

## The Revolutionary Program of Communist Society Eliminates All Forms of Ownership of Land, the Instruments of Production and the Products of Labor

*Bordiga, Amadeo*  
1958

Written by Bordiga as a member of the Partito Comunista Internazionale for publication in *Il Programma Comunista* no. 16, September 3-17, 1958. It was then translated into Spanish in 1981, and thence into English in 2013. Found in English at <https://libcom.org/library/revolutionary-program-communist-society-eliminates-all-forms-ownership-land-instruments-> - Spanish available at <http://sinistra.net/lib/upt/elproc/moqe/moqefkibus.html>.

### Engels and the Agrarian Programs of the Socialist Parties<sup>1</sup>

In September 1894, at its Nantes Congress, the French Workers Party (the party of Guesde and Lafargue) adopted an agrarian action program. In October, in Frankfurt am Main, the German Social Democratic Party of Engels was engaged in addressing the same issue; near the end of his long life, Engels remained in contact with the movement of the Second International, founded in 1889, after the death of Marx. He expressed his vehement objections to the French resolution, while he was more satisfied with the German Congress, where a right wing tendency similar to the one that prevailed at Nantes was rejected.

Engels dedicated an article to this topic that is of the utmost importance, published in the journal *Die Neue Zeit* in November 1894. A somewhat unfaithful translation of this article was published in the November 1955 issue of the Stalinist journal, *Cahiers du Communisme*. The editors of this journal say in their preface to the text that a packet of correspondence of great interest between Engels and Lafargue was discovered in the house of a descendant of Marx (Lafargue was his son-in-law). In these letters, Engels did not try to hide his disapproval, and his formulations are truly important; only the Stalinists would have the gall to write a preface to a historical document that so blatantly exposes them.

---

<sup>1</sup> Turin Meeting, June 1-2, 1958. In publishing these “corollaries” of the meeting of the party held on June 1 and 2, 1958 in Turin, which first appeared in issues numbers 16 and 17 of the same year in our bimonthly *Il Programma Comunista*, we must recall that the Turin Meeting was convened in response—during its second session—to the meeting of the most extreme representatives of post-Stalinist revisionism held in Ljubljana, and was at the same time a living vindication of the central role of the party in the revolution and in the state of the proletarian dictatorship, and the occasion for an ardent polemic against the distorters and “modernizers” of the Marxist revolutionary vision. As a result, the prefigurative outline that is elaborated in the text reproduced here of the fundamental features of communist society is not ... a blind leap forward by the intellect or by desire into the empty world of ideas: it is inseparable from the struggle to destroy the capitalist mode of production and thus from the reconstruction of the guiding-organ of this formidable battle, the class party. This is a text that was written for revolutionary militants, not for those who dream of a City of the Sun or for impotent philosophers who are waiting for the Word to be made Flesh.

You—he says with true bitterness, despite the seriousness of his tone, the old Engels addressing Lafargue—you, the intransigent revolutionaries of yesterday, have taken a little more to opportunism than the Germans. In a later letter, Engels stresses that he wrote his critical article in a friendly spirit, but did not hesitate to repeat that, “you have allowed yourself to be dragged too far down the slippery slope of opportunism.” These quotations are also useful in order to show just how far back the terminology of our discussion goes, to which we have always granted the greatest importance. Even before the death of Engels, the left wing Marxists (who, at the Congress of Rouen in 1882, had split from the “Possibilists”, who advocated participation in the ministries of bourgeois governments) defined themselves as intransigent revolutionaries, and the same term was adopted, in the first decade of this century, by the left fraction of the Italian Socialist Party, which was opposed to the reformism of Turati and the possibilism of Bissolati, and from which the Communist Party was born after a subsequent process of realignments and splits.

The word, opportunism, which many young people think was first coined by Lenin in the indomitable battle he waged during the First World War, had already been employed by Engels and Marx in their writings. On other occasions we have noted that, semantically, it is not the most felicitous expression, since it is susceptible to being interpreted as a moral judgment, rather than a social-deterministic one. Nonetheless, the word has the historical right of precedence, and in our view expresses what is despicable and depraved as opposed to what is healthy in Marxism.

In that letter written in order to “deal considerately” with Lafargue, whose revolutionary credentials were beyond reproach, Engels provided a definition of right wing opportunism that was as sharp as a razor. In the sentence in which he says, “you have gone too far down the slippery slope of opportunism”, he also writes the following words:

“In Nantes, you are on the road to sacrificing the future of the Party for one day’s success.”

This definition is still relevant: opportunism is the method that sacrifices the future of the Party for one day’s success. Those who have practiced it, then and now, are disgraceful!

Now is the time to get to the crux of the problem and take a look at Engels’ text. He concluded that, for the French, there was still time to stop and he hoped that his article would help them to do so. But where are the French (and the Italians) of 1958?

### **Socialists and the Peasantry in the late 1800s**

Before we proceed to a study of Engels we shall sketch a picture of the general situation of the agricultural population of Europe during his time. The bourgeois parties had always judged that the socialist movement would have to develop only in the milieu of the urban industrial workers, and were surprised when the peasant question found a place on the agendas of all the socialist parties of the time. The response of Engels is relevant to every stage, such as, for example, when we demonstrate that right in the middle of the twentieth century the social questions of the countries of color and the industrially undeveloped countries cannot be constrained within the rigid dualism, capitalists-proletarians, but, always and everywhere, Marxism must have doctrinal and practical answers for the whole multi-class, rather than two-class, panorama of society.

Engels is in a position to allow only two exceptions to the fundamental presence of one large class of peasants who are not wage workers or entrepreneurs: Great Britain and Prussia east of the Elbe. Only in those two regions had the owners of large landed estates and big industrial agriculture totally liquidated the small farmer who worked for himself. We shall observe that even in these two exceptional cases, there are three

classes (as always in Marx, even when he addresses the question of a model bourgeois society): urban or rural wage labor, industrial or agrarian capitalist, and bourgeois, rather than feudal, landowner.

