

Publisher's Note

100 years have gone by since, in June 1920, still in the heart of the internationalist battle triggered by the October Revolution, Lenin published "*Left-Wing*" *Communism, an Infantile Disorder*, almost at the same time as the opening of the proceedings of the Second Congress of the Communist International, founded the previous year in March 1919.

A real global *What Is to Be Done?* that formed the referential thread for all the contributions presented in the course of the congress by the exponents of the Bolshevik leadership, and which Grigory Zinoviev himself, the chairman of the Comintern's Executive Committee, defined as a work that, "for Marxist theory, is no less important than Marx's *Capital*".

Unfortunately, falling a prey to Stalinism and uprooted from its inseparable connection with internationalist strategy, the book would end up, paradoxically, being reduced to a "tactics manual", to be used to condemn as "left-wing" communism every criticism of the worst compromises and unprincipled "about-turns" of the opportunistic parties in the service of Russian state capitalism.

But it was precisely Arrigo Cervetto, in his manuscripts on strategy, who grasped its essence when he recalled that its value lies "in the affirmation of the universal validity of the Bolshevik experience (i.e. of Leninism)".

In their race against time, engaged in those years by the revolutionary vanguards, the main problem was in fact represented by the historical delay of the *world party*. And, in that sense, the Bolshevik experience was to serve as a lesson, since it was an experience of unique struggle, of a "practical history", as Lenin himself recalled in the

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pages of his book, “unequalled anywhere in the world in its wealth of ... forms, shades, and methods of struggle of all classes of modern society”.

If – as Cervetto observed again – Lenin had succeeded in winning “the battle against Spartacist centrism over the need for the World Party” in the First Congress, launching the process for the formation of a world Leninist Party was the difficult challenge undertaken by the Russian leadership in the course of the Second. But unlike Russia, where that course had taken decades of theoretical, political and organisational battles in order to impose itself, now it was a question of repeating it in an extremely short time span, in extraordinarily urgent conditions and, above all, on an international scale.

In those conditions, truly exceptional from the revolutionary point of view, the Communist International had rapidly enlarged its sphere of influence, becoming a real pole of attraction for a plurality of movements and political currents, also very different from one another, which were knocking at its door asking to be let in. This was a magmatic aggregation of forces which could and had to be made homogeneous, disciplined and organised, only by bringing to it consciousness “from outside”, i.e. international strategy – especially as the course of events, from the non-revolution in Germany to the arrest of the Red Army on the banks of the Vistula in Poland, was gradually making it more evident that the hopes of an easy victory had turned out to be illusory and that it was necessary to equip oneself with a solid, long-term strategy.

For Lenin, it would have been a mistake to believe that what continued to be a “very serious revolutionary crisis” was, however, “without a way out”: “There is no situation that offers absolutely no way out” for the bourgeoisie. And this was the first lesson of Bolshevism. Even the most serious crises are not irreversible for capitalism, especially if the party’s subjective element has not organised the proletariat’s force in time and has not provided it with a strategy.

In that situation fraught with unknowns, one thing, however, was certain. The international proletariat would

not have been able to take advantage of the prolongation of the crisis without a world Bolshevik Party. And this could have formed only in a struggle to the bitter end against opportunism, “our main enemy”. Nevertheless, the struggle against the mistakes of the so-called “left-wing” currents was no less important for Lenin.

The final resolutions of the Second Congress spread the basic principles of the Leninist party conception to the whole movement. The spontaneity of the German and Dutch Left came out of it substantially beaten. And, with the adoption of the “21 conditions”, all the centrist parties found themselves in an *either/or* situation: either throw out their “right wings” or remain out of the International. If split from the opportunists was undoubtedly a necessary precondition, at the same time it was not sufficient. Unfortunately, centrism and maximalism remained the major elements in the political formation of the cadres of that world party that had been formed too late to be equal to the task it had set itself.

The internationalists fell fighting. And in their resistance to the social-democratic counter-revolution, first, and fascist and Stalinist, later, they demonstrated great passion and courage – which, however, were not enough.

When Lenin, summing up his party conception in a single sentence, wrote that “without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement,” he was not writing a catchphrase. If anything, he was raising the basic issue: the non-assimilation of strategy was the cause not so much of a partial defeat, in some ways inevitable, but of the fact that that defeat led to a disastrous rout from which only the honour of those valiant militants was saved. Passion is not enough. To deal with communist struggle in the long times of imperialist development, “passion strengthened by reason, disciplined and anchored in theory,” is necessary.

In the class struggle, a defeat is not wholly so if the party that suffers it succeeds in drawing all the lessons that may derive from it. When the march of internationalism resumed in the 1950s, after “the lowest point of proletarian

internationalism” had been reached with the Yalta agreements, the original Lotta Comunista group drew what was necessary from that defeat.

It was necessary to return to Lenin, acknowledging the historical delay that had accumulated in the meantime, aware, first of all, that the party has to take shape in the counter-revolutionary phase, forging itself in theoretical clarity, study and the long practice of militancy, because only in this way is it possible to arrive prepared at the appointments with the inevitable economic, political and military crises that imperialism is destined to spawn thanks to its chaotic development.

Today the historical delay continues to weigh on European Leninism, not only because its continental entrenchment is not yet sufficient, but also because the acceleration of history due to the irruption of China into the global arena complicates this delay even more. And the new strategic phase, which characterises the imperialist contention in the time of continental powers, is for us at the same time both a huge opportunity and an unprecedented challenge.

More than ever, the Bolshevik model can allow us to face it by building, in the heart of the European imperialist metropolis, an internationalist party equal to the unprecedented task we have before us.

That model remains the highest historical product from the viewpoint of the acquisition of consciousness of the real movement. Hence, it represented and still represents a choice of freedom and inevitably of struggle against “the present state of things”, a struggle carried on in collective work that allows us to overcome every narrow, misleading limit of individualism and personalism, precisely thanks to that “very severe and really cast-iron discipline” that is not an imposition but a free, conscious choice.

This is one of the reasons why we proudly continue to define ourselves as Leninists. This is the lesson of urgent topicality contained in the pages of “Left-Wing” Communism: a weapon of struggle for a militancy that looks to the future.

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