THE STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF BORDIGA

INTRODUCTION

Bordiga was historically the founder leader of the Italian Communist Party and the rival of Gramsci for the major influence within that organisation. It could be argued that Gramsci's strategy of position was formulated in opposition to the views that Bordiga had about the perspective of proletarian revolution in the West. Historically the result of this rivalry has been that Gramsci has been considered favourably, whilst Bordiga is considered to be a dogmatist and ultra-leftist. This article, whilst often being critical of Bordiga will also outline his overall attempt to uphold a principled conception of Marxist theory and practice. Bordiga could be considered to be inflexible in his principles, and this was considered to be his major weakness, but in the era of the decline of the Communist International, and the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, this trait could be considered to be one of his strengths. However, whatever merits Bordiga had must be evaluated in relation to his principal limitation which was his conception of party revolution. This approach was similar to Stalin's conception of proletarian revolution, and so undermined Bordiga's ability to oppose Stalin. Despite this flaw, Bordiga was a principled supporter of the Left Opposition to Stalin, and this viewpoint never wavered despite developing some political differences with Trotsky. Bordiga did become politically inactive in the 1930's but he became involved again after the Second World War, and so had an important role in the development of revolutionary Marxism in the 1950's, which will be studied in a separate article. This initial article tackles Bordiga's politics between the early 1920's and concludes with an analysis of his important Lyon Theses.

THE ELABORATION OF PARTY REVOLUTION

Bordiga in an article: Party and Class, which is written in response to the views of the Second Comintern Congress on this subject, makes the apparently uncontroversial comment that the class struggle cannot be understood in the static terms of the occupations of the workers, but is instead defined by the development of the relationship of party to class. He comments: “A party lives when there is the existence of a doctrine and a method of action. A party is a school of political thought and organisation of struggle. The first characteristic is a fact of consciousness, the second is a fact of will, or more precisely a striving towards a final end. Without these two characteristics we do not have the definition of a class.”(1) This comment implies that without the role of a revolutionary party, the class is effectively passive or at least not capable of developing revolutionary class consciousness. The economic connection of the class to the development of the productive forces may be the objective basis of the prospects for the development of the class struggle, but what raises this process to a higher and more conscious level is the generation of the relationship of party and class. The working class can engage in action, but only the connection with the party can facilitate the possibility that this situation becomes the potential for the creation of a revolutionary dynamic. This is why he contends: “Indeed only an advanced minority can have the clear vision of a collective action which is directed towards general ends that concern the whole class and which have as its core the project of changing the whole social regime. Those groups, those minorities are nothing other than the party. When its formation (which of course never proceeds without arrests, crises and internal conflicts) has reached a certain stage we may say that we have a class in action. Although the party includes only a part of the class, only it can give the class its unity of action and movement, for it amalgamates those elements beyond the limits of categories and localities, which are sensitive to the class and represent it.”(2)

In other words, Bordiga disagrees with those who argued that the party should merely support the movement for workers councils, because the majority of the class is able to initiate struggles and therefore establish by its spontaneous dynamism the possibility for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. Bordiga considers that this standpoint is both illusory and opportunist. This approach underestimates the complexity of the revolutionary process, and so underestimates the tasks that are involved in its success. It is not the apparent logic of mass struggle by factory workers that will establish the objective and subjective conditions of the prospects for the demise of capitalism. Certainly, objectively the working class in action can represent the empirical strength of the struggle, but the vital conscious and subjective aspect of the dynamics of revolutionary transformation requires the role of the party, or the interaction of party and class. Consequently the assumption is that if the workers occupy the factories this is still merely a protest against the system that will not establish the subjective will to overthrow capitalism. Only when the party becomes the leadership of the class will the strategy and determination be developed that enables the potential for the overthrow of capitalism to occur. This point is outlined by Bordiga with such vigour that it seems that he is almost counterposing as opposites the role of the party and class. He seems to be suggesting that only when the class is subordinated to the conscious determination of the party can revolution occur. This standpoint seems to amount to voluntarism because Bordiga appears to be indifferent to the possibilities created by mass struggle, and instead implies that the resoluteness of the party elite will realise socialism. This view seems to be the conclusion of the following comment: “However it is to be only remembered that the individuals in that great remaining mass have neither class consciousness nor class will yet and live for their own selfish ends, or for their trade, their village, their nation, then it will be realised that in order to secure the action of the class as a whole in the historical movement, it is necessary to have an organ which inspires, unites and heads it – in short which offices it; it will then be realised that the party actually is the nucleus without which there would be no reason to consider the whole remaining mass as a mobilisation of forces. The class presupposes the party, because to exist and act in history it must possess a critical doctrine of history and an aim to attain it.”(3)

Bu the point that is glossed over by Bordiga is that the workers in struggle are no longer a passive mass, and instead have developed an understanding of their class power by means of collective struggle, which is concretely realised in terms of occupation of the factories. In this context the most appropriate strategy of the party is not to impose in an external and elite manner its will upon the class but instead to relate to the existing struggles and try to make them more conscious in terms of indicating the connection between the occupations and the possibility to realise the state power of the working class. In this context, the slogan of a workers government would indicate how the party is relating to the struggles and trying to make them more powerful and orientated to the goal of revolution. In contrast, Bordiga seems to be indifferent to the possibilities that workers can achieve, and instead implies dogmatically that ONLY with party leadership will it be possible for the aims of the class to be realised. He does not seem to suggest a perspective based on the interaction of party and class, but instead in a voluntarist manner the party imposes its will on the class if the class is to adopt revolutionary goals. This is why he comments that: “In the only true revolutionary conception, the direction of class action is delegated to the party.”(4) This comment if applied absolutely would suggest that the class has no independent dynamism, it is not capable of promoting its own goals by militant action as a result of collective struggle. Hence the task of the party is not to learn from the struggles of the working class when developing its strategy, but instead to merely instruct the class as to how it should proceed in the revolutionary process. Effectively the class has no social power apart from its relationship to the party. The result of this analysis is that the character of proletarian revolution is a party revolution. Only the party can direct the class as to how it should proceed and relate it objective strength to the subjective aims established by the strategy of the party.

Bordiga justifies his standpoint by outlining how the spontaneous illusions of the working class perpetuate capitalism in terms of the acceptance of bourgeois democracy. This point may have validity in times of the political tranquillity of the capitalist system, but instead he should be commentating on the possibilities of the working class movement when they have occupied the factories in Italy. Instead of justifying the elite role of the party, it would be more appropriate to relate the role of the party to the possibilities of this mass struggle. In a timeless and elitist manner he comments: “The bourgeoisie governs with the majority, not only of all the citizens, but also of the workers taken alone. Therefore if the party called on the whole proletarian mass to judge the actions an initiatives of which the party alone has responsibility, it would tie itself to a verdict that would almost certainly be favourable to the bourgeoisie. That verdict would always be less enlightened, less advanced, less revolutionary, and above all less dictated by a consciousness of the really collective interest of the workers and final result of the revolutionary struggle, than the advice coming from the ranks of the organised party alone. The concept of the proletariat's right to command its own class action is only an abstraction devoid of any Marxist sense.”(5)

The major problem with this standpoint is that Bordiga is emphasising the lowest period of the class struggle in order to justify the necessity of the party imposing its leadership onto the class in general. It could be argued that when there is a reactionary situation it is vital that the party oppose the influence of bourgeois ideology within the working class and instead upholds a conception of the revolutionary interests of the working class. But in a situation of mass struggle that is increasingly posing the necessity of revolutionary developments, the role of the party should be to promote the collective strength of the working class, and in this manner encourage activity that will connect the dynamism of class practice with the theoretical objectives of the party. But Bordiga is not making this point. Instead he is suggesting that in all periods of the class struggle, whether the influence of the bourgeoisie is great, or the working class is on the ascendency, the role of the party should be to effectively direct and instruct the process of development of the class struggle. This means that the only principled and effective method of revolutionary praxis is one that is based on the imperatives established by the party. This implies that the party should even instruct the workers in relation to the construction of the Soviets. This standpoint is a caricature of the lessons that should be learnt from the October revolution in Russia. What Lenin recognised was that Bolshevik policy should be related to promoting the dynamism of the very activity of the workers, such as calling for 'All Power to the Soviets'. Without the collective action of the working class the October revolution would have been inconceivable. Bordiga is interpreting this strategy in a dogmatic manner and is instead suggesting that the party should have the primary initiative in relation to the development of actions by the class. The class should follow the party in an obedient manner, and only if the class accepts that it has no independence in relation to the party will it be successful in the process of the revolutionary transformation of society. This one-sided interpretation of Leninism is effectively adopted by Stalin in the mid 1920's. Hence the spontaneity of the working class can only be defined as having a reactionary character, and so the only principled relationship is that in which the party provides directives for the class to follow.

The organisational conclusion of Bordiga's approach is that in order for the party to have a principled standpoint in relation to the class struggle, it has to be as homogenous as possible. There is no basis for disputes which only represent the influence of opportunism, and instead a party: 'that is centralised, disciplined...with a clear orientation on the problems of principles and tactics' is the only type that is able to establish an intransigent strategy for the working class to support. (6) This approach does not outline what should happen if opportunist forces become dominant within the revolutionary party. In this context the demands of organisation and principles would be in a contradictory relationship. At the time of the Second Comintern Congress, Bordiga obviously assumed that the party would not be capable of degenerating if it continued to adhere to the politics of the Communist International. The problem was that it is this very organisation which does politically degenerate because of the opportunist leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the mid 1920's. This development poses an acute problem for Bordiga's conception of the revolutionary party which is based on strict adherence to the directives of the Communist International. However, he does ultimately consider that political principles outweighs the apparently rival considerations of obedience to what has become an opportunist organisation.