In all other countries, for Engels and for every Marxist, “the peasant is a very essential factor of the population, production and political power”. Therefore no one can say that the peasants, as far as I am concerned, do not exist, as an excuse, or that the movements of the colonial peoples, as far as I am concerned, do not exist.<sup>2</sup>

That the theory of the function of these social classes, however, and the way the Marxist party should approach them, should be a copy of the corresponding positions of the petty-bourgeois democracy, is the other outrage against which Engels unsheathed one of his “corrections”. We must however say that this second position is just another way of formulating the same outrage.

Since only a mental defective could doubt the statistical weight of the peasants in terms of demography and the economy, Engels rapidly touched on the sore spot: what is its impact as a factor in the political struggle?

The conclusion is obvious: most of the time, the peasants have only demonstrated their apathy, based on their isolated lives in rural areas. But this apathy is not itself without effects:

“This apathy on the part of the great mass of the population is the strongest pillar not only of the parliamentary corruption in Paris and Rome but also Russian despotism.” Not we, but Engels, mentioned Rome, and he did so no less than 64 years ago.

Engels showed that since the birth of the workers movement in the cities, the bourgeoisie had never ceased to galvanize the peasant landowners against the workers movement, depicting the socialists as those who would abolish property, and the same thing was done by the landowners who rented out their lands, who pretended to have a common interest to defend alongside the small peasant landowner.

Must the industrial proletariat accept as inevitable the fact that, in the conquest of political power, the whole peasant class will be an active ally of the bourgeoisie that also must be defeated? Engels introduced the Marxist perspective on this question, rapidly admitting that such a perspective must be condemned, and is just as useless for the cause of the revolution as well as that of the proletariat that will thus never be able to conquer before the disappearance of all the intermediate classes.

In France, history has taught us—as is incomparably presented in the classical texts of Karl Marx—that the peasants, with their weight in society, have always tipped the scales of confrontations in favor of the side that was opposed to the interests of the working class, in the First and Second Empires and against the Paris revolutions of 1831, 1848-1849 and 1871.

How, then, can this relation of forces be shifted in favor of the workers? How should we address the small peasant landowners and what should we promise them? Now we are at the heart of the agrarian problem. But the goal of Engels is to discredit as anti-Marxist and counterrevolutionary any defense of the preservation of small-scale property. What would the venerable and great Frederick have said if someone had proposed, as they are doing today in Italy and France<sup>3</sup>, that the agrarian program must advocate the extension, over the entire rural population, of the ownership of all the land that is under cultivation?

---

<sup>2</sup> See the series of documents produced at General Meetings of the party on this question in “El marxismo y la cuestion nacional y colonial”, *El Programa Comunista*, no. 36, October-December 1980.

<sup>3</sup> We may add, in 1980: “and in Spain and all of Latin America.”

## The French Programs

Already in 1892, at the Marseilles Congress, the French Workers Party had drafted an agrarian program (this was the year when the anarchists split from the socialist party in Italy and the Italian Socialist Party was founded in Genoa).

This first program is not subject to the same degree of condemnation on the part of Engels as the Nantes program, because the latter program, as we shall see below, had misappropriated theoretical principles for the purpose of obtaining the support of the party for the immediate interests of the small peasant landowners. In Marseilles the party limited itself to suggesting practical goals for agitation among the peasants (at the time it defended the famous distinction between the maximum and the minimum program, which later led to the whole historical crisis of the socialist parties). Engels highlighted the fact that the demands made on behalf of the small peasant landowners—those which, at the time, were more attentive to the demands of the sharecroppers than to the working landowners—were so modest that other parties had already proposed them and that many bourgeois governments had already implemented them. Wholesale purchasing cooperatives formed by rural municipalities for the acquisition of machinery, favored by the state so that central garages and depots could be established, prohibition of the seizure of the harvest by the landowner for non-payment of debts, revision of land assessments, and so on....

The list of demands made on behalf of the agrarian wage workers is given even less consideration by Engels; some are obvious, because they are the same as for the industrial workers, like a minimum wage; others are tolerable, such as the establishment, on municipal land (municipal property), of agricultural production cooperatives.

This program, however, led the party to such significant electoral success in the elections of 1893 that, on the eve of the next Congress, some elements in the party sought to continue to push ahead on the road of championing the interests of the peasants. There was nonetheless a feeling that this was dangerous ground, so they wanted to pave the way by drafting a theoretical preamble that would show that there was no contradiction between the maximum socialist program and the protection of the small peasant landowner, and even the protection of his property rights! It is at this point that Engels, after having summarized the program's contents, directed the full force of his critique. They wanted, he said, "to prove that it is in keeping with the principles of socialism to protect small-peasant property from destruction by the capitalist mode of production, although one is perfectly aware that this destruction is inevitable".

The preamble's first premise says that, considered in terms of the general program of the party, the producers will not be free until they possess the means of production. The second premise says that, if in the industrial domain one can foresee the restitution of the means of production to the producers in a collective or social form, in the agricultural domain, at least in France, the means of production, the land, is in most cases individually possessed by the worker.

The third premise says that whereas peasant property "is irretrievably doomed", "socialism" must not, however, "hasten its doom, as its task does not consist in separating property from labor", but, to the contrary, "in uniting both of these factors of all production by placing them in the same hands".

The fourth premise says that, considering the fact that just as the industrial premises must be seized from the private capitalists in order to hand them over to the workers, so also, and in just the same way, the large landed estates must be given to the agricultural proletarians and therefore it is always the duty of "socialism" "to maintain the peasants themselves tilling their patches of land in possession of the same as against the [tax

collector], the usurer, and the encroachments of the newly-arisen big landowners”.

