BORDIGA'S THESIS OF 1951

INTRODUCTION

Bordiga produced two important theses which summed up the politics of his organisation in 1951. The purpose of the critique of his approach will be to try and determine whether the limitations outlined in part one of this article have been overcome, or are instead confirmed and strengthened. In this manner we will try and establish whether Bordiga's standpoint has become compatible with that of the principal forces within the Fourth International, or even provides a more intransigent approach that means it has become a genuine expression of the elaboration of revolutionary politics. If it is possible to outline how the perspective of Bordiga is principled, this would suggest that its present forces could become an integral part of the formation of a new international. However, if from our studies, it is necessary to reluctantly conclude that Bordiga's standpoint is still influenced by the limitations of previous positions, then it may be important to consider that its politics remain opposed to this task of promoting the development of an organisation dedicated to the task of world revolution. However, the possible elaboration of such a harsh conclusion is not based on any sentimental defence of any of the tendencies that have been created by the Fourth International. We maintain that the necessity to explain the post-war expansion of Stalinism led to immediate crisis within the Fourth International, and the result was the unsatisfactory view that Stalinism had created deformed workers states. This implied that Stalinism could act in a progressive manner. This standpoint led to opportunism, which took the extreme form that Stalinism could lead the struggle against world capitalism in the form of the perspective of war-revolution. There was a partial struggle against this opportunism, which was led by the International Committee, but this possibility to develop a genuine alternative was ended when the US Socialist Workers Party re-united with the opportunist current in terms of agreement about Cuba. The conclusion was that a petty-bourgeois current could carry out proletarian revolution.

A genuine opposition to this current was never built, and instead various sectarian formations emerged based on the prestige of individual leaders. Thus by 1960, the era of the Fourth International was over. The long arduous task began to re-create the Fourth International. However, the many groups dedicated to this task have not been able to avoid either opportunist or ultra-left errors. The major promising development was the creation of the Workers Power group, but this was limited by its attachment to the call for a Fifth International, and it has been undermined by a major split. Furthermore, it lacked a regime of genuine inner-party democracy and was very hierarchical and opposed to anyone who displayed innovative ideas. Consequently, in the present situation there is no organisation that has emerged that has been able to combine principled politics with a democratic structure. Instead various elitist organisations have resulted, and these often seem indifferent to tackling the issues generated by the class struggle. This means there is no Fourth International, but instead only an idea continues that the traditions of the International Left Opposition can be re-created. The claims of both orthodox currents, and of unorthodox trends like the International Socialists, are problematical. There are no authoritative leaders and organisations. Indifference to theory is rife, and instead a limited activism is promoted. However, we believe that Trotskyism represents the most principled basis to re-build revolutionary politics despite these chronic difficulties. In this manner we are guided by Trotskyism in our study of the rival ideas of Bordiga. Our major task is to promote a broad International that is open to most tendencies. In this spirit we contribute this work on the 1951 Theses of Bordiga.

We have already established the ultra-left limitations of the Bordiga of the mid 1920's Hence it would seem to be a futile task to study his documents of 1951. However we consider that this is a premature criticism because it is still possible to suggest that the Bordiga of the early 1950's has corrected some of these problems, and so made a contribution towards the development of principled Marxist politics. This point is important to make because the limitations of the Fourth International, and its various rival groupings, are generally of a right-centrist character. Hence the development of authentic Marxist politics, even from a somewhat unorthodox origin can only be welcomed. The question is can the views of Bordiga contribute to the revival of Marxist politics in international terms?

