

By the L' Ouvrier Communiste, this text presents their views on the development of class consciousness among the proletariat and its entwinement with violence. Originally published in "L'Ouvrier Communiste N°12 - Octobre 1930".

All or almost all the so-called leaders of the proletarian movement have denied the possibility of the autonomous development of workers' consciousness, limiting it to mere economic consciousness, to the stomach stimulant, to labour consciousness, or else they have thought that this consciousness must develop according to already laid down directives, provided by them. The Social Democrats, the Bolsheviki, almost all those politicians, who have never decided to make a definitive defection from the non-working class from which they originated, or who have abandoned the proletariat in the midst of which they were born, have jealously separated ideology from the proletarian movement, giving the impression that this ideology was an exclusive product of their brains. Even the anarchists, when they proclaim the immortality of the anarchist idea, they detach their ideology from the proletarian movement. Anarchist idealists, like those of "Studi Sociali", make their ideology prevail over the masses, they make it a particular mysticism of privileged brains, revealers of the anarchist word. And, in this, they do not differ at all from the thought of Lenin who considered communist ideology as the necessary product of the intellectual elaboration of the great thinkers coming from the bourgeois class. In this way, the problem of proletarian consciousness is resolved dogmatically, a priori. If ideology is something that precedes the workers' movement, if it is an intellectual anticipation, all that remains for the workers' movement itself is to let itself be impregnated by this ideology for the development of its revolutionary consciousness. But there is more: since the proletariat cannot today, under the capitalist regime, educate itself - this is above all a thought of Rosa Luxemburg, who, although not having the quality of a leader, has that of a heroine - it only remains for it to trust the communists who, once the revolution has taken place, will be able to create this consciousness for it.

It is an indisputable fact that this particular way of considering the problem of proletarian consciousness in the revolution constitutes a vicious circle. Indeed, if this consciousness is only a consequence, in all cases, before and after the revolution, it will never be revolutionary; and the proletariat, and consequently the new social aggregate, will always be subject to an ideology

of the elite, a domination of the intellectual elite. This theory therefore has a distinctly bourgeois aspect insofar as it leads to skepticism and discouragement, insofar as it affirms as impossible the real development of the cerebral, spiritual energies of the masses. The masses do not have and will not have their own intellectual initiatives, since, even when the revolution is made, it will only have to assimilate theories already elaborated and developed.

And it is still an indisputable fact that this theory is in complete contradiction with the materialist dialectic, that is, with the way of considering history as a process of conflicts between forces that act on the fundamental basis of economic force. In fact, this way of seeing and observing the evolution of history in no way allows us to consider ideology, that is, the conscious reflection of reality, as something that this reality would surpass and that would stand outside of it.

Esotericism, that is, the difficult and mysterious form that ideology takes at all times, appears rather as a particular stratagem intended to make it inaccessible to simple minds, to brains that are not too developed. It is characteristic to note that the immense difficulty that theoreticians of all political schools, supposedly revolutionary, attribute to ideological digestion, that scarecrow's air that they adopt when they speak of something difficult, is what they have in common with bourgeois philosophers like Hegel, Kant and Schopenhauer, who, like the Egyptian priests, guarded the hermetic secrets of bourgeois ideology. Many say: not all workers can become theoreticians; therefore, the few who can continue to make the law, whether they are communists or anarchists is of no importance.

Obviously, the idealist who admits that the spirit is not, so to speak, a material energy, a function of matter, as Engels would say, has good reasons for affirming a similar thing. But in this case, if the spirit, if intellectual activity, is not an element in development, the thing is suddenly expedited since, on these bases, the revolution remains a pure arbitrariness of the conscious elites, an upheaval of thought in the intellectual aristocracy. But there's much more to be said for the comical nature of the doctrine of these unconscious Hegelian minstrels who, in the 20th century, utter deep anachronistic sighs under the balcony of a romantic old lady. And their revolution would end up in such a pitiful state that we'd end up saying it wasn't worth having.

The strange thing is that this bourgeois mentality manifests itself among the representatives of the Marxist dialectic, among those who excommunicate and re-excommunicate themselves,

sometimes from Moscow, sometimes from Constantinople: it would be better to say: which is comical.

In general, the party man is like this, he takes on important caricatured airs which will make our proletarian posterity laugh heartily.

Karl Marx never really thought that proletarian consciousness had to be an exact copy of his thought, and, on the other hand, he did not consider that he had offered the proletariat a new world view, that is, a new philosophy, when he thought that, by criticizing bourgeois philosophies, the proletariat had to throw all philosophies into the air, and that it had to replace them with experience, that is, experimental sciences. Marx spoke to us rather of a leap from the world of slavery to that of freedom. What is this world of slavery if not capitalism in which economic forces dominate the production process, social organization, and also its ideological superstructure? Where then are brains linked to the dominant play of bourgeois forces? And if this is a fact, it follows that if forms of proletarian ideology begin to appear, to make their way, this is due precisely to the class struggle which is beginning to develop. And these ideological forms are not at all above the forms of struggle, but, although they are dominated by them, they only reflect in a synthetic way, if you will, the mood of the masses and very often, it is a pity that sometimes even contradicting themselves as Lenin said, they remain well behind, and this is moreover natural, the forms of struggle and the mood of the masses. As we see, the depositories of the ideological ballot boxes do nothing other than follow reality step by step and are even very often the falsifiers of it.