The fifth premise was the one that Engels found most scandalous: while the first four created a tremendous doctrinal confusion, the fifth one directly annihilates the concept of the class struggle: “it is expedient to extend this protection also to the producers who as tenants or sharecroppers (*metayers*) cultivate the land owned by others and who, if they exploit day laborers, are to a certain extent compelled to do so because of the exploitation to which they themselves are subjected”.

### **The Unfortunate Conclusion**

From the above premises arose the practical program that is intended “to bring together all the elements of rural production, all occupations which by virtue of various rights and titles utilise the national soil, to wage an identical struggle against the common foe: the feudality of landownership”.

Here, as Engels demonstrated, although with the obvious intention not to treat old self-professed Marxists like idiots, all historical differentiations are thrown overboard, confusing, in the France of 1894, the feudal landowners, annihilated a century before by the Great Revolution, not with the large capitalist landlords, the industrialists of agriculture, towards whom today’s national-communist traitors directly issue invitations to join a broad-based bloc, because they improve the soil (!), but with the bourgeois agrarian landowners, who do not engage in administration or management of the agricultural estate, but who live off the rent paid by the petty tenant farmers or large landlords. This third class of capitalist society has nothing to do with the old feudal nobility; the former bought its territorial goods with money, and can sell them, since “the bourgeois revolution transformed the land into an article of commerce”; the latter (that is, the feudal class) had an inalienable right not only over the land, but also over the workers who populated it. Engels would remind these sluggish disciples that a bloc did arise, “for a certain time and for definite purposes”, against this feudal class, but it is clear that in this historical bloc—whose heyday in France was in the remote past and in Russia was still underway—it was these same “bourgeois landlords” who took part.

Such a noxious error still beclouds the European proletarian horizon due to the triumphant opportunism of Stalinism. The doctrinal weapons to counteract its ruinous effects do not have to be sought in the data supplied by the period that has elapsed since 1894, but in the very same arsenal that Engels utilized in his text on the peasant question.

This agrarian policy, totally subordinated to coalition politics, kills the class struggle, and insofar as it is implemented by the same party that embraces the factory workers it kills it exclusively for the benefit of the industrial capitalists, and guarantees the survival of the bourgeois form of society until these elephantine parties are destroyed.

Continuing in the doctrinal vein, before we consider the political side of the question, it is necessary to make another equally pessimistic observation, one that would be pointless to omit, consisting in the fact that today, unlike the situation in 1894, opportunism is not at the stage of posing a threat; it has already sucked all the energy from the working class. Many—almost all—of the groups that challenge the big Stalinist or post-Stalinist parties, and which have split from them, have demonstrated that they have ideas concerning the “*contenu du socialisme*” that are just as un-Marxist as those presented in the Nantes Program (since our narrative relates to France, we shall refer to the group, “Socialisme ou Barbarie”). We would have said anti-Marxist if we were not in the presence of the sober discourse of Frederick Engels, who, evidently, knew from experience, and from the effects of many sharp reprimands from Papa Marx, that the French do not like to be *choqué* (wounded), and that they do not even like to be *froissé* (offended). In the first instance

they assume the visage of a D'Artagnan, in the second that of a Talleyrand, as was the case later with Frossard (a world champion of un-Marxism) at the Second Congress of the Communist International. And this person dared to call himself a Marxist in front of Lenin!

### **A Series of False Formulas**

False formulations are extremely useful for the purpose of clarifying the real "content" of the modern revolutionary program. The old social ideologies assumed a mystical form, but were nonetheless still condensations of the human experience of the species, of the same nature as the most highly developed notions attained in the era of capitalism and in the struggle to overthrow it. We could say that the old mysticism assumed the form of a series of affirmative theses. Modern mysticism, the norm of action of the destructive forces of contemporary society, is instead organized in a series of negative theses. The degree of consciousness of the future, which cannot be attained by the individual but only by the revolutionary party, is forged in a more expressive way—at least until a society without classes has become a reality—in a series of norms of this kind: don't say this—don't do that.

We hope to present in a modest and accessible form an edifying result that is the product of some rather arduous labors. With this goal in mind, we shall proceed to examine, following in the footsteps of Engels, the master of this method, the mistaken formulas of the Nantes premises.

Engels began by saying, concerning the first premise, that it is not correct to deduce the formula, "that freedom of the producers presupposes the possession of the means of production", from our general program.

This same French program immediately adds that this possession is only possible in the form of individual possession—which has never been generalized and which industrial development is making increasingly more impossible—or in the form of possession in common, the preconditions for which have been created by the stabilization of capitalist society. The only goal of socialism, in that case, said Engels, is "the common possession of the means of production".

Engels considered it to be of great importance to emphasize the fact that no conquest or preservation of individual possession of the means of production on the part of the producers can possibly be a goal of the socialist program. And he adds:

"Not only in industry, where the ground has already been prepared, but in general, hence also in agriculture."

This is a fundamental thesis for the entire classical corpus of Marxism. The proletarian party—unless it has openly declared that it is revisionist—cannot advocate or defend for even one second, a form of unity between the worker and his means of labor that is achieved on an individual scale, in subdivided personal allotments. The text under examination here repeats this again and again.

Engels also refutes the concept expressed in the erroneous formula concerning the "freedom" of the producer. This freedom is by no means assured by these hybrid forms, bound up with contemporary society, in which the producer possesses the land as well as a share of his instruments of production. In today's economy, these factors are quite precarious and are not guaranteed for the small peasant proprietor. The bourgeois revolution has undoubtedly conferred upon him the benefit of freeing him from his feudal bonds, and from the personal servitude of giving a feudal lord part of his labor time or a share of his products. But this freedom in no way guarantees, with the advent of an era when everyone gets his little plot of land, that he will not be separated from the latter in a hundred

ways, which Engels enumerates together with the concrete part of the program, but which are inseparable from the essence of capitalist society: taxation, mortgage debt, destruction of rural domestic industry, foreclosures and seizures to the point of total expropriation. No legislative measure (reform) will be capable of preventing the peasant from spontaneously selling everything he owns, including his land, rather than letting himself die of hunger. Here, the critique of Engels verges on invective: "Your attempt to protect the small peasant in his property does not protect his liberty but only the particular form of his servitude; it prolongs a situation in which he can neither live nor die."