THE CHARACTERISTIC THESES OF BORDIGA

Bordiga's 'Characteristic Theses of the Party', begin with a section on theory. (1) He re-affirms the emphasis on the role of the party in the revolutionary process and comments: “The class party is the indispensable organ for the proletarian revolutionary struggle. The Communist Party consists of the most advanced and resolute part of the proletariat, unites the efforts of the working masses transforming their struggles for group interests and contingent issues into the general struggle for the revolutionary emancipation of the proletariat.”(2) In this general form, the approach of Bordiga is acceptable. He outlines the importance of the Communist Party in terms of leadership and strategy for the development of the class struggle. He is making the point that the Communist Party is vital if various struggles are to acquire a conscious aim of socialism and the overthrow of capitalism. This standpoint is a welcome alternative to the Fourth International's perspective that objective conditions have become the most important basis for bringing about social change. Instead of this dilution of the commitment to the importance of the party, Bordiga re-affirms his view that the role of the party is crucial for prompting the unity and consciousness of the working class, and so provides a sense of historical mission to the specific struggles that occur within capitalism. He outlines how the role of the party is crucial for uniting theory with practice, and in this manner creating the subjective and objective conditions for the possibility to persuade the workers that their interests are compatible with the task to overthrow capitalism. It could be argued that Bordiga's approach has an element of ultimatism, or demands that the proletariat act against the present system. But his formulations are careful to avoid any possible interpretation in this manner. Instead he is merely suggesting that in order for class struggle to achieve a higher and more conscious level the intervention of the party is vital. The historical lessons of the class struggle would seem to confirm the validity of Bordiga's approach.

However, Bordiga still upholds the view that after the overthrow of capitalism, the aim should be the creation of the party state: “It is the party alone which therefore represents, organises and directs the proletarian dictatorship.”(3) This perspective seems to represent a dogmatic denial of the lessons of the experience of the USSR. However revolutionary a party is, it will be likely to construct an elite dictatorship if it acquires sole and exclusive political power. It may claim to be ruling on behalf of the working class, and for a period of time this may be true, but ultimately its rule over society becomes expressed as an unaccountable dictatorship. The only manner in which this possibility can be avoided is to have a system based on multi-party democracy. In contrast the exclusive power of the party will result in the rule of a repressive bureaucracy. It is also necessary to develop a political system based on the genuine participation of working people in order to ensure its popular character, and the economy should be based on the importance of the self-administration of the producers. Only in this manner can an economy be organised which is based on the principles of democratic planning. In contrast, Bordiga suggests the proletarian state should organise the economy. We know from historical experience that this situation could result in a bureaucratic social formation extracting a surplus from the producers, and imposing a centralised economy that is unable to meet the demands of the consumers. In order to avoid this situation it is necessary that genuinely democratic planning be generated in which the state only intervenes in order to encourage the success of workers management of the economy, and to therefore create a truly democratic plan. In this context the state does not instruct the process of economic activity, and is instead a form of encouragement of the initiative of the producers. This situation could avoid the possibility that the state imposes its imperatives onto the economy. Instead the state provides general guidelines, but the producers would have the ability and freedom to reject them and instead be able to establish their own understanding of how production should be promoted. However, despite the limitations of Bordiga's approach he is not suggesting that a state which is not revolutionary, such as a deformed workers state could create a form of genuine planning. Only a truly revolutionary state can create a credible and authentic socialist economy and society. This is a principled understanding despite the dogmatism in his approach.

Bordiga argues that the task of the overthrow of capitalism means that alliances are not principled, including with the reformist and pseudo proletarian parties.(4) This approach could be viewed as sectarian and dogmatic, but Bordiga is suggesting that the International Communist Party has to build itself on the basis of its own political independence and integrity. This standpoint was welcome in the period when the Fourth International is accommodating to Stalinism, and was often accepting the dilution of its programme in order to create a united front with the forces of Social Democracy. The point is that Bordiga's approach could be considered to be constructive if it is not applied inflexibly, and so the united front is not ruled to be unprincipled in all circumstances. What Bordia is implying in a perceptive manner is that Stalinism has not become progressive because of its apparent overthrow of capitalism in Eastern Europe. Also the Communist Parties of Italy and France have contributed to the stabilisation of capitalism. In these circumstances only the most independent political position can uphold the integrity of the oppositional revolutionary forces. The counter-revolutionary role of Social Democracy and Stalinism in promoting the stabilisation of capitalism, and has opposed the possibility to transform world imperialist war into international proletarian revolution. This development indicates the reactionary character of these organisations. Hence Bordiga seems right to rule out the possibility of a united front with these organisations under these reactionary circumstances. Instead the party must rely on its own political integrity if it is to grow and establish relations with the working class.