It therefore remains a fact that experience, which is the foundation of theoretical forms, is the basis of all conscious development, and that the proletariat can therefore attain its class consciousness by means of experience. And it is not a fact that mere economic comfort is a source of conscious development. The fact that today, on the contrary, we have to observe a psychological corruption among the labor aristocracies leads us to believe that only hard experience can bring them back to the path of class unity, but only in part.. Consequently, no one can think that this workers' consciousness will experience a continuous and gradual development on the basis of an eternal bourgeois democracy; that it will be the process of a peaceful evolution, or the product of a simple propaganda work. It is the product of a set of

elements: it is indisputable that it would be wrong to affirm that the workers' brain has not made steps forward in the last historical period, and that also the long phase of economic struggles has not yielded results; a large part of the workers have learned to begin to reason with their brain, even if in an insufficient way. Naturally, this development of the workers' mentality ended up degenerating since, in the period of prosperity of capitalism, it began to consider the latter as something stable with which it was worth living, even if in some agreement with it. But now a new epoch is succeeding it, now the prosperity of capitalism is declining, and here we are on the threshold of ever more gigantic crises, here we are in question, in the middle of an economic period. And now this workers' consciousness is obliged to take another step forward since workers' thought finds itself confronted with greater problems. In Italy, for example, this new step forward of proletarian consciousness leads the working class to the occupation of the factories. Two elements were in conflict, during this period of the history of the Italian workers' movement, in the collective spirit of the proletariat: the social-democratic tradition and the new revolutionary conscious factor: the expropriation of capital. Unfortunately, it was the first factor that had the upper hand. From struggle to struggle, in the civil war, the proletariat, as a mass, increased its conscious strength more and more: only one element, the element of the hope for a peaceful evolution towards socialism, still gained the upper hand. But if this factor weighs heavily in the balance, another fact has remained clear: for the proletariat to overcome its hesitations, for it to pass to a higher level of consciousness, violence was a necessary element. The class struggle in Italy and Western Europe has entered a new phase: this factor which seemed to be diminishing more and more in the eyes of the boasters of parliamentary politics appears once again in history as a decisive element. The bourgeoisie, in the mortal phase of its definitive crisis, here attacks openly and establishes the regime of terror, as in Italy: there it begins to launch its reactionary offensive, as in Austria and Germany. Everywhere it sharpens its weapons, everywhere by means of compulsory arbitration or social insurance, as in France, it prepares to launch the offensive against the wage earners, against the standard of living of the working class.

The prospects of the struggle are becoming more and more clear. Everywhere, the proletariat is confronted with the spectacle of police or fascist brutality. In Italy, this method appears to be the only one to fight against the regime. Violence: the violence of a few today, the violence of many

tomorrow, that of the masses. Men come out, suddenly leap out, from the heart of the working class and strike. They are isolated, but not like Bresci, Passannante<sup>1</sup> and other precursors of the revolutionary epic.

If these great epic figures of the proletarian movement were once more beautiful in their isolation, today behind the Lucetti, behind the Donati, the Della Maggiora and the others, there is a murmur of approval that rises, a dull voice of conscience that develops, a tide of spirits in revolt that follows them not far behind them. These men who, to create the new proletarian spirit, to collaborate in the formation of the new level of proletarian consciousness, gave their lives — thirty years in prison is also death — must not simply be justified, but they must be exalted and followed. To be violent, to hit, to incite to new struggles, new conflicts, is a duty for revolutionaries. The old joke of the cowards who feared to provoke the reaction by striking has no more supporters today, except among the political sycophants, among the profiteers of the Concentration, and the Bolshevik mercenaries who, for the interests of the Russian neo-bourgeois caste, gave the signal for the end of the civil war in 1924, among the whining devotees of the victim Matteotti who have stinked the air with their cowardice, and the filthy defamers of Lucetti<sup>2</sup> who have offered the proletariat of Italy the dishonor of the Bombacci farce<sup>3</sup>. And also among the profiteers of the emigration in France and the editors of that filthy Parisian "rag"<sup>4</sup> that is L'Humanité, who today find in the individual act a method harmful to the revolution. This collection of cowards, this concentrated cowardice, to use the expression of that valiant old man Paolo Schicchi, who fears open combat and frontal attack, this filthy band of mercenaries can today only defame the heroism of those whom they will never imitate, but will always deny.

And it is in this complex process, in which new disillusionments are certainly being prepared for the proletariat, that the working class will find the means to strike consciously and to win consciously.

Consciousness and violence are two factors that complement each other, neither can develop separately. And in the new struggles, in the new phase of civil struggle that is opening again in Italy, that we hope for in Germany, in Austria, and in the other capitalist countries, we hope that workers' consciousness will reach the level sufficient to win.

And this even without your theoretical lucubrations, or even the old mummies of Marxist orthodoxy.