### **The False Chimera of Freedom**

We shall denounce the diseased formula of the first premise, which, from one error leads to another greater error, with less generosity than was displayed by the great Engels; we do not have a Paul Lafargue before us, in whom Marxism has momentarily gone dormant and who only needs to be reawakened, but a despicable gang of traitors and defeatists whose souls are already damned.

The premise seems to respond to this question: when will the producers be free? And it responds: when they are not separated from their means of production. It is this slippery slope that leads to the idealization of an impossible and impoverished society of small peasant landowners and artisans, and the master did not desist from hurling the bitter accusation of reactionary at this position, since such a society is much more backwards than the society of proletarians and capitalists. The error, however, one that is completely metaphysical and idealist, which has completely erased any determinist and historical-dialectical perspective, consists in that of assuming a stupid position, professed today by many self-proclaimed "leftists" on both sides of the Atlantic, i.e.: socialism is a struggle for the individual liberation of the worker. This premise embeds certain economic theories within the framework of a philosophy of Freedom.

We repudiate such a starting point: it is stupidly bourgeois and only leads to the degeneration whose spectacle is unfolding throughout the world in the form of Stalinism. The formula would be no less of a distortion if one were to speak of the collective liberation of the producers. For it is a matter of establishing the limits of this collectivity, and it is on this reef that all the "immediatists" founder, as we shall see below. The domain enclosed by these limits is so vast that it must include manufacturing and agriculture and every form of human activity in general. When human activity, which embraces much more than production, a term that is linked to bourgeois society, has no limits in its collective dynamic, nor any temporal limit between generation and generation, it will be understood that the postulate of Freedom was a transitory and obsolete bourgeois ideology, and then we shall be able to say that it was once dangerous but is now soporific and false.

### **Property and Labor**

In the third premise mentioned above, its proponents thought they could base their arguments on something as incontestable as the fact that the mission of socialism consists in uniting, rather than separating, property and labor. Engels did not want to be too vicious, but he repeated that, "the latter in this general form is by no means the task of socialism. Its task is, rather, only to transfer the means of production to the producers as their *common possession*".

If one loses sight of this fact, Engels said, it is clear that one "imposes upon socialism the imperative duty to carry out something which it had declared to be impossible in the preceding paragraph. It charges it to 'maintain' the small-holding ownership of the peasants although it itself states that this form of ownership is 'irretrievably doomed'".

Here we must dig even deeper, mindful of all the Marxian-Engelsian precepts and our whole doctrine. Above all, the question of this “separation” is not metaphysical, but historical. It is not a matter of just saying that the bourgeoisie has separated property from the worker and that we, intending to rectify this, will reunite them. This would be pure foolishness. Marxism has never depicted, in the revolution and in bourgeois societies, a process of separation of property from labor, but a process of the separation of the men who labor from the conditions of their labor. Property is a historical-juridical category. The aforementioned separation is a relation between very real elements and materials: on the one side, the men who labor; and on the other, the possibility of having access to the land and to the use of the tools of labor. Feudal servitude and slavery united these two elements in a very simple way: they imprisoned both elements in the same concentration camp, from which a portion of the products (another concrete, physical element) was extracted at the whim of the ruling class. The bourgeois revolution broke up this self-enclosed circle and said to the workers: you are free to leave; then the circle was once again closed and the separation we are discussing was carried out. The ruling class cut the barbed wire and monopolized the conditions of production, keeping the whole product: the serfs who fled to hunger and impotence are still paying homage to the miracle of Freedom!

Socialism seeks to abolish, for everyone (individual, group, class or state), the possibility of being surrounded by barbed wire; but this cannot be expressed with the meaningless phrase, reunite property and labor! It means that socialism works to bring about the end and final destruction of bourgeois property and wage labor, the final and worst of all servitudes.

When the text of the Nantes Program then says that labor and property are the two factors of production, whose separation leads to servitude and poverty for the proletarians, it commits a yet greater outrage. Property as a factor of production! Here Marxism is forgotten and completely renounced. In the description of the capitalist mode of production, the central thesis of Marxism is that there is only one factor of production, and that is human labor. Landed property, and property in the form of tools and buildings, is not another factor of production. To call them factors of production is to regress to the trinity formula that was annihilated by Marx in the third volume of *Capital*: this trinity formula maintains that wealth has three sources: land, capital and labor, and this vulgar doctrine justifies the three forms of distribution: rents, profits and wages. The socialist and communist party is the historical form in struggle against the rule of the capitalist class, the class whose doctrine holds that capital, with just as much right as labor, is a factor of production. In order to trace the doctrine that defends the right of the third term, the third factor of production, we have to go even further back in time, beyond Ricardo, to the Physiocrats of the feudal era, whose doctrine provided the historical justification (pay a little attention here) for precisely the hated rule of the feudal lords!

To reunite the land with labor is therefore a grave Marxist heresy, and this is just as true with regard to collective labor as it is for the individual laborer.

### **Industrial and Agrarian Enterprise**

It is precisely the slippery fourth premise that contains the trap of the defense of the small plot of cultivated land, a defense that is based on the comparison of the big industries that “must be seized from their lazy owners”, that is, the urban bourgeoisie (who were not so lazy, however, during the times of the “*Maître des Forges*”), with the large landed estates that must be “collectively or socially” handed over to the agricultural proletarians. In a later passage, Engels makes a very different comparison between the socialist and revolutionary expropriation of the factory owner and that affecting the agrarian landowner.