In a perceptive manner, Bordiga outlines how the various organisations of the working class have in the recent period accommodated to support for national defence of the given imperialist power. He implies that only a perspective of international revolution is the principled alternative to this standpoint. Only the intransigent development of the class struggle led by the genuine Communist party can provide an alternative to accommodation to the forces of bourgeois democracy. Only the development of militant class struggle led by the party can provide an alternative to the influence of the reactionary forces of Social Democracy and Stalinism. In this context, Bordiga outlines how only principled support for international revolutionary struggle can provide the basis for an isolated workers state to avoid the problem of degeneration: “The defence of the proletarian regime against the ever present dangers of degeneration is possible only if the proletarian state is always in solidarity with the international struggle of the working class of each country against its own bourgeoisie, its state, and its army, this struggle permits of no respite even in wartime. This co-ordination can only be secured if the world communist party controls the politics and programme of the states where the working class has vanquished.”(5)

In other words Bordiga has outlined, as opposed to the opportunist Pabloite theory of war revolution, the principled necessity for genuine world revolutionary struggle by the proletariat as the only historically progressive alternative to the situation of the crisis of capitalism. He has outlined that the working class should support the intransigence of the genuine Communist party and not support national defence of imperialism, or follow the opportunism of Social Democracy or Stalinism. In order to avoid national degeneration of a workers state its major policies should be guided by the influence of the world communist party. This standpoint represents the basis for the development of a principled perspective of world revolution, and contends that the working class can only establish genuine political independence and the ability to oppose the influence of bourgeois democracy by its support for a principled Communist Party. Such an approach is a serious lesson that Bordiga has made in relation to the events of world war two and its aftermath. But his overall lessons need not be diluted and undermined.

In the section of the tasks of the party, Bordiga rightly refers to the important role of the party in the class struggle, but his strategy is dogmatic in that it includes the necessity of civil war. The problem with this standpoint is that it is the very working class that the party is attempting to influence will be discouraged by the prospect of violent struggle for socialism. Instead the party should develop a programme of peace as part of its strategy for the overthrow of capitalism. This approach need not dilute its principles and willingness to oppose the existing system. Instead the party can mobilise the majority of the working class in terms of the aims of peace and socialism. However, Bordiga is right to suggest that the role of the party is an indispensable aspect of the process of opposition to and overthrow of capitalism. He suggests that the party is the most suitable instrument for articulating the strategy for bringing about the demise of capitalism, but to suggest that the party can understand 'clearly the general objectives of the historic movement of the proletariat in the whole world' is an exaggeration. (6) This view implies that the process of change to socialism is rigid, predictable and unchanging. Such a rigid view denies the uncertainties of the class struggle and the necessity to be flexible in relation to the fluctuating character of events. Indeed it could be argued that a successful party is one that can interpret new developments in the most profound and novel manner. Hence in this context, Bordiga is wrong to suggest that the importance of the role of factory organisations, or occupations, is not part of the strategy of the class struggle. It may be under concrete conditions that the occupation of factories occurs, and so indicates the necessity for their development in the process of the overthrow of the domination of capitalism. The role of the party in this context will be to encourage the process of factory occupations and to facilitate the workers becoming conscious of the possibility to realise the potential of that situation in terms of the formation of a workers government. The point is Bordiga is being inflexible when he implies that certain forms of class activity cannot promote the possibility to overthrow capitalism. Thankfully, Bordiga does recognise the potential of party work within the trade unions, but he seems reticent to imply that this means the trade unions could potentially have an important role in the overthrow of capitalism.