Nevertheless despite his principled role in supporting the Left Opposition, Bordiga has an inflexible attitude towards trade unions and the economic organisation of the working class. He does not consider that it is possible for this type of mass organisation to transcend the limitations of particular trades, even though this very development occurred with the occupation of the Italian factories in the early 1920's. This situation was made possible by the fact that the collective strength of the working class transcended the limitations of trade and related defensive trade unionism. In this context the task was to relate the dynamism of the collective strength of the working class with the task of promoting the prospect of political power. Instead Bordiga does not analyse this situation and instead warns in a dogmatic manner of the limitations of syndicalism. The only form of class struggle that is principled and in his opinion permitted is one that occurs under the strict direction of the party: “The class originates from an immediate homogeneity of economic conditions which appear to us as the primary motive force of the tendency to destroy and go beyond the present mode of production. But in order to assume this great task, the class must have its own thought, its own critical method, its own will bent on the precise ends defined by research and criticism, and its own organisation of struggle channelling and utilising with the utmost efficiency its collective efforts and sacrifices. All this constitutes the party.”(7) Hence he is admitting that it appears potentially the mighty movement of the Italian workers, in the form of the factory occupations, was all that seemed necessary in order to seize political power. But this was an illusion. Instead the spontaneity of the movement of the workers could not establish the strategy and tactics necessary for the task of overthrowing capitalism. Instead only the organisation of the party has the theoretical will and clarity necessary in order to direct the practice of the class towards the aim of revolution and ending capitalism.

Thus Bordiga effectively denies the interaction of theory and practice. Instead he suggests the spontaneous power of the workers will not be sufficient in order to promote the realisation of the task of overthrowing capitalism. Only when the class listens and obeys the party will the superior role of theory be able to define the abilities and character of principled practice. This implies by its theoretical imagination the party generates what should be the practice of the class. In contrast, the factory occupations, because they are primarily spontaneous, will not be able to achieve the objectives of class struggle, and instead are likely to be defeated. Only the party leadership will be able to establish the possibilities of success in the conscious task of trying to overthrow capitalism. Indeed, even the militant actions of the workers may not have this level of perception about its intentions, instead the workers may be satisfied with economistic gains such as improved wages and conditions. Only the party can uphold the revolutionary tasks of the working class. Therefore only with the leadership of the party will the aim of overthrowing capitalism be upheld.

The intransigence of Bordiga's position means that it could be suggested that he adopts the standpoint of voluntarism. Instead of connecting the practice of the party to the possibilities of mass struggle, he instead considers that the only principled and feasible strategic approach is one that is based on the theoretical supremacy of the directives of the party. Gramsci rejects this voluntarism and instead suggest that only the development of a popular consciousness that is increasingly critical of capitalism can relate to the revolutionary aims of the party. But Bordiga has no conception of popular consciousness, or the complexities of developing the interaction of the party and class in the process of intensifying the class struggle. Instead the role of the class is strictly subordinated to that of the party. There is no allowance for the initiative and dynamism of the class in this conception, and so he cannot actually explain the character of the revolutionary process. An actual revolutionary situation is one in which the increasing militancy of the class connects with the objectives of the party. Instead of this creative interaction of party and class, Bordiga defines this relationship as one of direction of the class by the party. He does not allow for the fact that the class may resent this elitist approach, and so would reject the aims of the party. Instead in some mysterious manner, Bordiga envisages that the majority of the class will come to support the minority of the class organised in the party. What is not explained is why the class would willingly accept its subordination to the directives of the party.

Bordiga elaborates his standpoint in his article: 'Party and class action'(1921) (8) The logical conclusion of Bordiga's conception of the relationship of party and class implies that after the revolution what will develop is the party state: “Such a preparation, which must exactly correspond to the precise historical tasks of the proletarian revolution, can be guaranteed only by the political party, in effect the political party is the only organism which possesses on the one hand a general historical view of the historical process and on the other hand a strict organisational discipline ensuring the complete subordination of all its particular functions to the final general aim of the class.”(9) This standpoint is a distortion of what Lenin meant by the Commune state, which involves the popular participation of the people. Instead the party in a dominant role effectively instructs the class how to carry out the functions of economy and state. This is what effectively happened in Russia because of unfavourable circumstances, but it is Bordiga who provides the most coherent and unapologetic explanation of this development in terms of the necessity of the role of the party in the organisation of the post-revolutionary society because of its theoretical superiority and organisational coherence. He does not seem to recognise that this approach could imply that the party becomes a new class that has the inherent right to dictate to the working class about how to organise society, but instead suggests in a vague manner that the dominating role of the party is still in accordance with the interests of the working class as a whole. The theoretical superiority of the party concerning the aims of the class in general means that: “It is for this reason that the rule of the class can only be the rule of the party.”(10) What seems to be implied is that the leading role of the party during the period of the process of the attempt to overthrow capitalism is continued in the attempt to construct socialism. There is no difference between the dominating role of the party in either period; instead the first is logically continued in the second. Bordiga was only to recognise the difficulties of this approach when he came into opposition to Stalinism, but even then he effectively called for a new principled party to replace the degenerating Stalinist one in order to lead the construction of socialism.

The precedent for Bordiga's opposition to Stalinism was that he accepted the fact that revolutionary parties often degenerated in relation to the tasks of the class struggle, such as Social Democracy at the time of the First World War. Thus he makes the conclusion that it is possible that the international revolutionary organisations will not adopt a principled attitude in relation to the tasks of the attempt to overthrow capitalism: “Thus, in this period, in which everything indicates will be decisive, we can see again that a movement of the revolutionary organisation of the masses, of organisation of their forces for the revolutionary action. But once again, far from having the immediate simplicity of a rule, this situation poses difficult tactical problems, it does not exclude partial or serious failure, and it raises questions which so greatly impassion the militants of the world revolutionary organisation.”(11) Hence the very obligations of revolutionary leadership imply that the highest level of organisation and theory can be undermined by the failure to continue to uphold these principled aspects. In this context the temptations to dilute revolutionary politics in the form of opportunism may occur. The only sure method by which this possibility can be avoided is by upholding the most principled and intransigent conception of proletarian revolution. Primarily, we should not let tactical changes become the pretext for the undermining of revolutionary politics, such as the united front. Furthermore, it would be an example of empiricist reasoning to suggest that the party should be of a certain size, and so should be smaller or larger. Bordiga is of the opinion that the very principled character of the party means that its following within the working class will not be large until a revolutionary period arises, and then its committed following will increase.

The point he is making is that the application of clever tactics will not necessarily improve the situation of the Communist party in periods of political tranquillity and the decline of the class struggle. Instead it is necessary to prepare for the forthcoming revolutionary situation, which Bordiga is certain will arise in the future. Thus he comments: “Given the present unstable situation, it is possible that we will not see such fluctuations in the generally secure process of development of the revolutionary international. It is unquestionable that communist tactics must try to face these unfavourable circumstances, but it is no less certain that it would be absurd to eliminate them by mere tactical formulas, just as it would be excessive to draw pessimistic conclusions from these circumstances.”(12) The point he is effectively making is that there is no effective tactic which can dramatically alter the character of the present situation, or the balance of forces. Instead of trying to conceive of tactics that could undermine the revolutionary integrity of the party it is more principled to prepare the party for the possible changing situation and the development of more favourable possibilities for proletarian revolution. The problem with this standpoint is that whilst it upholds the principled aim of maintaining the firm character and cohesion of the party, it also means that it is passive in unfavourable political situations. Furthermore, it is not necessarily opportunist to try and devise tactics that can, if successful, improve the possibilities for the revolutionary party, such as the application of the united front. The alternative of Bordiga is to effectively advocate passivity as the most principled expression of revolutionary politics. He essentially considers that the attempt to conceive of tactics in order to tackle the problems of the party in periods of the unfavourable character of the class struggle as representing opportunism: “The worst remedy which could be used against unfavourable consequences of situations, however, would be to periodically put on trial the theoretical and organisational principles that are the very basis of the party, with the objective of enlarging its zone of contact with the masses. In situations where the revolutionary inclinations of the masses are weakening, this movement to “bring the party towards the masses”, as some call it, is very often equivalent to changing the very nature of the party, thus depriving it of the very qualities that would enable it to be a catalyst capable of influencing the masses to resume their forward movement.”(13)

This standpoint is contradictory. It implies that the role of tactics in a defensive period of the class struggle can only be opportunist, or adapts to the low level of mass activity. Only in a period of upturn is it possible to suggest tactics that can promote the aim of proletarian revolution. But surely the role of defensive tactics, such as the united front, are in order to facilitate the possibility of movement to a new higher era of class struggle? It would be nonsensical for defensive tactics to adopt to the present situation unless the aim was to opportunistically accommodate to the existing Social Democratic leadership of the working class. In contrast, the principled application of a defensive tactic could encourage the development of the class struggle, as occurred between 1923 and 1924. The point is the problem is opportunism and not the role of defensive tactics. The character of opportunism is the acceptance of adaptation to Social Democracy. In contrast, Bordiga defines opportunism as adaptation to the masses, but this development could actually be constructive because it could result in the possibility of greater interaction between party and class. Adaptation to the masses does not necessarily mean accepting the influence of bourgeois ideology, and instead it could mean the relations of party and class become closer. This is the point made by Gramsci in terms of his strategy of position. Only the growing relations of party and class can bring about the prospect of proletarian revolution. In contrast, Bordiga seems to imply that only distant connections of party and class can be principled. This is not what he intends to suggest, but it seems to be the logic of his position. He seems to be suggesting that the party only becomes relevant for the class struggle when the prospect of proletarian revolution becomes imminent: “The communist party possesses a theoretical consciousness confirmed by the movement's revolutionary experiences, which enables it to be prepared to confront the demands of revolutionary struggle. And because of this, even though the masses abandon it during certain phases of its life, it has a guarantee that their support will return when they are confronted with revolutionary problems for which there can be no other solution than that inscribed in the party's programme. When the necessities of revolutionary action reveal the need for centralised and disciplined organ of leadership, then the communist party, whose constitution will have obeyed these principles, will put itself at the head of the movement.”(14)