The Nantes Program, besides the fact that it did not elaborate on the essential distinction between “collective” and “social” management, a question that it barely addresses, side-steps the no less important distinction between large landed estates or large scale landownership and large scale industrial agriculture. Where the management of a unit of production based on wage labor constitutes a single form of technical exploitation—even when part of the wage is paid not in money form but in the form of products—a form that Marx defined as a medieval remnant and which is “protected” by the Italian Togliattian “Marxists” in order to more closely bind the rural proletariat to the wretched form of ownership of little parcels of land—then there is no reason not to treat this productive unit the same way we would treat the factory of Mr. Krupp, to employ the example used by Engels. Difficulties arise, however, when there is a large rural property owned by a single individual, which is nonetheless divided into a large number of separate parcels cultivated by many technically independent family-based units, composed of small sharecroppers and tenant farmers. In this case, expropriation will not possess the historical character of the expropriation of large concentrated industry, but will be reduced—if feudal forms still survive, as was the case in Russia in 1917—to a liberation of glebe serfs that will not yet surpass the inferior condition of the distribution of many small plots of land. In a consolidated bourgeois regime, such as the French regime of the late 19th century, the programmatic formula must not be limited, in the opinion of Engels, to the transformation of the tenant farmers who pay their rents in money or in kind into “free” worker-landowners; the socialist parties must resolutely propose as a goal for the peasants—those who can be accepted by the party and those who are under its influence—the formation of agricultural production cooperatives under unitary management, which is also a transitional form insofar as it will have to be gradually transformed into “co-operative, large-scale production”, “under the control of the community”. This formula is employed by Engels to stigmatize, with proper severity, any inclusion in the program—even the immediate program—of any partition of large landed property and its distribution among the peasants in order to reduce it to so many small individual or family parcels.

Concerning this point another consideration must be added—a consideration that must be linked to other Marxist texts—with regard to the destination point of the socialist program. The collective management of enterprises that have already been unified under the ownership of the bourgeoisie could be conceived as a transitory expedient if one thinks about the collectivity of the workers of the enterprise as the subject of such management. But such a consideration must not cause one to think that socialism is fulfilled with the replacement of capitalist or individual ownership of the factory (which is today collective in the form of corporations) by collective working class ownership. In the correct formulation of this position, the word we encounter is not ownership [property], but possession, that of the taking of possession of the means of production, and even more correctly, that of the exploitation, of management, of direction, to which terms we have to add the exact subject. The expression, social management, is better than cooperative management, while it would be completely bourgeois rather than socialist to refer to “co-operative ownership”. The term, national management, can be used to attempt to express the hypothesis that the expropriation of the industrial means of production and the land might be carried out in one country but not in another, but it recalls state management, which is nothing but a form of state capitalist ownership of enterprises.

While we are still discussing agriculture, we would like to make it clear that—according to the communist program—the land and the means of production must pass into the hands of society, society organized on new foundations, foundations that can no longer be called commodity production. Consequently, the land and the rural productive apparatus pass into the hands of all the workers as a whole, whether industrial or agricultural workers, and the same is true of the industrial plant. It is only in this sense that one can

interpret Marx when he speaks of the abolition of the differences between city and country, and of the overcoming of the social division of labor, as pillars of communist society. The old propaganda slogans: the factories to the workers and the land to the peasants, and those of an even more insipid variety—the ships to the sailors—even though they are all-too-often employed even in recent times, are nothing but a parody of the formidable power of the Marxist revolutionary program.

### **The Most Extreme Aberration**

Before we proceed to explore other texts by Marx for early anticipations of the principles we have just recalled, we shall conclude our comprehensive examination of the study published by Engels with a reference to his indignation, because it is so relevant to our time, at the last of the five premises, the one that attributes to the party the duty to help the peasant sharecroppers and tenant farmers exploit wage labor! We shall pass over the subtle destructive critique directed by Engels at the details of the Nantes Program, which include reform measures that either have no chance of being implemented or else would lead the peasants themselves to the very condition that had constituted the origin of their poverty and brutalization, in France and elsewhere, by the misuse of the lever with which those who drafted the Nantes Program sought to mobilize the peasantry.

We shall also omit the final part about Germany, where, fortunately, the party had not committed similar mistakes, and where it was demonstrated that the party had to rely on the dispossessed peasantry of the east, semi-serfs of the Prussian Junkers, instead of the peasantry of the west, which was devoid of any revolutionary potential.

We are disappointed not to have found any reference in this text by Engels to Italy, where during that time the party, with a high degree of class consciousness, led the struggle of the agricultural day laborers, in the Romagna and Apulia, for example, against the wealthy bourgeois tenant farmers, a struggle that assumed the most violent forms, embodying what Engels presents as the correct goal, that is, that the peasant wage workers should be in the socialist party and the tenant farmers and sharecroppers should be in some other, petty bourgeois party, which in Italy was the Republican Party. Today, meanwhile, to the contrary, the “communists” are pursuing the same policy that was shamefully incorporated into the French program of 1894, that is, crushing the class struggle of the wage-workers employed by the middle class peasants and sharecroppers, as we have mentioned.

The words of Engels apply to today's traitors:

“Here, we are entering upon ground that is passing strange. Socialism is particularly opposed to the exploitation of wage labor. And here it is declared to be the imperative duty of socialism to protect the French tenants when they ‘exploit day laborers’, as the text literally states! And that because they are compelled to do so to a certain by ‘the exploitation to which they themselves are subjected’!

“How easy and pleasant it is to keep on coasting once you are on the toboggan slide! (Oh, father Engels, you could not imagine the extremes to which this lust for demagogic success and betrayal has gone!—[Bordiga's interpolation].) When now the big and middle peasants of Germany come to ask the French Socialists to intercede with the German Party Executive to get the German Social-Democratic Party to protect them in the exploitation of their male and female farm servants, citing in support of the contention the ‘exploitation to which they themselves are subjected’ by usurers, tax collectors, grain speculators and cattle dealers, what will they answer? What guarantee have they that our agrarian big landlords will not send them Count Kanitz (as he also submitted a proposal like theirs, providing for a state monopoly of grain importation) and likewise ask for socialist protection of their exploitation of the rural workers, citing in support ‘the exploitation to

which they themselves are subjected' by stock-jobbers, money lender, and grain speculators?"