Bordiga rightly suggests that the formation of the Paris Commune put the issue of proletarian revolution on the agenda in Europe. The possibility of alliances with the national bourgeoisie in that era became unprincipled. But the development of the revisionism of Bernstein undermines the aim of proletarian revolution and instead articulates the opposing strategy of reformism. The outbreak of the first world war results in opportunism and support for the connected defence of the nation state as opposed to the tasks of international proletarian revolution. But the Russian revolution occurred which had the task of the promotion of international revolution, but ultimately, according to Bordiga its isolation meant the generation of the 'economic task of the bourgeois revolution'.(7) We may disagree with Bordiga's economic definition in terms of what happened in the Soviet Union, but he is right to suggest that it underwent social and economic regression because of the continuing isolation of the Soviet state and the failure of international proletarian revolution. He also contends that the Communist International degenerated because of its reliance on opportunist tactics such as accommodation of social democracy. This is a partial truth because it could be argued that under certain circumstances the united front was necessary in order to promote common class struggle, what was opportunist was that diplomacy replaced honesty and principles in the relations that were formed between the Communist Parties and Social Democracy.

The organisational and political conclusion that Bordiga made was that united fronts were inherently unprincipled and so should be rejected. This meant opposing the perspective of a workers government, which was considered to be an opportunist accommodation to Social Democracy. What Bordiga did not recognise was that this tactic of the workers government could be utilised in order to develop common struggle against the bourgeois state, and therefore meant creating a government that potentially could be transitional to the formation of a proletarian state. If the Social Democrats opposed this logic they would be discredited and become unpopular. But Bordiga did not recognise this potential. Instead he could only conceive of opportunist limitations in this tactic. However, he was not wrong to suggest that the united front tactic was often applied in an unprincipled manner in terms of diplomatic accommodation to the influence of Social Democracy. But the conclusion that should have been made was that it was necessary to apply a principled version of the united front rather than reject it altogether.

But Bordiga was right to suggest that the party intensified its power within the state in Russia in a repressive manner, and this led to actions against any type of opposition. The logical conclusion that Bordiga should have made was to call for the end of the party state, but he could not make this demand because in an inconsistent manner, he supported the role of the party state, but opposed its regressive effects. Bordiga was probably right to suggest that the Comintern upheld a policy of accommodation to the parties of bourgeois democracy, because they tended to advocate a broad form of the united front against fascism. However, this criticism also means that Bordiga effectively rejected a united front with the socialists against the fascists. Possibly this united front could not have been developed, but at least it should have been tried. There were opportunities for this development to occur, but Bordiga's sectarianism did not allow them to be achieved.

But despite the sectarian limitations in the approach of Bordiga, he was right to connect the logic of opportunism in the mid-1920s within the Communist International with the open acceptance of the popular front with bourgeois liberal parties in the 1930's. He connects the support of national defence by the various Communist parties in World War two with the opportunist interpretation of the perspective of defence of the USSR. Bordiga outlines how this approach was a rejection of the aims of internationalism and communism. Stalinism went from a policy of accommodation to Allied imperialism in world war two to opposition in the cold war, but what was constant in this period of vacillation was opposition to international proletarian revolution. Hence the influence of this form of opportunism undermined the possibility to overthrow capitalism in world war two. Bordiga makes a correct comment about the overall role of the USSR: (we can disagree with his effective opposition to the defence of the USSR versus German Imperialism) “It was ineluctable that the gigantic opportunism which had gained the workers movement would lead to the liquidation of all revolutionary instances. Consequently, the reconstitution of the class strength of the world proletariat has been very much delayed, made more difficult and will require a greater effort.”(8)