This standpoint is a combination of voluntarism and fatalism. On the one hand it is implied that regardless of its actions the very dynamism of the party will ensure its support of the people, and fatalism in that the support of the people is guaranteed by increasing favourable and maturing historical conditions for change. What this combination of determinism and voluntarism implies is that the role of tactics is minimised. Tactics can be opportunist by their very definition, and so the most principled activity of the party is to 'wait' for the development of a revolutionary situation. This standpoint denies the fact that the correct application of tactics can be crucial in bringing about the very possibility of revolutionary activity. For example, the united front can increase the militancy and confidence of the working class and therefore promote the generation of a more favourable balance of class forces. In contrast, Bordiga implies that the very coherence of the party provides the most superior and principled basis to maintain itself in periods of the downturn of the class struggle. The role of the principles of the party is the most crucial guarantee of its ability to survive unfavourable times and to instead thrive when the class struggle intensifies: “The only criteria by which to judge this efficiency are the precisely defined theoretical basis of the party's programme and the rigid internal discipline of all its organisational sections and of all its members; only such a discipline can guarantee the utilisation of everyone's work for the greatest success of the revolutionary cause. Any other form of intervention in the composition of the party which is not logical derived from the precise application of these principles can only lead to illusory results and would deprive the class party of its greatest revolutionary strength; this strength lies precisely in the doctrinal and organisational continuity of all its propaganda and all its action to state in advance, how the process of the final struggle between the classes will develop and in its ability to give itself a type of organisation which responds to the needs of this decisive phase.”(15)

If taken to its extreme this standpoint justifies an extreme voluntarism in which the principled character of the party because of its theory, programme, and organisational discipline, is able to promote the ability to relate to the challenges of the class struggle in a successful manner. Thus the attempt to dilute this intransigent role because of the application of tactics like the united front will only result in undermining the integrity of the party, and so will decrease its ability to connect to the class struggle in an effective manner. Instead of this tactical opportunism, the very 'essence' of the party as revolutionary is a guarantee of its ability to be able to intervene in the class struggle in an effective manner. The party has the essential ability, if its principles are not compromised, to be able to relate to mass struggles in a manner that enables the victory of the proletarian revolution to occur. The point is the party should not dilute its principled character in order to relate to the working class, but instead affirm its leadership and vanguard role. Only in this manner will the party remain a suitable instrument and agency of the revolutionary process. Bordiga does not consider that a problem could arise in terms of the isolation of party from the class, instead the major limitation that could arise is if the party attempts to establish an opportunist connection to the class, in the form of the application of clever tactics. In this sense the major task has been to establish the organisational firmness and cohesion of the Communist International. Hence it has been an advance that the Communist International's 21 conditions for admission are intransigently against the possibility of centrist parties being able to join. In other words the greatest chances of success of the process of revolution is if the Communist Parties does not dilute its organisational and political principles. The alternative would be to compromise the character of the Communist Parties in order to establish a relationship with opportunist parties. This tendency would undermine the principle of intransigence that is necessary for the success of proletarian revolution.

What Bordiga was rejecting is the possibility of combining the possibility of tactical compromise in order to attract more parties to the International with firmness of principles concerning the aim of proletarian revolution. The rejection of centrism meant that the Communist International remained small and unable to attract the followers of many mass parties, like the Independent Labour Party. This inflexibility denied that it was possible to maintain the aims of revolution and socialism, and yet be more conciliatory concerning the admission of centrist organisations into the Communist International. Bordiga effectively supported a monolithic international with no different views in the name of revolutionary principles. But it was possible to combine organisational flexibility with programmatic firmness. Indeed various centrist parties would have welcomed this tolerance within the Communist International. But Bordiga considers that the very increase in size of the Communist parties would amount to the political dilution of their revolutionary character. Instead of the attempt to create mass parties he desires that the parties retain 'sound organisational, programmatic and tactical directives which crystallise the results of the best experiences of the revolutionary struggle on an international scale'. (16) He contends that this approach does not mean a 'sterile desire to have pure, perfect and orthodox parties'. (17) But this problem seems to be the logical result of his approach. He starts with the view that the creation of mass parties, via the application of clever tactics, can only result in the opportunist degeneration of the Communist International, and so his alternative is to justify what could be considered ossified parties that make a virtue of being small in order to be principled. Furthermore, he considers that the only way that these parties can act in principled terms is by rejecting any attempts to develop alliances with other parties and instead act in a hostile manner towards them in terms of total opposition and the desire to bring about the effective absorption of these parties into the Communists: “The support of the masses can be securely won only by a struggle against their opportunist leaders. This means that where non-communist parties still exert an influence among the masses, the masses must be own over by dismantling the organisational network of these parties and by absorbing their proletarian elements into the solid and well defined organisation of the Communist party.”(18)

This sectarian approach indicates that Bordiga is one of the originators of the Third Period approach. He rejects the view that the very interests of developing the class struggle may demand the application of the united front between Communist and Social Democratic organisations and instead he prefers a position of absolute hostility and intransigence. He does not recognise that this standpoint may result in undermining the common interests of the working class, and so in this manner denying the necessity of developing united struggle against capitalism and its reactionary agencies. Indeed the prestige of the Communists could be promoted with the very application of the united front and the advocacy of joint activity against an employers’ offensive, or defensive solidarity against Fascism. The failure to establish Socialist-Communist unity against Fascism in Italy was at least partly responsible for the increasing success of the reactionary forces led by Mussolini, and Bordiga does not seem to have learnt this lesson. Instead he justifies a sectarian position of splendid isolation as the expression of revolutionary principles, and so denies the possibility of unity between the different working class parties. Hence he contends that the only principled stance towards Social Democratic organisations is one that is 'absolutely uncompromising'.(19) This approach may be necessary under certain circumstances, as in relation to the Labour Party's betrayal of the 1926 General strike, but under different conditions the united front can be advocated without any dilution of revolutionary principles. The point is that the united front should not be rejected under all circumstances, and instead should be promoted when common action will uphold the interests of the working class. Instead of this tactical flexibility, Bordiga supports the aim of creating monolithic revolutionary organisations with no wavering elements and instead is united by rigid ideological and organisational unity. The inconvenient fact that this type of party may be unattractive for the majority of the working class is a matter of indifference for Bordiga, and instead he can only consider that an authentic and principled party is one that is totally committed to ending the influence of Social Democracy. He does not recognise that the aim of ending the hegemonic influence of Social Democracy may require tactical flexibility, and even involves the development of the united front. Instead to him the approach is uncomplicated, and necessitates total opposition to Social Democracy under all circumstances.

The logical tactical aspect of his sectarian position is that only the perspective of the revolutionary offensive is principled: “If the revolutionary possibilities are less immediate we will not run the risk even for a single moment of letting ourselves be distracted from our patient work of preparation in order to retreat to the mere solving of immediate problems, which would only benefit the bourgeoisie.”(20) This comment implies that only the perspective of the revolutionary insurrection is principled, and therefore any defensive activity, including the possibility of the united front, is opportunist and represents capitulation to reactionary forces. However, this standpoint actually implies passivity and fatalism when the very urgent and practical task is to oppose the offensive of the forces of reaction, such the necessity of united action against fascism. In actuality Bordiga proposes abstentionism rather than common opposition to fascism. He does not seem to recognise that only with the defeat of fascism will the possibility for proletarian revolution start to mature. Hence only with the successful completion of defensive tasks will the prospect of an offensive against capitalism become feasible. But, in a contradictory and inconsistent manner, Bordiga does admit the possibility of defensive actions. He comments that: “It is certain that the party's revolutionary preparation can begin to translate itself into planned actions even in the partial movements of the masses: thus retaliation against white terror – whose aims are to give the proletariat the feeling that it is definitively weaker than its adversaries and to make it abandon revolutionary preparation – is an indispensable tactical means.”(21) In other words a defensive action is principled if it contributes to the possibility of developing preparation for the perspective of proletarian revolution. However, this rigid view means he still can deny the principled character of much defensive activity because in his opinion it does not contribute to the development of the offensive struggle against capitalism. He justifies his standpoint on the basis that support for unprincipled defensive actions can promote the opportunist fusion of Communist and Social Democratic organisations. Hence he cannot conceive that such a possibility may be a tremendous gain for the struggle against capitalism. Instead what is vital to Bordiga is the preservation of the organisational and political independence of the Communist party.