We may conclude with one last quotation concerning the peasants and their relevance to the party that truly constitutes a rule that we must never forget:

"I flatly deny that the socialist workers' party of any country is charged with the task of taking into its fold, in addition to the rural proletarians and the small peasants, also the idle and big peasants and perhaps even the tenants of the big estates, the capitalist cattle breeders and other capitalist exploiters of the national soil.... We can use in our Party individuals from every class of society, but have no use whatever for any groups representing capitalist, middle-bourgeois, or middle-peasant interests."

This is how to defend the party, its nature, its doctrine which is not for sale, its revolutionary future! And this is why the political party is the only form that can prevent the degeneration of the class struggle of the urban and rural proletariat of all countries.

### **Marx's Great Pronouncement**

Our French comrades brought to us in Turin a text by Marx whose note on publication is as follows:

"This manuscript, found after the death of Karl Marx in his archives, is possibly an addendum to the work on the nationalization of the land that Marx had written at the request of Applegarth. This work has remained undiscovered until now. The title of the notebook is 'On the Nationalization of the Land'."

This welcome development comes to the aid of our modest reiteration that Marxism does not modify the forms of property, but radically negates the appropriation of the land. We shall begin by quoting a theoretically less-difficult passage:

"At the International Congress in Brussels, in 1868, one of my friends said (this was the First International and the way he expresses himself indicates that he was not a Bakuninist libertarian—[Bordiga's note]): 'Small private property is doomed by the verdict of science; great private property by justice. There remains then but one alternative. The soil must become the property of rural associations, or the property of the whole nation. The future will decide the question.' I say, on the contrary: 'The future will decide that the land can only be owned nationally. To give up the soil to the hands of associated rural laborers would be to surrender all society to one exclusive class of producers'."

The content of this brief note is vast in its scope. Above all, it proves that it is not in accordance with Marxism to dispose of difficult questions by referring them to the revelation and decision of future history. Marxism knows quite well, from its beginnings, how to definitively resolve the essential characteristics of the future society, and explicitly enunciates them.

Secondly, the terms, national and nationally, are only adopted for the purposes of engaging in a Socratic dialogue with the first formulation. In the positive thesis he speaks of transference and not of property; not of the nation, but of all of society.

Finally, one may further explicate the proposition, which is so masterful in the highest sense of the term, in the following way: The socialist program is not expressed as either the abolition of the surrender of a sector of the productive means to a class of individuals, or to a minority of non-producers who live in leisure. The socialist program demands that no sector of production should be ruled by any single class, not even a class of producers, but by all of society. As a result, the land will not be transferred to associations of peasants, nor will it be transferred to the peasants as a class, but to all of society.

This is the pitiless condemnation of all immediatist distortions, which have hounded us incessantly for so many years, even among alleged left wing revolutionaries.

This Marxist theorem strikes a fatal blow at all communalism and syndicalism, as well as all “enterprise-based socialism” (see the relevant chapters of our “Fundamentals of Revolutionary Communism”), because these old fashioned programs, superannuated and rotten, “surrender” indivisible energies of society to limited groups.

This fundamental postulate annuls any definition, whether advocated by Stalinists or post-Stalinists, of socialist property in accordance with the agrarian forms in which the Kolkhozes have been seen to deliver all of society, the material life of all of society, into the hands of a particular class of producers.

Furthermore, not even the handing over to the state of all the industrial enterprises, as is the case in Russia today, merits the name of socialism. This state, due the very fact that it is in the process of being transferred to “particular groups of producers”, by farmstead or by province, is not a historical representative of the integral, classless society of tomorrow. A character of that kind can be realized and maintained only on the plane of political theory, thanks to the party form, which brutally thrashes all immediatism and which is the only form that can exorcise the opportunist plague.

But we shall return briefly to this passage from Marx, which shows us how all attribution of ownership, indeed all material transfer of the land, to limited groups, cuts off the royal road to communism.

“The nationalization of land will work a complete change in the relations between labor and capital and finally do away altogether with capitalist production, whether industrial or rural. Only then the class distinctions and privileges will disappear together with the economical basis from which they originate and society will be transformed into an association of ‘producers’ (note that these quotation marks have been inserted by Marx, and that is they way it should be read—[Bordiga’s note]). To live upon other people’s labor will become a thing of the past. There will no longer exist a government nor a state distinct from society itself.”

Before submitting these essential, immutable and never changing principles of Marxism to one more examination, we shall state for the record that Marx never hesitated to resolutely depict the communist society, assuming an unlimited responsibility for the entire revolutionary movement of a historical stage.

This is the solid metal of original Marxism that sparkles so brightly from underneath the rime of a thousand subsequent incrustations, and which will tomorrow shine directly in the light.

### **Marx and Landed Property**

In the text by Karl Marx referred to above, the program of the communists is defined under two aspects. Historically and economically, it defends big agricultural estates, for which the term “cultivation on a large scale” is used, as opposed to the small farm and plot of land. In addition, the communist program calls for the disappearance or, as it is often less correctly expressed, the abolition of every form of landed property, which also implies every subject of property, whether individual or collective.

Marx did not spend a lot of time addressing the traditional philosophical and juridical justifications for man’s property relations as they affect the land. These justifications go back to the old inanity that property is an extension of the person. The ancient syllogism begins to be false in its very premise, which is passed over in silence: my person, my physical body, belongs to me; it is my property. We deny even this, which is at bottom nothing but a preconceived notion born from the hoary forms of slavery, in which land and

human bodies together were seized by force. If I am a slave, my body has an alien owner, the master. If I am not a slave, I am the master of myself. It seems crystal clear and is also pure foolishness. In that development of the social structure in which the odious form of possession of another human being underwent a process of decline, instead of heralding the decline and fall of all subsequent forms of property, it was logical that the ideological superstructure—in the illustrious tradition of all real processes!—should only take this tiny little pygmy step: for it merely registered a simple change of the master of the slave, something that poor humanity was all-too-accustomed to. Before, I went from being a slave of Titus to being a slave of Sempronius; now I have become a slave of myself.... Perhaps that was not such a good deal!