Thus Bordiga is outlining a profound understanding of the relationship of Stalinism to the undermining of the possibility of proletarian revolution in the period of the world war and is aftermath. Firstly, the policy of the popular front and its defence of bourgeois democracy was replaced by the pact with Nazi Germany and acceptance of the influence of fascism. Then the alliance with the Allies became the form to reject the possibility to overthrow capitalism in Western Europe. The end of this alliance with the Allies did not mean the promotion of proletarian revolution, but instead Stalinist occupation of Eastern Europe stabilised the situation and undermined the prospect of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism in this area. Hence Bordiga is generally right to contend that: “This conforms the position of the Italian Left which regarded the Second World War as imperialist and the occupation of the vanquished countries as counterrevolutionary and foresaw that the second war could not be followed by a revolutionary revival.”(9) The reactionary character of the USSR was expressed in its occupation of Eastern Europe and opposition to any possibility of proletarian revolution. The united action of the Allies and the USSR undermined any possibility of the immediate revival of the world revolution. In contrast to this sober and generally realistic analysis the Fourth International had illusions in the crisis of capitalism, and in this sense projected progressive illusions in Stalinism. In contrast the Bordiga group had the most realistic perspectives and recognised the counter-revolutionary stabilisation of capitalism in Europe. His group had the most principled and realistic perspectives.

Bordiga's organisation also connected the reactionary role of the USSR with its internal social character. They argued that its rejection of world proletarian revolution in the name of peaceful co-existence between states was an indication that the USSR was state capitalist: “Hence states and parties which admit or even assume hypothetically peaceful coexistence and competition between states instead of propagandising the absolute incompatibility among the classes and armed struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat, are capitalist states and counterrevolutionary parties, and their phraseology only masks their non-proletarian character.”(10) Thus in contrast to the theoretical vacillations of the leadership of the Fourth International concerning the character of Stalinism and the USSR, Bordiga and his group was able to connect the opportunism of national defence of imperialism with the overall reactionary role of the USSR, and therefore outline how Stalinism had become a consistent opponent of proletarian revolution. There was nothing progressive about the USSR, which instead defended capitalism both internally and externally. The various Communist Parties accepted the leadership of the USSR, and so upheld the policy of national defence rather than elaborate the alternative of proletarian internationalism and opposition to imperialism and capitalism. There is an element of ultra-leftism in the standpoint of Bordia such as equating peace with the defence of opportunism, but generally he has outlined a consistent policy of why Stalinism can never become a supporter of world revolution. Instead it can only be counterrevolutionary and so accommodate to the interests of stabilising world capitalism.

Bordiga contends in relation to the issue of peace that: “Revolutionary Marxism rejects pacifism as a theory and means of propaganda and subordinates peace to the violent destruction of world imperialism; there will be no peace as long as the proletariat of the world is not free from bourgeois exploitation. It also denounces pacifism as a weapon of the class enemy to disarm the proletariat and withhold them from revolutionary influence.”(11) What Bordiga does not differentiate between is the ideology of pacifism and peace. The former implies the utilisation of peaceful means for limited goals such as an attempt to persuade the ruling class to become less aggressive. This standpoint is opportunist and is dependent on the emphasis on class collaboration. But the alternative is not to reject the importance of peace as being inherently opportunist. Instead we have to connect the aspiration for peace, which is popular, with the aim of socialism, and in this manner the dynamics of collective class struggle are based on the connection of militancy with peaceful methods. Hence the aims of revolution are not diluted or undermined by the influence of peace. We are also suggesting that the perspective of peace does not in any sense imply support for class collaboration. Instead it is the very basis to oppose capitalism which is dependent on the justification of wars and aggression. Ending the possibility of war means bring about the overthrow of capitalism.