The major problem with his standpoint is that the class struggle becomes defined in the subjective terms of what we want it to be, instead of what it actually is. Thus the actual development of the situation in the post-war period after world war one was a certain stabilisation of capitalism which had led to an employers’ offensive, and the rise of Fascism in Italy. Both of these situations called for the application of the tactic of the united front. It would be a sectarian mistake for the Communist International to deny this possibility in the name of its own organisational integrity and adherence to principles. But the idealist aspect of Bordiga's approach means that he can only contemplate one principled tactic, which is that of the revolutionary offensive. This means he does not fully appreciate that only with the resolution of the tasks in the defensive period of the class struggle will the offensive become possible and credible. Instead of recognising the separate and inter-related character of the defensive and offensive periods of the class struggle, Bordiga blurs over the distinction in terms of contending that the defensive is merely a prelude towards the generation of the offensive. Hence he effectively rejects the importance of the defensive, and instead contends that it is merely a phase of the offensive. Consequently he does not appreciate the significance of the defensive, not does he uphold the tactics which is appropriate to the era of the defensive, which is that of the united front. This means he considers that the period of the defensive is merely a momentary pause in the process of movement towards the offensive in the perspective of the revolutionary party. The result of his standpoint is that he upholds a voluntarist approach that is unable to comprehend the actual balance of the class forces. This voluntarism takes the form of denying that the major task of the Communist parties is to win the majority of the working class to the aim of revolution. Instead he implies that the revolutionary process could represent the minority Communist party being able to organise an insurrection without the support of the majority of the working class. He attempts to deny the Blanquism of his approach by suggesting that armed action can only be taken with the permission of the Communist party. The problem with this standpoint is that he does not preclude the prospect of the Communist party carrying out the act of insurrection without the consent of the majority of the working class, which is considered to be reactionary. However, he glosses over this issue of Blanquism in his standpoint by also suggesting that the Communist party if it is principled will obtain the support of the working class for its actions.

BORDIGA'S UNDERSTANDING OF DEMOCRACY

Bordiga considers that bourgeois democracy is flawed because it is based on the formal attempt to reconcile the principles of political rights with the actuality of economic inequality. But this does not mean that democracy cannot be utilised in different terms, such as in relation to the principles of a proletarian party. The concept of democracy can only be understood in terms of its particular functioning, and cannot be justified as an 'absolute principle of truth and justice'. (21) The problem with this analysis is that whilst the limitations of bourgeois democracy are established, this does not provide guidance as to whether there are circumstances in which bourgeois democracy should be defended against its undermining by more reactionary forces, like fascism. Bordiga argues that the theory of proletarian revolution should not conciliate bourgeois democracy, and this view may have validity under certain circumstances such as in relation to the dynamics of the struggle to overthrow capitalism, but this standpoint does not explain all circumstances. It may be necessary to defend bourgeois democracy as a gain of the working class if it is being undermined by the forces of reactionary counterrevolution. In this context the very defence of bourgeois democracy becomes the political basis to defend the interests of the working class, and to then advance towards the goal of proletarian revolution. Bordiga claims that the system of universal suffrage for all citizens is based on the illusion of formal equality between all voting citizens, and so ignores the significance of the unequal material conditions of existence. This is a correct criticism and indicates the limitations of all systems of bourgeois democracy. But this aspect does not deny the fact that even with the flaws of the democratic system under capitalism it may still be in the interests of the proletariat to utilise this system for the purpose of organisation and for expressing a sense of the popularity of the socialist party. The point being made is that there is not an absolute discrepancy between bourgeois democracy and proletarian democracy. Despite the limitations of the former it may still be useful and principled to utilise this system in order to have some guide as to the level of influence of the socialist or communist party within capitalist society. In the last analysis it is also vitally important to defend bourgeois democracy against reactionary forces that aim to impose ruthless dictatorship over the working class.

Bordiga standpoint is defined in the following manner: “The division of society into classes distinguished by economic privilege clearly removes all value from majority decision making. Our critique refutes the deceitful theory that the democratic and parliamentary state machine which arose from modern liberal constitutions is an organisation of all citizens in the interests of all citizens. From the moment that opposing interests and class conflicts exist, there can be no unity of organization, and in spite of the outward appearance of popular sovereignty, the state remains the organ of the economically dominant class and the instrument of the defence of its interests.”(23) This view may be generally correct, but it does not mean that because of these limitations the institutions of bourgeois democracy cannot be utilised for beneficial effect by the organisations of the working class. Primarily, the role of the popular vote indicates in some limited manner the level of strength and influence of revolutionary organisations. The bourgeois democratic system also provides people with the right of association, and the ability to develop an independent form of media. Hence the forces of socialism can promote their ability to develop a considerable force of political power within the bourgeois democratic system. This will enable the socialist party to utilise bourgeois democracy in a manner that could advance the interests of the working class. But, if bourgeois democracy did not exist, and working class organisation was banned, it would be much more difficult to associate in terms of the promotion of class interests. This is why it is necessary to defend the possibilities within bourgeois democracy which advance the prospect for realising socialism. In contrast, Bordiga seems to be implying that the democratic political system is merely a form of ideological deception and has little substance. This is an aspect of the system, but it does not explain its progressive features, and the connected ability to utilise bourgeois democracy for the purpose of the aims of revolutionary objectives.

Bordiga goes on to explain that the democratic principle of rule of the majority is not useful in the situation of the formation of a revolutionary regime. For example, the proletariat may be a minority, and not even homogenous, whilst the peasantry is a majority: “In Russia for example, power is in the hands of the working class and peasantry, but if we consider the entire development of the revolutionary movement, it is easy to demonstrate that the industrial proletarian class, although much less numerous than the peasantry, nevertheless plays a far more important role.”(24) This point was true during the period of war communism when it was considered necessary to coerce the peasantry into supplying grain, but the very futility of disregarding the interests of the majority of society led to the introduction of the New Economic Policy. It was necessary to make concessions to the peasantry in order to obtain their co-operation, and so develop an effective form of the proletariat and peasant alliance. In other words, it was not possible for the proletarian state to disregard the interests of the majority of society for a long period of time. Instead economic policy had to become based on making concessions to the peasants, only in this manner could the objectives of the state be promoted. Thus the democratic principle of the rule of the majority asserted itself between 1921 and1928. Only the introduction of forced collectivisation by Stalin ended this situation and led to an elite regime replacing some of the promotion of the principles of democracy within Soviet society.

In contrast, Bordiga can only consider that the policy of war communism, or an offensive and coercion, is related to the interests of the proletarian state. This approach is the logic of his indifference about the necessity to connect economic policy with the role of democracy. He justifies his stance in terms of undermining the economic influence of the bourgeoisie, but he does not recognise that the objective effect of his perspective is to alienate the peasantry. Bordiga argues that the proletarian dictatorship should not be limited by democratic considerations, but the ultimate logic of this standpoint was to bestow on the state a form of absolute and centralised power. The point is that the role of effective popular democracy potentially limited the power of the state apparatus, and even promoted the possibility of different policies. The accountability of the state to the process of genuine democracy would have ended the consolidation of the party-state and instead led to the realisation of political pluralism. However, Bordiga is indifferent to these possibilities because to him a genuine political system based on participation in its administration does not require the realisation of democracy. A system of delegates is instead essential in order to avoid bureaucratisation and elitism. But this view does not recognise that only a genuine multi-party system can ensure that the state is accountable to the people. Bordiga argues that a system of Soviets can ensure the accountability of the system to the people, but he does not seem to understand that this situation can still result in the rule of an elite if the functioning of parties is not allowed. Without multi-parties the system can become the instrument of the state and party. Hence Soviet democracy requires the role of genuine electoral competition between the various parties that support the revolution.

Bordiga rejects this reasoning because to him the revolutionary party inevitably represents the interests of society: “In reality, it only encompasses a minority of the mass, but the properties that distinguish it from other broad based forms of representative organisation demonstrate precisely that the party represents the collective interests and movement better than any other organ.”(25) This is a voluntarist view that contends the party has an inherent ability to express the interests of the workers and peasants. But what would indicate this aspect most successfully would be democratic elections and the genuine accountability of the party to society. Without what are free elections, the party is dominant because of it absolute power and the lack of accountability between the party and the electorate. In these monolithic conditions the view that the party represents the collective interests of the people becomes an expression of myth and tradition, and the real situation is based on the relations between the dominating elite and the subordination of the people. Only the application of genuine democracy ensures that the party is able to establish its hegemony by means of popular election and not through coercion. Instead of these considerations, Bordiga claims the Communist Party has an inherent right to rule in a revolutionary regime: “What makes the party equal to its task is not its statutes or mere internal organisational measures. It is the positive characteristics which develop within the party because it participates in the struggle as an organisation possessing a single orientation which derives from its conception of the historical process, from a fundamental programme which has been translated into a collective consciousness and at the same time from a secure organisational discipline.”(26) Thus in a mystical manner the Communist party has the theory, practice and organisation that makes it compatible with the resolving of the complex tasks of the process of creating a revolutionary regime. The problem with this standpoint is that it glosses over the actuality of the formation of a bureaucratised regime. Single party authority is not compatible with the development of a principled regime that is truly accountable to society, and instead what is justified is the principle and practice of absolutism and the crude identification of the state and society. The point is that no party, however revolutionary, has some form of inherent right to rule. This view can only justify authoritarianism. Instead the only basis to oppose this development is the development of a situation in which diverse parties compete for the support of electors. Bordiga considers that the dynamic of society is towards the transcendence of state power and the end of coercion, but this aim cannot possibly be realised if one party has absolute state power. Instead the coercive character of the state will only intensify in order to uphold the domination of the single party. Only a situation in which parties compete with each other for power can bring the state under the control of the democratic process. In other words the rule of the single party, however revolutionary, cannot avoid the misuse of power if it is not effectively held to account by the role of the people as electors. Instead Bordiga is asking us to believe that the party can act in a principled manner by the fact of its origins and role as a principled party. This understanding may explain the role of the party during the period of the development of the revolution, but this analysis cannot establish how the party will operate when it has absolute power. Even the most principled of all parties is likely to act in a repressive manner if it has exclusive control of the state. Bordiga tries to gloss over this point by developing a mythology of the virtuous party.

