parties which organised tens of millions of proletarians in all parts of the world have largely collapsed in on themselves. We find ourselves in the present with currents that have a minuscule influence in relation to the past. This is an element which seems to us to be very important for the future. Every revolution brings about a counter-revolution. The future revolutions that will inevitably arise from the ongoing contradictions of a capitalism that is reaching its internal limits will not

have the powerful enemy that Stalinism was in the past. Its triumph allowed a political and ideological counter-revolution that only began to erode in the 1960s and 1970s, a counter-revolutionary epoch from which we believe we are slowly beginning to emerge. We are in a liminal period between past and future [33], a period tending towards social polarisation due to the material contradictions of capitalism, which generates not only mass protest movements, but also causes the emergence of small class minorities trying to orient themselves in a revolutionary direction. The aim of this writing is to encourage this orientation in an authentically revolutionary sense.

### **Barbaria (Spain)**

[1] See this article in the virtual library at barbaria.net.

[2] V.I. Lenin, Report on the tactics of the CP in Russia, July 5, 1921.

[3] Once, at a party meeting, David Ryazanov, the Russian Marxologist, said to him: “Stop it, Koba! Don’t make a fool of yourself. Everyone knows very well that theory is not your forte”, when Stalin was criticising Trotsky.

[4] See in this regard, among others, Leon de Mattis’ text on communist measures:

<https://colectivobrumario.wordpress.com/2015/12/22/1-as-medidas-comunistas-leon-de-mattis>.

[5] Quote from an article of Bilan entitled, Party, International and State.

[6] For this purpose Stalin uses Lenin’s texts which emphasise this need for endurance and the measures to be applied in order to take steps towards socialism, to create the industrial basis for socialism. In any case, Lenin never speaks of the possibility of building socialism in Russia as he is very clear that socialism means classless society. Even when he is more equivocal, as in the case of his text On Cooperation (1923), Lenin speaks of an alliance between workers and peasants to further socialist construction. Obviously, a society with workers and peasants, with

commodities and money, remains a capitalist society. Lenin knew perfectly well, and he repeats it constantly, that the triumph of the international revolution is the sine qua non for the triumph of the Russian revolution. What he wonders is what to do until the revolution breaks out in other countries (see, the Report on the Tax in Kind, 1921).

[7] This is what Bordiga affirms in his text Dialogue with the Dead.

[8] To understand these debates within the Communist International, which already reflect the difficulty of the Bolshevik majority to defend a revolutionary intransigence in the face of the ebb of the revolutionary wave, see our text, The Past of our Being on barbaria.net.

[9] Cf. in barbaria.net [Audio] Against Trade Unions

[10] See in this respect the important text by Vercesi, The Tactic of the Comintern (1926-1940) published in Prometeo between 1946 and 1947, which gives precious programmatic indications.

[11] On Trotsky's idea of permanent revolution and the limits of this policy see our articles on the decadence of capitalism, permanent revolution and double revolution on barbaria.net.

[12] Data from Pierre Broué in his *Histoire de l'Internationale Communiste*.

[13] In this respect we refer to the text by Vercesi, already mentioned, on *The Tactic of the Comintern*. And to the excellent booklet of *Programma Comunista* where the connivances between the KPD and German nationalism are explained in detail. And, like all this, it coexists with the development of a national-bolshevik current:  
[https://internationalcommunistparty.org/images/pdf/testi/Nazionalismo\\_e\\_internazionalismo.pdf](https://internationalcommunistparty.org/images/pdf/testi/Nazionalismo_e_internazionalismo.pdf).

[14] Manuilsky, Russian leader of the Comintern

[15] Dimitrov, speech at the 7th Congress of the Comintern

[16] Pierre Broué in his *Histoire de l'Internationale Communiste* gives the number of KPD leaders killed by Hitler and Stalin and the accounts do not favour Hitler.

[17] This, like the two other articles by Vercesi that we are going to comment on, can be found in the section of our page dedicated to the library of historical texts.

[18] In this connection, see also *The Past of our Being*.

[19] Litvinov, Foreign Commissar under Stalin, spoke before Khrushchev of the “peaceful coexistence of capitalism and socialism”. As we can see, the successes of capitalist logic were already in full swing.