This vulgar, anti-socialist mode of reasoning is more foolish than the myth that there was an original solitary man who declared himself king of the universe. According to the Biblical construction, it must even be admitted that, due to the multiplication of humans, the system of relations between the ego and the others only became more dense, and the illusory autonomy of the ego became ever more dispersed. For us, Marxists, every step from simple to new and more complicated modes of production augments the network of multiple relations between the individual and all his kind, and reduces the conditions currently designated by the terms autonomy and freedom. This is how all individualism dissolves.

The modern, atheist bourgeois who defends property sees the course of history according to his class ideology (whose debris are today the patrimony of only petty bourgeois and so many alleged Marxists). He sees the process upside-down, as a succession of stages of a ridiculous disconnection of the individual-man from social bonds (while, in reality, the bonds between man and external nature are becoming more and more dense over the course of history). The liberation of man from slavery, liberation from servitude and from despotism, liberation from exploitation!

In this construction that stands opposed to ours, the individual loosens his bonds, breaks free and constructs the autonomy and greatness of the Person! And many people interpret this series as the stages that lead to the revolution.

Individual, person and property all go well together. Given the false principle that we just examined (my body is mine, and so is my hand), the tool with which our powers are extended for the purposes of labor is also mine. The land, too, is a tool of human labor (here, the second premise logically follows). The products of my hand and of its various extensions are also mine: Property is therefore an inalienable attribute of the Person.

Just how contradictory such an argument really is, can be seen in the fact that, in the ideology of the defenders of the private ownership of agricultural land who preceded the enlightenment and the capitalists, the Earth is itself productive of wealth, before and even without the labor that man applies to it. How, then, is the right of possession of man over parcels of land converted into a mysterious “natural law”?

### **How Marx Responds**

Asked for his view on the nationalization of the land, right from the start Marx liquidated all such impotent philosophical formulas.

“The property in the soil – that original source of all wealth – has become the great problem upon the solution of which depends the future of the working class.

“While not intending to discuss here all the argument put forward by the advocates of private property in land – jurists, philosophers, and political economists – we shall only state firstly that they disguise the original fact of conquest under the cloak of ‘natural right’. If conquest constitutes a natural right on the part of the few, the many have only to

gather sufficient strength in order to acquire the natural right of reconquering what has been taken from them. In the progress of history (Marx means that the first acts of violence created ownership of the land which, at the beginning, had been free, and which was later held in common—[Bordiga's note]), the conquerors attempt to give a sort of social sanction to their original title derived from brute force, through the instrumentality of laws imposed by themselves. At last comes the philosopher who declares those laws to imply the universal consent of society. If indeed private property in land is based upon such a universal consent, it evidently becomes extinct from the moment the majority of a society dissent from warranting it. However, leaving aside the so-called 'rights' of property...."

Here, our proposal is to follow Marx's thinking to the negation of "any kind" of property, that is, of any subject of property (private individual, associated individuals, state, nation, and, finally, society) as well as of any object of property (the land, concerning which we are speaking here, the instruments of labor in general, and the products of labor).

As we have always maintained, all of this is contained in the initial formula of the negation of private property, that is, in the consideration of such a form as a transitory characteristic in the history of human society which is destined to disappear in the present stage.

Furthermore, property that is not conceived as private will also logically come to an end. With regard to the land, what is most obvious concerning the characteristic of the institution is the enclosure within which no one may trespass without the consent of the owner. Private ownership means that the owner is not deprived of the right to enter. Regardless of the identity of the subject of this right, a single person or a multiple-person entity, this "private" character survives.

### **Against All Divided Property**

Marx then goes on to take a position against the practice of agricultural production on small, individual farms.

Leaving aside the philosophical question, and after making a few sarcastic remarks, he continues as follows:

"... we affirm that the economical development of society, the increase and concentration of people, the necessity to agriculture of collective and organized labor as well as of machinery and similar contrivances, render the nationalization of land a 'social necessity', against which no amount of talk about the rights of property will avail.

"Changes dictated by social necessity are sure to work their way sooner or later, because the imperative wants of society must be satisfied, and legislation will always be forced to adapt itself to them.

"What we require is a daily increasing production whose exigencies cannot be met by allowing a few individuals to regulate it according to their whims and private interests or to ignorantly exhaust the powers of the soil. All modern methods such as irrigation, drainage, steam plowing, chemical treatment, etc., ought to be applied to agriculture at last. But the scientific knowledge we possess, and the technical means of agriculture we command, such as machinery, etc., can never be successfully applied but by cultivating the land on a large scale. Cultivation on a large scale – even under its present capitalist form that degrades the producer himself to a mere beast of burden – has to show results so much superior to the small and piecemeal cultivation – would it then not, if applied on national dimension, be sure to give an immense impulse to production? The ever growing wants of the people on the one side, the ever increasing price of agricultural products on

the other, afford the irrefutable proof that the nationalization of land has become a 'social necessity'. The diminution of agricultural produce springing from individual abuse ceases to be possible as soon as cultivation is carried on under the control, at the cost, and for the benefit of the nation."

It is obvious that this text was intended to serve as propaganda and was aimed at a milieu that was not yet converted to Marxism. Very soon, however, he will arrive at the radical theses that we have denominated under the subheading of "Marx's Great Pronouncement". Here we can see displayed his preference for a national management of a state character, when he speaks of costs and benefits. Further along he will clarify that the bourgeois state will always be incapable of providing the necessary impulse to agriculture.