He upholds his standpoint by suggesting that the economic plans require extreme centralised realisation by the state: “For their part, the local organs serve to organise the masses politically so that they will participate in fulfilling the plans and accept military and economic organisation. They therefore create the conditions for broadest and most continuous mass activity possible, and can channel this activity towards the formation of a highly centralised proletarian state.”(27) This standpoint is justified in terms of the imperatives of economic efficiency and the problems with this approach are not evaluated. Extreme economic centralisation can only contribute to the promotion of absolute political power. The organisation of production by a single economic agency means that the political system has similar characteristics. In contrast, if the economic organisation of production is based on the role of industrial democracy, this situation will promote the possibility that the political system has similar features. But Bordiga is effectively indifferent to the role of democracy within a revolutionary state because he implies that it could undermine the realisation of the vanguard role of the party. Hence he glosses over the problems associated with absolute power because he assumes that this is the form that the rule of the revolutionary party will assume. Ultimately this standpoint is justified on the basis that the rule of a class takes the form of the rule of a party. He contends that the class is too immature and heterogeneous to be able to exercise political power and instead this role is carried out by the party. The elitist logic of this perspective means that he is indifferent to the problem of the rule of the single party assuming absolute power.

Bordiga's indifference about democracy is also expressed in terms of its application within the trade unions. He does not consider that democracy should be an inherent virtue of the functioning of the unions and instead contends about them: “We must accelerate their transformation from organs of counterrevolutionary influence on the proletariat into organs of revolutionary struggle. The criteria of internal organisation have no value in themselves but only insofar as they contribute to this objective.”(28) The practical consideration from this approach is that formal democracy should be encouraged when it upholds the interests of the workers organised in the unions: “But in all this there are no “constitutional” prejudices, and communists provided that they are understood by the masses and can demonstrate to them that they are acting in the direction of their most immediate felt interests, can and must behave in a flexible way vis-a-vis the canons of formal democracy.”(29) But the point is that if the party had a crude instrumental, or cynical attitude, towards internal union democracy its proposals would not be supported. Only if the revolutionary organisation continually acts to promote union democracy in the most sincere manner will it begin to attract support. The party must indicate that union democracy has intrinsic merit that is connected to the aim of defending the interests of the members of the union. In this context the Union leadership oppose the greater role of democracy because they represent a privileged layer who prefer that the membership should be deferential and unwilling to assert their distinct interests. Hence the development of democracy is actually a crucial aspect of creating a dynamic union that is concerned with the promotion and realisation of the aspirations of its members. But Bordiga does not recognise that democracy is an integral aspects of generating and promoting class struggle. Thus he contends in relation to the role of the party: “But we can envisage a mode of organisation which will be increasingly liberated from the conventions of democratic principle, and it will not be necessary to reject it out of unjustified fears if one day it can be shown that other methods of decision, or choice, of resolution of problems are more consistent with the real demands of the party's development and its activity in the framework of history.”(30)

This comment represents a complacent view that does not recognise that if an autocratic leader comes to power within the Communist organisations then this can only result in the justification of autocracy and opportunist politics. Bordiga comments that: “Democracy cannot be a principle for us”. (32) Such a view is wrong, because democracy is the most constructive and effective method by which it is possible to connect the views of the party leadership with its membership. The application of democracy is how the party leaders are held to account for their policies. In this manner the role of democracy is to uphold the realisation of revolutionary principles. Instead in a one-sided and elitist manner, Bordiga contends that it is centralism that is able to combine structure with action. Obviously centralism can be important, but without the role of democracy centralism becomes the justification of the domination of a single leader. In the exceptional instance of Lenin this situation did not undermine revolutionary principles, but in the majority of situations, the exclusive role of centralism can only create the rule of a leader with opportunist principles. It is the mechanism of democracy that can ensure that the leadership are accountable, and it is in this situation that they are most likely to uphold consistent revolutionary policies. Indeed this will be the popular demand of the membership.

In other words Bordiga's position means that he tends to glorify the role of the party and its leadership. He can recognise the possibility of degeneration in terms of the adoption of unprincipled positions, but this would mean accommodation to illusions in democracy and the role of majority rule. Instead he upholds strict centralism and the role of the absolute leader. It would seem that Bordiga would become a follower of Stalin, yet this did not happen. The next part of this article will try and indicate why Bordiga's politics did not correspond to the apparent logic of these early articles. Instead he became a supporter of the Left Opposition and rejected the perspectives of Stalin, and so we can suggest that in this manner, Bordiga became part of the heritage of revolutionary Marxism. This conclusion does not gloss over the significance of his early work and its ultra-left glorification of the party, and undermining of the importance of democracy. However, what we want to try and establish is whether there was any basis for the group around Bordiga joining the International Left Opposition. Was both Trotsky and Bordiga rigid and dogmatic when they effectively denied any possibility of unification? This point will be studied in terms of an analysis of Bordiga's Lyon Theses. This was a response to Gramsci's leadership of the Italian Communist Party.

BORDIGA'S LYON THESES

Bordiga establishes the approach of Marxism in terms of dialectical and historical materialism, the economic analysis of Capital and the programmatic character of the Communist Manifesto. He also suggests that Lenin was the outstanding leader who implemented these methods and principles. Obviously, there are many different interpretations of what is meant by Marxism, but Bordiga has outlined a useful approach, and has summarised many of the vital elements of this revolutionary perspective. However, what is more problematical is when he contends that Marxism rejects Social Democracy, syndicalism and centrism. It is obviously principled to oppose the opportunist limitations of these standpoints, but it is also constructive to try and obtain the support of these currents for revolutionary Marxism. In contrast, Bordiga seems to imply that the Communist Party should not apply the tactic of the united front, and so should refuse the attempt to gain support from these currents for common struggle against capitalism. His approach is especially problematical in relation to centrism. It is well known that the vacillating and oscillating character of centrism means that it could become receptive to the possibility of being won to the banner of genuine Marxism. Instead Bordiga comments: “The Communist Party likewise opposes the many manifestations of spurious revolutionism which aim to resuscitate such tendencies by mingling them with communist theses – a danger that is designated by the now well known term of centrism.”(32) This approach justifies the sectarian rejection of alliance between the Italian Socialist Party, which was defined as centrist, and the Italian Communist party. The result was that united work against fascism did not occur. In the name of principles, this was a serious mistake by Bordiga. It was not a dilution of revolutionary aims to uphold the necessity of a united front in that situation. Instead this common work would have expressed the most effective manner in which fascism could have been opposed and possibly defeated. Bordiga upheld principles at the expense of the actual immediate interests of the working class.

He conceives of the class struggle in the following dogmatic manner: “Every class struggle is a political struggle, that is to say, it has the tendency to end up as a struggle for the conquest of political power and control of the new state organism. Consequently the organ which leads the class struggle to its final victory is the class political party, which is the sole possible instrument firstly of revolutionary insurrection and then of government.”(33) Events in Italy indicated the abstract and over-generalised character of this perspective. The defensive character of the political situation meant the immediate priority was to defeat the threat of fascism, this development would not necessarily promote the possibility of the proletarian revolution, but it was still a vital action if the forces of the working class were not to suffer a serious defeat. Hence every political struggle is not necessarily an integral aspect of the process of proletarian revolution, but it could still be a vital part of the class struggle which would in the long term possibly benefit the advance of the working class towards their final goal. An immediate defensive struggle arose in terms of the necessity to defeat fascism, victory in this struggle may be to the immediate advantage of bourgeois democracy but such an outcome was not irrelevant for the working class. This was because the establishment of the consolidation of bourgeois democracy would mean the defeat of fascism, and so allow the workers to organise and act to further their class interests. This possibility would not be feasible if fascism triumphed. Bordiga seemed to be indifferent to these questions because to him the only valid struggle was one that became offensive and part of the attempt to realise proletarian revolution. Hence he seemed indifferent to the importance of defensive struggles, and which required the application of the united front. His hostility to opportunist formations meant he could only envisage an offensive struggle led by the Communist Party. This tactical approach was seriously mistaken when there was a vital importance to defeat fascism.

However, he is not necessarily wrong to also contend that: “Historically, the party therefore represents the class in the successive stages of the struggle, even if only a greater or smaller part of the class is regrouped in its ranks.”(34) The revolutionary character of the party means that it has an organic connection with the interests of the class. The problem was that Bordiga projected this principled understanding in order to justify incorrect tactics, such as an effective rejection of the united front. Primarily, Bordiga could only envisage the importance of offensive tactics in the class struggle: “Thanks to the party, the working class acquires the knowledge of the way forward and the will to take it.”(35) The problem was that the very situation in Italy meant that the crucial tactic that was required was an understanding of the importance of the defensive, and the necessity to engage at this level if fascism was to be defeated. In this context it was a voluntarist error to define the character of politics in terms of the role of the offensive, because the very interests of the class struggle demanded that the aims of the defensive be accomplished successfully. Only in this manner could the issue of the offensive be posed in an objective and reflective manner.

The related problem with Bordiga's approach is that he considered that it was only principled to form small parties with a greater sense of organisational and political cohesion than mass parties. He seemed to define mass parties as those that have low standards for membership. This strict organisational criteria was because of his adherence to the conception of party revolution. Only the elite party, based on strict centralism and political uniformity, could lead the working class to victory. This meant the prospect of alliances and coalitions was rejected as being unprincipled. Instead it was the elite party united by a common programme that would be ideological cohesive and able to lead the working class to overthrow capitalism: “Only with the direct intervention at the head of the working class of a political party, defined by the political adherence of its members, do we find the progressive syntheses of these particular impulses into a common vision and activity, whereby individuals and groups are enabled to go beyond all particularism and accept difficulties and sacrifices for the final and general triumph of the working class cause.”(36) Bordiga could not contemplate that it was possible to unite high standards of party membership concerning theory and programme with an open and receptive attitude towards other parties. Instead he considered the very willingness to consider alliances as a dilution of the cohesion and stability of the revolutionary party. This meant the most principled stance for the party was effectively one of splendid isolation, which implied an abstentionist position in relation to the requirements of the class struggle. This passive stance, justified by party doctrine, was very detrimental when the question of an alliance with the socialists against the fascists was a crucial issue. He denies that his position amounts to the view that 'only authentic workers can be communist' or 'the revolution isn’t a question of forms of organisation', but in actuality these elitist and rigid formulations are what he is defending. ((37) He is suggesting that the most immaculate party at the level of theory, organisation and practice, will be the only one that is able to intervene successfully in the class struggle. But what he does not recognise is that the art of compromise may be necessary at the given moment because unity against fascism is required. The point is that this acceptance of compromise does not mean that the principles of the party are undermined, but instead the aim of constructing a united front is advanced and developed. In this very manner of conciliation the party actually upholds its integrity and principles because its flexible policy is actually promoting the possibility to achieve success in the struggle against fascism. In this manner the aim of proletarian revolution is being advanced.