[20] As Bordiga later commented: “The historical situation, whereby the proletarian state had only been constituted in one country, while in the others it had not succeeded in conquering power, made it difficult for the Russian section to find the clear organic solution of holding the helm of the world organisation. The [Communist] Left was the first to notice that the behaviour of the Russian state, both in its internal economy and in international relations, was beginning to show deviations, and it also warned that a difference would be established between the policy of the historic party, that is, of all the revolutionary Communists of the world, and the policy of a formal party defending the interests of the contingent Russian state”, *Considerations on the Organic Activity of the Party when the General Situation is Historically Unfavourable*.

Thus, inevitably and in perfect logic with the determinism of historical materialism, the Russian party became a leash of the Russian state and its

hunger for capital accumulation. Obviously, the battle that had to be fought, and that is why the counter-revolution is political and was not inevitable, was to save the party and the International from the uncompromising defence of the communist programme. An isolated revolution cannot maintain the class dictatorship over time. Recognition of this fact by revolutionaries is the main lesson we can draw in order to avoid the worst of counter-revolutions: that which clothes the bourgeoisie with the instruments created by our class in struggle. This is why Bilan argues forcefully that counter-revolution is political and ideological first and foremost. The failure of the class dictatorship was inevitable, the degeneration of the party was not. And it is in this logic that we communists of today and tomorrow must prepare ourselves.

[21] On the data, see the book by Graziano Giusti *I conti con nemico*. On the capitalist character of the economy of the former USSR, see our booklet *The Capitalism of Stalin* on [barbaria.net](http://barbaria.net).

[22] All these data are taken from the magnificent work by Graziano Giusti, *I conti col nemico*. Giusti is a comrade of the internationalist communist group *Pagine Marxiste*.

[23] The 1933 Soviet penal code sentenced the crime of male homosexuality to up to 5 years of forced labour in prison according to article 121, unlike the 1922 code which had decriminalised it.

[24] See the book by Jean Jacques Marie, *Le rapport Khrouchtchev*.

[25] The data are taken from Pierre Broué's book already quoted. We would only add that this type of militant of the counter-revolution is the diametric opposite of the tens of thousands of communists, anarchists and revolutionaries in general who courageously opposed the counter-revolution. The confessions that the executioners and judges extracted, only sometimes by means of brutal torture, have not prevented the collapse of these infamous regimes from bringing us closer to the true confession: the capitalist character of these states.

[26] In October 1961, Chu En-Lai placed a wreath on Stalin's sarcophagus dedicated to "the great Marxist-Leninist Joseph Vissarionovitch Stalin". This was in response to the criticisms that Khrushchev had been making since the 20th Congress. What we are interested in emphasising is that the Stalinist personality cult stems from this personalist and voluntarist vision, which is typical of bourgeois politics.

[27] In reality, an attempt to reform the Stalinist capitalist regime, which was already showing signs of a deep crisis.

[28] The falsifiers of yesterday and today refer to the camp of counter-revolution as the International Communist Movement. We think it has been made clear in this pamphlet why it seems important to us to call a spade a spade and not to confuse reality with denominations that deny it.

[29] Mao, *The Role of the CPC in the National War*. The italics are ours

[30] We cannot devote a more extensive study to the critique of that counter-revolutionary Mao, because this pamphlet is already extensive enough. We would like to devote ourselves to it in the not-too-distant future, because his figure continues to cause deep mystifications among young generations of newly radicalising proletarians.

[31] A programme different from the official programme of the evolutionist and reformist social democracy of the Second International. The latter aimed at overcoming capitalism by gradualist means and based on a class programme formally different from that of the bourgeoisie. This was obviously a bourgeois programme in its content and form, to which our comrades of the time gave the response it

deserved. We simply want to point out that the reformism of yesteryear was more serious, as a comrade who fought both counter-revolutionary currents once said.

[32] Eurocommunism is the final break of the Western CPs—in particular the Italian, Spanish and French parties—with the USSR due to the manifest crisis of Stalinism, a crisis that weakens the very political strength of these national parties and accentuates the search for their own independent path to “socialism”.

[33] On this subject, see on our web site, our booklet, *Ten Notes on the Revolutionary Perspective* and other texts.

# **Pamphlet by The League of Internationalist Communists**

[Internationalistcommunists.org](http://Internationalistcommunists.org)