Despite limitations in Bordiga's approach he suggests in a perceptive manner that the very defeats inflicted on the working class means that the capitalist system has stabilised and that it will not be overthrown in the short-term. This realistic perspective allows for the possibility of the development of patient and thoughtful politics. In contrast the majority of the Fourth International persisted with the catastrophic and unrealistic perspective of war revolution led by Stalinism. They did not appreciate the consequences of the counterrevolutionary role of Stalinism. Bordiga outlines perceptively the problems of the stabilisation of capitalism in the following manner: “On the contrary, the proletariat, in the face of the gigantic extension of capitalism, has not always known how to use its class energy with success, falling back, after each defeat, into the net of opportunism and treason, and staying back from the revolution for an ever lengthening period.”(12) Hence in contrast to the false optimism of the Fourth International about imminent world revolution, Bordiga recognises that the stabilisation of world capitalism can only strengthen tendencies of reformism and rejection of the aim of the overthrow of the system. Instead of subjective predictions of the immediate demise of world capitalism it is necessary to prepare for the development of more favourable possibilities when mass struggles emerge. Until that time the International Communist party should be prepared for reactionary views to emerge within the working class, and a general acceptance of the system. This indicates that Bordiga upholds a reflective view of patience and cautious optimism about the future. The point is that he is not reticent to accept that the situation may become unfavourable for the development of the class struggle, and that it is necessary to prepare for this situation. Hence it is vital that the revolutionary party prepares in terms of the upturns and downturns of the political situation, it should be able to relate to a situation of defeats as well as victories: “The cycle of victorious struggles and of defeats, even the most drastic ones, and the opportunistic waves during which the revolutionary movement is submitted to the influence of the enemy class constitute a vital field of positive experiences where the revolution matures.”(13) Thus no experience is wasted or futile in relation to the tasks of the party. All of these developments contribute to an understanding of what is required in relation to the ultimate aim of revolution. This is a reflective and patient understanding of the political fluctuations that the party must be aware of in relation to accepting the difficulties involved in the process of facilitating the possibility of revolution. There is not a smooth process of evolution that will eventually arrive at the destination of success. Instead the party has to be mature enough to be prepared to accept the difficulties involved in the class struggle, and be able to accept its possible isolation from the working class. The party should not become demoralised because of the problems involved in relation to its political tasks, and instead should retain a confidence that the superiority of its programme will mean that it is able to gain mass support. However, this possibility will not happen immediately, instead it is possible that an unfavourable political situation will be of a long term nature and therefore the party should conduct propaganda work in order to recruit as many people as possible to its ranks.

In other words the party should uphold a long term perspective: “After the defeats, the revolutionary comeback is long and difficult, but the movement, although it is not visible on the surface, is not interrupted, it maintains, crystallised in a restricted vanguard, the revolutionary class demands.”(14) The very period of isolation from the class should not be wasted, but instead the party develops its programme and strategy, and so prepares in a patient and mature manner for the period of the development of the class struggle. Thus the party should remember that periods of the defeat and decline of the working class are numerous, and that it was the doctrine of Marxism which was able to patiently relate to these adverse developments and so prepared itself for more favourable circumstances within the political situation. This was the experience of Marx, Engels, Lenin and others. Bordiga solemnly suggests that the present period (1940-51) has been one in which the majority of the working class has supported Stalinism and its respective national imperialism, and so the forces of revolutionary Marxism are isolated and defeated. The process of political degeneration within the international working class movement contributes to the stabilisation of capitalism and the isolation of the revolutionary forces. But it is vital that the party is not demoralised even if ambitious tasks are presently not on the political agenda. Instead in a confident and yet realistic manner, Bordiga comments: “Today, in spite of depression and the limitation of the means of action at its disposal, the party, following the revolutionary tradition, has no intention of renouncing the historical preparation of the resumption on a large scale of the class struggle, which more formidable than all preceding ones, will profit by past experience. Restriction to activity does not imply the renouncement of revolutionary objectives. The party accepts that in certain sectors its activity is quantitatively reduced, but it intends as far as possible to fulfil all its different tasks, and it does not renounce any of them.”(15)