Indeed, Bordiga seems to have recognised this necessity of compromise when he comments: “The way the party operates in response to specific situations, and relates to other groups, organisations and institutions of the society in which it moves, constitute its tactics. The general element of this question must be defined in relation to overall principles, it is then possible on a secondary level, to establish concrete norms of action in relation to different types of practical problems and the successive phases of historical development.”(38) Tragically this apparent awareness of the necessity of tactical flexibility is not practiced by Bordiga. Instead the importance of principles undermines the formal recognition of relating to other groups. The question of what is practical is defined by the party in isolation from other social forces, and so the approach of Bordiga is an instance of the very voluntarism that he formally opposes: “We equally condemn the voluntarist conception of the party according to which a small group of men, after having forged for themselves a profession of faith, proceed to spread and impose it by a gigantic effort of will, activity and heroism.”(39) The major reason that his perspective is voluntarist is that he does not recognise that the major task of the Communist Party is to relate to the bigger and older Socialist Party. It is the question of the united front that will define the politics of Italy in the 1920's. Instead of recognising the importance of this alliance, he considers that relations between the Socialists and Communists is effectively unprincipled.

He considers the alternative to be of a theoretical character, the fact that the Communists, via the application of the Marxist method, are able to understand the historical laws of social development. With this superior understanding the party has the ability and determination to become the major organisation of the working class. In other words, with its profound knowledge of the economy and society the party has the ability to overcome ideological confusion which results from being the passive recipient of economic imperatives. Instead the party can shape its own destiny when developing its relationship to the class. The understanding of social laws provides the party with immense dynamism and the ability to realise the future that is represented within the process of economic development. This historical confidence implies that the only relationship of party and class which matters is the task of the overthrow of capitalism: “Humanity, and its most powerful grouping such as classes, parties and states, have moved almost as if they were playthings in the grip of economic laws, up to now almost certainly unknown to them. These groupings at the same time have lacked theoretical awareness of the economic process, and the possibility of managing and controlling it. However, the class that appears in the present historical epoch, the proletariat, and the political groupings, which emanate from it – the party and the State – for them the problem is modified. This is because the proletariat is the first class that isn't driven to base its rise to power on the consolidation of social privileges and class divisions, the first not to subject and exploit another class anew, whilst at the same time it is the first that manages to shape a doctrine of the social and historical development of the economy – in other words, Marxist communism.”(40)

Bordiga claims that the superiority of Marxist theory, which can articulate the character of social development on behalf of a revolutionary class, means that the vantage point by which the Communist party can survey the class struggle is immensely superior to that of other classes and parties. This means the grasp of historical materialism enables the party to construct a programme of action that promotes the favourable possibility of the revolutionary transformation of capitalism. Therefore strategy is based on this expression of historical confidence, and implies that coalitions and alliances are not necessary for the success of the party and class. Consequently, the advocates of the united front within the Communist Party can be portrayed as pessimists who do not properly understand the implications of the laws of social development. A confident reading of historical materialism is utilised in order to effectively deny the role of defensive struggle and the practical task of overthrowing fascism. Instead the party will be able to exclusively lead the struggle to overthrow capitalism because it is the only organisation that is able to understand society. The class has the 'will' and 'freedom' to bring about communism. (41)

This emphatic version of historical confidence is not very compatible with the difficult tasks of the actual class struggle as it is, rather than how we would like it to be. The actual empirical fact is that the organisations of the working class have been smashed by fascist counterrevolution. This means the role of the 'will' has been utilised in a reactionary manner in order to defend capitalism in terms of repressive methods. The working class is confronted with the task of organisational and political reconstruction of its forces. The Communist party is an isolated and persecuted group. Yet Bordiga can effectively ignore this dire situation and instead outlines a schema of the inevitable success of the class. This procedure unites voluntarism and fatalism. He does not outline his position in terms of the uncomfortable facts of what is, but instead outlines a schema of what we would like it to be. The objective problem is that the present balance of class forces favour the ruling class and its fascist agency. This means a policy that is based on empirical realities would be based on recognition of this unfavourable situation. The question of confidence in the historical future would be a matter of theory, in contrast the tasks of practice would focus on defeating fascism. Bordiga contends that the Communist party is defined by an 'unbroken thread to the ultimate goals in the future'.(42) This comment is true to the extent that this perspective is about opposing capitalism, but it has little relation to the present tasks, which are about defeating fascism. Only when this task is successful is it possible to conceive of the potential future with more confidence. Bordiga contends that the party should not justify a doctrine of fatalism 'which would have us as passive spectators of phenomena into which no direct intervention is felt possible.”(43) But this very viewpoint is the logical result of Bordiga's sectarianism and theoretical isolation from the struggle. He suggests that he is against the politics of purity, but this trait is the only credible conclusion that can be made about his politics. Thus when he suggests the party is: 'elite, distinct and superior to the rest of the elements that compose the working class', this is precisely what he has created.(44) The tragedy is that this party is unable to intervene effectively in order to oppose fascism, and this is the problem that Gramsci is trying to rectify.

Ironically, Bordiga can formally outline a useful conception of the necessary relation of tactics to strategy. Thus he maintains: “In resolving the general question of tactics on the same terrain as that of the nature of the party, the Marxist solution must be distinguished both from that doctrinal estrangement from the reality of the class struggle which contents itself with abstract lucubration, while negating concrete activity, and from sentimental aestheticism; which aspires, with the noisy gestures and heroic posturing of tiny minorities to bring about new situations and historical movements. Also, it must be distinguished from opportunism, which neglects the link with principles, i.e., with the general scope of the movement, and, keeping in view only an immediate and apparent success, is content to clamour for isolated and limited demands without bothering whether they contradict the necessity of preparing for the supreme conquests of the working class.”(45) The important tactical problem was that he considered the emphasis on defeating fascism as a form of this opportunism he has described. He did not consider that the immediate task of defeating fascism would tremendously advance the cause of proletarian revolution. He does identify opportunism with the role of Social Democracy, which is true, but he ignores the fact that Social Democracy and the Communist party have a common interest in defeating fascism. The point is that reformism and the Communist party are not united on the aim of proletarian revolution, but both have an interest in overcoming fascism and restoring bourgeois democracy. Success in these terms can only advance the goal of the overthrow of capitalism. But this is the very point he does not seem to understand. Bordiga's emphasis on the final goal means that he neglects the importance of more immediate and limited tasks. He can outline this indifference at the level of theory and principles, and so he does not connect the tasks generated by empirical reality with the perspective of revolution. Hence he does not recognise the necessity of compromise, or U-turns, and so effectively denies the validity of defensive tasks. He refuses to recognise that defensive tasks have an intimate connection to the possibility of an offensive against capitalism.

Bordiga's rigid standpoint is outlined in the following comment: “The active participation in all the struggles of the working class, including those that arise out of partial and limited interests, in order to encourage their development. Emphasis however must constantly be placed on the factor of their links with the final revolutionary aims, and with the conquests of the class struggle presented as stepping stones on the way to the indispensable combat to come. This means denouncing the perils of abandoning ourselves to partial accomplishments as though they were points of arrival, and the danger of bartering these for the conditions of class activity and combativity of the proletariat which are the autonomy and independence of its ideology and its organisations, most important of which is the party.”(46) In its systematic and theoretical form this formulation seems to be unproblematical. It seems opposed to both sectarianism and opportunism, and emphasises the importance of connecting present struggles with the tasks of proletarian revolution. But the problem is that this apparently immaculate conception of the role of the party is also undermined by the actual acceptance of sectarianism and relative indifference about the importance of the present tasks of the class struggle. The point is that the emphasis is on the limitations of the immediate tasks. This suggests that concentration on them could undermine the overall development of the militancy of the working class and its ability to develop its intransigent opposition to capitalism. It is being argued that the very principled character of the ideology of the working class is upheld by an emphasis on the ultimate aims of the struggle, and so in this context the role of the immediate should only be considered in terms of the overall character of the aims of the party. It seems as if the very combative character of the class can be maintained if it ensures that it does not give much attention to the immediate situation, and instead ensures that the particular and concrete are mere moments in the process of developing the possibility of revolution. But the problem with this perspective is that the very partial accomplishments which are derided by Bordiga could represent the basis of forward movement in the class struggle. It is a sectarian mistake to deny the importance of the immediate and concrete in the name of the ultimate goal, and instead what is required is to establish the connections between the practical and direct tasks with the final aim of revolution.

Thus Bordiga’s emphasis is on the final goal, and so means the following comment is an accurate indicator of his standpoint: “The supreme purpose of the complex party's activity is the creation of the subjective conditions for the proletariat's preparation, so that it is in a position to profit from revolutionary possibilities as soon as history presents them, and emerge from the struggle victor rather than vanquished.”(47) This suggests that the only principled tactic is that of the offensive in order to create the conditions for the act of revolution. What is also implied in voluntarist terms is that the party effectively creates the conditions for the process of revolution, or that it instructs the working class concerning the tasks involved in the act of the overthrow of capitalism. But the point is that this voluntarist approach underestimates the importance of the tactics that are involved in the revolutionary process. Only if the necessary tactics are realised at a lower phase in the class struggle will it be possible to move to a higher stage in the development of the class struggle. This means that if the tactics of a given period are realised, the organic links between party and class will grow.

But Bordiga seems to be indifferent to the very importance of mass parties with growing connections to the working class. He comments: “We must consider the following tactical formulation wrong: all true communist parties should in all situations strive to be mass parties, that is to say, always be organisations with huge memberships and a very widespread influence over the proletariat such as to at least exceed that of the other self-styled workers parties.”(48) It is true that numerical growth is not the most important aim, what is more significant is the issue of whether an organic connection is being established between party and class. But Bordiga seems to be indifferent to the very notion of the party being able to obtain the support of the majority of the class, instead what he is concerned about is the party obtaining the acceptance within the working class of its historic goals. He implies that an emphasis on obtaining the majority of support of the working class may divert the party from concentrating on the aim of revolution. Instead he seems to uphold the view of an elite revolution led by the party, even though he denies this perspective. However, the conception of the party leading the minority of the class towards victory seems to be the outcome of his voluntarist stance. Hence he criticises the aim of the party becoming the majority party of the working class because this may lead to an acceptance of opportunist and pro- Social Democratic politics, and contends that the party: ' avoids taking paths, which although apparently the easiest routes to instant popularity, would divert it from its task'. (49) Thus it seems that Bordiga equates being the minority party of the class with adherence to the principles of the revolutionary process. He does not seem to consider that becoming the majority party of the class could enhance the possible realisation of the goals of the party.

In this context, Bordiga implies that some of the tactics of the party could become opportunist. This point is valid, but it does not overcome the necessity to apply tactics because they can also be both principled and prove to be successful. Primarily the tactic of opposing fascism is crucial if the aim of the proletarian revolution in Italy is to be able to advance. But Bordiga suggests that alliances with Social Democratic forces represents the error of passively waiting for the process of change to mature and evolve. This could be an error connected to the formation of any united front, but if applied successfully and in an active manner, the united front will actually increase the party's determination to be an important force acting in order to promote the transformation of the period of alliance into an attempt to advance the revolution. However, Bordiga is right to warn that the very measures of bourgeois governments can undermine the development of the class struggle. In this context working class militancy and its capacity to take decisive action, is defeated: “A more accurate evaluation, truly conforming with Marxism's breaking of the evolutionist and progressive spell, maintains that the bourgeoisie attempts to, and often succeeds in alternating its methods and parties in government according to its counter-revolutionary interests. All our experience shows that whenever the proletariat gets enthusiastic about the vicissitudes of bourgeois politics, opportunism triumphs.”(50) Bordiga is making a principled point about the durability and cleverness of bourgeois politics. The revolutionary party should not attempt to engage in the machinations of the bourgeois parties and instead maintain its independent stance. Nor should it have illusions in immediate success because of crisis within the bourgeois system, and therefore in the period in which struggles have to occur in which victory is not yet possible it does not undermine principles in the name of these apparent possibilities of triumph. Hence Lenin’s call for compromise should not be turned into an excuse for justifying opportunism. Bordiga is outlining the complex and uncertain character of the revolutionary process, he is suggesting that the revolutionary nature of the party will not guarantee success. This is a timely point on his part, but he often succumbs to this voluntarist standpoint.

In other words there is a contradictory tension between this timely analysis that implies that it would be complacent to underestimate the ability of the bourgeoisie to maintain its power and on the other hand his own lapse into subjectivist and voluntarist illusions about the victory of the revolution. In cautious terms he outlines that there are no historical guarantees of success with the application of tactics, and: “We can't predict with absolute certainty how objective situations will turn out, but we can predict what we should do in certain hypothetical situations, that is to say we can predict tactics in broad outlines.”(51) This comment represents a welcome appreciation of the role of tactics and his recognition that if successful they will contribute to the advance of the class struggle. The problem is that Bordiga has a general indifference towards tactics because he considers that they can have an unprincipled character in relation to the realisation of the aims of the revolutionary process, such as accommodation to opportunism and acceptance of the importance of present tasks at the expense of the goals of the future. This caution about tactics is indicated in the following comment: “We have no hesitation in saying that since the party itself is something perfectible but not perfect, much has to be sacrificed for clarity's sake to the persuasive capacity of the tactical norms, even if this does entail a certain schematisation: for even when tactical schemes prepared by us collapse under the weight of circumstances, the matter is never remedied by relapsing into opportunism and eclecticism but rather by renewed efforts to bring tactics back into line with the duties of the party.”(52) This comment indicates that tactics can promote acceptance of an opportunist understanding of the tasks of the party, and there is a constant attempt to ensure that tactics remain principled. It is admitted that good tactics can improve the character of the party, but this implies that the highest expression of these sound tactics is that of the offensive. Only in this form is it possible to be intransigent in relation to the forces of Social Democracy and in this manner avoid the problem of opportunism. Hence Bordiga argues: “This being so, the system of tactical norms must therefore be constructed with the precise aim of establishing under what conditions the intervention and activity of the party in such movements – its agitation in the life of proletarian struggles - harmonises with the final revolutionary objective whilst simultaneously guaranteeing useful progress in the sphere of ideological, organisational and tactical preparation.”(53)

In other words the intention of every tactical intervention in the class struggle at any given moment must be influenced by the ultimate aim of the revolutionary process. This implies that an apparent over-concentration on the moment could represent an acceptance of the influence of opportunist forces. Only the recognition of the organic connection of the present and the future is principled, and in this manner can overcome any tendency to conciliate the forces of Social Democracy. The problem with this standpoint, which may seem quite reasonable in theory, is that it denies the importance of the present and their related tactics. Only if the tasks of the present are successfully accomplished will it be possible to even conceive of movement to a higher stage in the class struggle. This is why the role of the present is not of a secondary nature, or merely a moment in the establishment of a revolutionary offensive, instead it can have a great significance. Only the greatest level of concentration on the tasks of the present can mean that success could become possible. This is why tactics should not be considered to be of a secondary nature, and instead they have an integral aspect in the strategy of the party.

THE LYON THESES AND INTERNATIONAL QUESTIONS

Bordiga rightly contends that whilst the formation of the Communist International has been a massive advance for the international working class, but he is also insistent that this organisation has had difficulty in establishing an effective understanding of Social Democracy, and the stability of bourgeois democracy. This situation has led to the strategic illusion that political power of the working class can be the inherent result of the formation of a left-wing bourgeois democratic government, or via the role of Social Democracy. Bordiga is right to suggest that this development is the result of degeneration within the Comintern. The flawed strategy can result in the generation of opportunism and centrist decline. Bordiga correctly maintains that these issues can only be constructively tackled by discussion, which means the banning of factions is a flawed and repressive organisational measure. He is not advocating the role of factions, but rather that people should be allowed to voice their opinions. The formation of factions would mean that the Comintern had degenerated and become the expression of political crisis. The major problem is the creation of a 'dictatorship from above', which would stifle the proletarian vanguard. The Bolshevisation of the party has led to formal unity which stifles the promotion of the revolutionary character of the Comintern. Bordiga concludes that: “This method causes damage to both the party and the proletariat in that it holds back the realisation of the “true” communist party. Once applied to several sections of the International it becomes itself a serious indication of latent opportunism. At the moment there doesn't appear to be any International Left Opposition within the Comintern, but if the unfavourable factors we have mentioned worsen, the formation of such an opposition will be at the same time a revolutionary necessity and a spontaneous reflex to the situation.”(54)

In this analysis, Bordiga has announced his intention to support any emerging Left Opposition. He has outlined that the problem is opportunism and that the situation is not being tackled in terms of the encouragement of discussion. Instead there is a monolithic unity and this is related to the conformist role of Bolshevisation. The leaders of the Comintern are utilising the prestige of the October revolution in order to discourage any criticism and instead promote a false unity. But the problem is that Bordiga connects this appropriate criticism with ultra-leftist politics such as the effective rejection of the united front tactic: “The united front shouldn't be interpreted as a political coalition with other so-called workers parties, but as a utilisation of immediate demands in particular situations in order to increase the communist party's influence over the masses without compromising its autonomous position.”(55) The problem with this interpretation of the united front is that it rejects any establishment of a connection with the working class that is influenced by the Social Democratic organisations. What Bordiga does not accept is that it is possible to develop an alliance with Social Democracy without compromising the political independence of the Communist Party. He does not address the aim of the United Front. If it is about opposing fascism or developing joint work in order to oppose the employers’ offensive, it can be justified. If it is about promoting a Social Democratic government this could be an unprincipled application. The point is how to reconcile the united front with upholding the integrity of the Communist party. What had to be understood at this time was that the working class were generally demanding the formation of the united front. In this sense its formation could only enhance the sense of power within the working class. United action could only increase the ability of the working class to oppose capitalism and reaction. But Bordiga cannot recognise the possibilities of a united front between the Communist party and other political organisations. He also connects his criticism to opposing the call for a workers government which is considered to be the perspective for the formation of a type of socialist administration under conditions of bourgeois democracy. But what he is ignoring is the agitational appeal of the call for a workers government. This tactic outlines to the working class that what is needed is a government based on their interests and organisations in order to solve the economic problems of society at the expense of the capitalists. If utilised in a principled manner, this slogan will not imply that a workers government is sufficient, but that it should be transitional to the realisation of the overthrow of capitalism and the formation of a proletarian state. Instead of recognising this agitational quality, Bordiga makes the ultimatum that the only demand that is principled in his opinion is the dictatorship of the proletariat. The problem is that this aim has been raised as an ultimatum, and will only attract the support of the Communist party. In contrast, the slogan of a workers government is capable of attracting the support of adherents of Social Democracy. It can become a popular aim that unites the forces of Social Democracy and the Communist party. Of course the leadership of Social Democracy will renege on this perspective, but this very development will enable the Communist Party to point out to the working class the treacherous role of the opportunist leaders. The popular influence of the workers government slogan can become the basis of promoting the aim of revolution and the formation of Soviets.