The central task in the period of the downturn of the class struggle is to renew Marxist theory. Bordiga is reticent about whether this involves innovation and new developments, but we can say that Marxism should be as audacious as possible in order to contribute new ideas about how to relate to the difficulties of the class struggle. The principal point is that the party should not become demoralised in the period of its isolation from the working class, and instead it should express both theoretical and political confidence. Bordiga is right to suggest that one of the central tasks of the party was to oppose Stalinism and all forms of opportunism. He is also perceptive to admit that it is not an easy task to overthrow capitalism which has proved to be a durable system that is able to create defensive mechanisms that undermine the attempt to overthrow it. However, this truth should not demoralise the party or compromise its positions. Instead as Bordiga comments: “The central focus point of the actual doctrinal position of our movement is therefore the following: no revision whatsoever of the primary principles of proletarian revolution.”(16) However, this firm standpoint is not a justification for dogmatism, instead as Bordiga remarks, the party should analyse carefully social phenomena in order to improve the ability of Marxism to understand the world in order to promote the aim of revolutionary change. There is a limit to theoretical innovation; it should not become the rationale to reject Marxist principles and objectives. Instead the task of theory is to elaborate and enhance the ability of Marxism to understand the world, and so as Bordiga argues in this manner the integrity of Marxism is upheld.

Consequently, the period of an unfavourable development in the class struggle should not be wasted, or result in demoralisation and passivity. Instead the party in a reflective manner renovates Marxist theory and conducts propaganda in order to maintain its links with the class. This propaganda consists of advocating a definite political perspective that it will use in order to educate the working class and promote its sense of class consciousness. However, Bordiga is wrong to reject the utilisation of tactics in order to strengthen the links between party and class, but he is right to suggest that the tactics of the Fourth International are opportunist and so undermine its integrity. Bordiga is right to suggest that when the party is small, the role of tactics is possibly inexpedient and unprincipled. On the whole he is right to claim that in adverse situations: “There are no ready-made recipes to speed up the restart of the class struggle. No manoeuvres or expedients that will make the proletariat recognise the voice of the class. Such manoeuvres and expedients would not let the party appear such as it is really but would represent a misrepresentation of its function to the detriment of the real starting point of the revolutionary movement which is based on the maturing of facts and a corresponding adjustment of the party capable of doing this only because of its doctrinal and tactical inflexibility.”(16) Thus in periods of isolation, the attempt to overcome this by the utilisation of clever tactics only undermines the theoretical and political integrity of the party. The result is compromise and opportunism. There is no substitute for the theoretical elaboration of Marxism and the related development of its principles in an intransigent manner. In contrast, the Fourth International has diluted it theoretical creativity in order to try and become more relevant, and the result is an adaptation to Stalinism. In this period of political isolation, inflexibility is a virtue if connected to the development of Marxist theory and the elaboration of the principles of the party. Only in this manner is it possible to interact with the class without the dilution of the standards of the revolutionary organisation.

However, this firmness of theory and practice does not mean that Bordiga is correct to deny the usefulness of mass work. Instead it could be argued that an emphasis on the firmness of principles enables the Party to intervene in the class struggle in the most intransigent manner, and without the dilution of the aims and objectives of Marxism. The alternative to the opportunist mass work of the Fourth International is not to reject the very importance of mass work. Instead the integrity of the International Communist party should be tested in the class struggle, even if this will not initially result in incredible results. The point is that the party has the most principled programme. It can attract support in this manner, and by so doing indicate the limitations of the post-war Fourth International. The problem is that Bordiga has a tendency to justify passivity and abstention as an expression of political intransigence. This is the major error of the Bordiga group. However, despite these limitations its programme and analysis indicate that it has a legitimate claim to represent the inheritors of the mantle of revolutionary Marxism. The opportunism within the Fourth International indicate that the Italian based International Communist Party is the most eloquent inheritor of the banner of revolutionary Marxism. The task at the time was to try and connect this current with the oppositional trends within the Fourth International. However, because of the limitations of different traditions this task was never realised or even recognised.

FOOTNOTES:

(1)Bordiga Characteristic Theses of the Party, (1951) Marxist Internet Archive

(2) ibid p1

(3) ibid p2

(4) ibid p3

(5) ibid p3

(6) ibid p4

(7) ibid p10

(8) ibid p19

(9) ibid p19

(10) ibid p20

(11) ibid p21

(12) ibid p22

(13) ibid p22

(14) ibid p22-23

(15) ibid p23

(16) ibid p26