Hence when Bordiga claims that the workers government slogan can only become a justification of opportunism, this prospect would only occur if the perspective was applied in a manner that accommodated to the role of Social Democracy. But if applied correctly, the Social Democrats under mass pressure could be forced to support a genuine workers government that was seriously opposed to capitalism. Instead of this flexible tactic, Bordiga adheres to the rigid formula of the aim of the dictatorship of the proletariat, or the government of the Communist party. He did not seem aware that this ultimatum would alienate the workers under the influence of Social Democracy. In contrast, the workers government slogan could encourage common action in support of this demand. Indeed Bordiga sums up perfectly the reasoning behind the workers government slogan: “The united front and the workers government used to be justified on the following grounds: that just having communist parties wasn't enough to achieve victory since it was necessary to conquer the masses, and in order to conquer the masses, the influence of the Social Democrats had to be fought on the terrain of those demands which are understood by all workers.”(55) However, it can be added that this meant the unity of the workers had to be promoted if the demand of the Workers Government was to become popular. In this manner, the caution of the Social Democratic leaders was put to the test, and in order to retain their influence they had to accept the validity of the demands put forward by the Communist Party. The result of this development was the possible struggle for the formation of a workers government which could be the prelude to the realisation of the revolutionary process.

However, despite Bordiga's sectarian view of the workers government tactic, he is making the valid point that in order to justify this slogan the view is also being promoted by the Comintern that a government based on bourgeois democracy is also progressive. Bordiga makes the perceptive point that this apparent perspective underestimates the capacity of these bourgeois governments to act in a repressive and reactionary manner. He provides examples when the Communist parties have supported an alliance with the forces of bourgeois democracy. Thus he concludes correctly that this approach represents an undermining of the political independence of the Communist party and is the justification for opportunism. However, the problem is that Bordiga considers this development as the logical extension of the workers government slogan. In actuality what has happened is the dilution of this approach in the name of correct tactics. If the workers government slogan was applied in a principled manner, it would be considered as being transitional to the formation of a revolutionary state, and in this manner its relationship to bourgeois democracy would be rejected.

Concerning the agrarian question in the Soviet Union, Bordiga seems to reject the importance of the New Economic Policy and the concessions made to the peasants. Instead in an ultimatistic manner he favours the introduction of collectivist production within agriculture and the end of private farming. His standpoint is similar to Stalin's forced collectivisation, even if Bordiga cannot be considered a supporter of the excesses of Stalinism. Bordiga is also ambiguous about the importance of the national question, even though he supports the aims of oppressed nations against imperialism. But despite these limitations, Bordiga is undoubtedly right to suggest that the issue of the development of the Soviet state should be a matter of discussion and consultation with the Communist International. Bordiga defends Trotsky's view that socialism in one country cannot be generated. Instead he contends: “The building of full socialism extended to production and distribution, to industry and agriculture, is impossible in just one country, but the progressive development of the socialist elements in the Russian economy can nevertheless be achieved by thwarting the plans of the counter-revolutionaries, supported inside Russia by the rich peasants, new bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie, and outside the country by the imperialist powers.”(56) He is making the profound point that if the process of economic development in Russia has problems the result could be the internal degeneration of the Soviet state. This is a matter of concern for the whole of the Comintern. The obvious conclusion of his standpoint is that only the development of the international revolution can resolve the economic problems of the USSR. This is why this approach should be promoted in urgent terms.

So despite the important ultra-left limitations of Bordiga's he was potentially a natural ally of the emerging Left Opposition within the USSR. In this context the question for Trotsky would be how to relate the politics of Bordiga to the aims of the Left Opposition. This process does not mean glossing over differences with Bordiga, but it does mean that a serious attempt should be made to win Bordiga to the ranks of what became the International Left Opposition. However, it has to be questioned whether a serious attempt was made to consistently relate to Bordiga. The conditions that Trotsky established for admission to the International Left Opposition were defined in terms of the politics of Trotsky. The basis to develop a broad international was not realised.

THE ITALIAN QUESTION

In this aspect of the Lyon Theses, Bordiga is able to assess the politics of the Italian Communist party with regards to the present situation of the realisation of the ascendency of Fascism. He argues correctly that this Fascist movement represented the alliance of the bourgeoisie and middle class against the proletariat: “The fascist movement must be understood as the attempt to politically unify the conflicting interests of various bourgeois groups under the banner of counter-revolution.”(57) He outlines how the traditional bourgeois parties were not an opposition to fascism, but instead at least tacitly accepted its rise to power. There was unity of the bourgeoisie and middle class in opposing the threat of proletarian revolution. The Fascists were only the most militant expression of the counter-revolution, but it has utilised its rise to state power in order to transform the state and make it the most completed expression of reactionary objectives. Bordiga's analysis would seem to suggest that the practical conclusion to be made is that the Communist Party should have made a united front with the Socialists in order to oppose the counter-revolutionary threat of the Fascists. But this conclusion is not made because the history of the formation of the Italian Communist Party, which was based on a split with the Socialists in the name of revolutionary principles, seemed to imply that the united front would be a concession to reformism. Instead the initial policy of the Italian Communists is based on implacable opposition to bourgeois democracy and the tactic of electoral abstentionism concerning involvement in Parliamentary institutions.

Hence the result of this tendency towards ultra-leftism in the PCI leadership meant the tactic of the united front was rejected, and instead the emphasis was on the possible Socialist conciliation of the fascists: “In order to place the proletariat in the best position for the ensuing battles, the leadership took the stance that although the greatest effort should be made to use the traditional apparatus of the Red organisations, it was also necessary to warn the proletariat not to count on anything from the maximalists and reformists, who would even go so far as accepting a peace treaty with fascism.”(58) The tragic aspect of this rigid policy was that it did not recognise that only the approach of the united front could ensure that the Socialists would not capitulate to the Fascists. Furthermore, there was a desire for unity within the working class against the aggression of the Fascists. Indeed the result of the ultra-left approach of Bordiga was to passively accept the inevitability of the rise of the Fascists to power: “Despite the efforts of the party, it was not until later, August 1922, that a generalised mobilisation took place, but proletarian defeat was inevitable and from then on fascism, openly supported in their violent campaigns by the forces of a decidedly liberal democratic state became master of the country.”(59) Bordiga admitted that the Communist International did not support the policy of the Italian Communist leadership, and they even advocated unification with the Socialist left wing.

Bordiga is also dismissive of Gramsci and his perspective of workers control of production in relation to the factory occupations in Italy during 1920. Bordiga's position within the Italian Communist party was weakened during the mid-1920's when he seemed to have been deposed from the leadership. He criticised the various optimistic schemas that the new leaders had for overthrowing fascism, such as an alliance with progressive middle class parties. Bordiga is right that instead of what can be defined as emerging popular frontism there is the need for reassert class politics as the basis of opposition to fascism: “The party must prepare the proletariat for a revival of its classist activity and for the struggle against fascism by drawing on the harsh experiences of recent times. At the same time, we need to disenchant the proletariat of the notion that there is anything to be gained from bourgeois politics, or that any help will be forthcoming from the urban middle classes. The experiences of the liberal-democratic period can be used to prevent the re-emergence of these pacifistic illusions.”(60) But he still rejects the tactic of the united front in order to oppose fascism, and instead ambiguously calls for the united front from below. But he suggests in a helpful manner the formation of workers and peasants committees in order to promote the development of the class struggle. He finishes his Theses with the recognition that the internal problems of the Italian party can only be resolved in terms of the development of the Communist International.

Hence we can conclude that despite Bordiga's obvious mistakes, he is a natural candidate for becoming a supporter of what was to become the International Left Opposition. The second part of this article will discuss whether his later positions, after a period of inactivity, confirm this evaluation.

FOOTNOTES:

(1)Amadeo Bordiga: Party and Class, Marxist Internet Archive p2

(2) ibid p3

(3) ibid p3

(4) ibid p3

(5) ibid p4

(6) ibid p5

(7) ibid p7

(8) Bordiga: Party and Class Action, Marxist Internet Archive

(9) ibid p2

(10) ibid p2

(11) ibid p4

(12) ibid p7

(13) ibid p7-8

(14) ibid p8

(15) ibid p8-9

(16) ibid p10

(17) ibid p10

(18) ibid p11

(19) ibid p11

(20) ibid p12

(21) ibid p13-14

(22)Bordiga, The Democratic Principle, Marxist Internet Archive p2

(23) ibid p10

(24) ibid p11

(25) ibid p13

(26) ibid p14

(27) ibid p15

(28) ibid p17

(29) ibid p17

(30) ibid p18

(31) ibid p18

(32)Lyon Theses (1926) p2

(33) ibid p2-3

(34) ibid p3

(35) ibid p3

(36) ibid p3-4

(37) ibid p4

(38) ibid p4

(39) ibid p5

(40) ibid p6

(41) ibid p7

(42) ibid p7

(43) ibid p7

(44) ibid p7

(45) ibid p8

(46) ibid p9

(47) ibid p9

(48) ibid p9

(49) ibid p10

(50) ibid p11

(51) ibid p14

(52) ibid p15

(53) ibid p15-16

(54) ibid p22

(55) ibid p24

(56) ibid p31

(57) ibid p32

(58) ibid p35

(59) ibid p36

(60) ibid p45