The author still deals with contemporary issues of his time, and it is interesting to see how he poses them exactly the same way Engels did in 1894 (as discussed in the first part of this study). How can anyone today usurp the name of Marxist who has come to maintain that, first the sharecropper, and then the tenant farmer and finally the day laborer of the countryside, must become landowners, as the present-day "communists" of Italy and Europe do?<sup>4</sup> For us, this essential part of Marxism, just as it was between 1868 (actually, even before that) and 1894, remains completely valid today.

### **The Agrarian Question in France**

Marx goes on to refute the cliché of the "rich" small-scale cultivator in France. His words require no commentary. The reader will discern their relation not only to the propositions of Engels, but also to those of Lenin, whose strict orthodoxy as an agrarian Marxist we have already demonstrated in depth in our study of Russia.

"France has often been alluded to, but with its peasantry proprietorship it is farther off the nationalization of land than England with its landlordism. In France, it is true, the soil is accessible to all who can buy it, but this very faculty has brought about the division of land into small plots cultivated by men with small means and mainly thrown on the resources of the bodily labor of both themselves and their families. This form of landed property and the piecemeal cultivation necessitated by it not only excludes all appliance of modern agricultural improvements, but simultaneously converts the tiller himself into the most decided enemy of all social progress, and above all, of the nationalization of the land. Enchained to the soil upon which he has to spend all his vital energies in order to get a relatively small return, bound to give away the greater part of his produce to the state in the form of taxes, to the law tribe in the form of judiciary costs, and to the usurer in the form of interest; utterly ignorant of the social movement outside his petty field of action; he still clings with frantic fondness to his spot of soil and his merely nominal proprietorship in the same. In this way, the French peasant has been thrown into a most fatal antagonism to the industrial working class. Peasantry proprietorship being thus the greatest obstacle to the 'nationalization of land'. France, in its present state, is certainly not the place where we must look for a solution of this great problem. To nationalize the land and let it out in small plots to individuals or workingmen's societies would, under a middle-class government, only bring about a reckless competition among them, and cause a certain increase of 'rent', and thus lend new facilities to the appropriators for feeding upon the producers."

---

<sup>4</sup> See "Trayectoria y catástrofe de la forma capitalista en la clásica y monolítica construcción teórica del marxismo", which is the report of the General Meeting of the Party in Piombino (September 1957), in Amadeo Bordiga, *Economía marxista e economía controrivoluzionaria*, Ed. Iskra, Milan, 1976. See also Marx's "Wage Labour and Capital".

The hypothesis advanced in the above paragraph foresaw the possibility that state measures in favor of nationalization would produce a class of tenant farmers who would take advantage of the wage laborers, and exploit them.

### **Classes and Producers**

It is at this point in the manuscript where Marx inserted the fundamental passage on the debate at the international congress of 1868. Regarding this passage, we placed enormous emphasis on the thesis that the land is handed over to the 'nation' rather than to the associated agricultural workers. The latter formula is anti-socialist because it would "surrender all society to one exclusive class of producers", an observation that we must always keep in mind. Socialism excludes not just the subjection of producer to owner, but also that of producer to producer.

The Russian agrarian formula, with its Kolkhozes, is spurious communism. The Kolkhozniki form a class of producers who have in their hands the subsistence of the entire "nation". Their rights with respect to the "state" are expanding every year: their taxes have been reduced, the prices paid for their farm products have been raised, they have been granted a certain degree of "economic" independence, etc. We shall clearly distinguish between the terms, state, nation and society; for now we have the right to say that, economically, competition and rent have reappeared in the Russian structure.

In the Sovkhozes, the agricultural workers are reduced to pure wage workers, like the industrial workers, without any rights over the disposal of the products of the countryside (to this date), and do not form a class of producers erected against society, just as the industrial workers do not form such a class, the industrial workers who are acclaimed as the owners (although this term makes them blush for shame in Russia!) of society itself, that is, as possessing hegemony over the peasants (!).

The classic Russian discussion concerning the question of the land was posed in three ways: Repartition (populists); Municipalization (Mensheviks); and Nationalization (Bolsheviks). Lenin always defended nationalization in revolutionary doctrine and practice, just as Marx defended it in the passage quoted above. The repartition of the populists, an abject peasant ideal, is at about the same level as the policies of the modern communist parties, in Italy for example, where they adorn themselves with the adjective popular and are just as deserving of the adjective populist. Municipalization corresponds with the program of giving the monopoly over the land not to society, but only to the peasant class. The Russian municipality, as this theory views it, is understood to be the rural village whose entire population is composed of peasants and which has tenuous links to the communitarian tradition of the primitive *Mir* (see our series on the economic structure of Russia).<sup>5</sup> The system of Kolkhozes is neither Marxist nor Leninist, and could very well be defined—especially in view of the "reforms" that are currently being implemented—as a provincialization of the land, over which the cities are increasingly losing all influence. This deformation, accentuated by the historical events of 1958, is in total contradiction to the doctrinal position of the party of 1868, according to which the land must not be given to "one exclusive class of producers" (the associates of the Kolkhozes), but to the entire collectivity of rural and urban workers.

The thesis of nationalization must not be understood in the manner of Ricardo: the land to the state, along with all the rent of the land. This means: the land to the industrial capitalist class or to its representative, the industrial capitalist state (like the Russian state). Marxist nationalization of the land is the dialectical contrary of its division into

---

<sup>5</sup> See "Russia e rivoluzione nella teoria marxista", *Il Programma Comunista*, nos. 21-24 (1954) and no. 1 (1955); and "Struttura economica e sociale della Russia d'oggi", first published in our Italian journal in 1955-1957 and republished by Edizione Il Programma Comunista, Milan, 1976.



parcels and allotment to peasant cooperatives and associations. This dialectical opposition is just as applicable to the structure of communist society, without classes or state (see the fragment quoted above), as it is to the political struggle, with respect to both the party and the class, within capitalist society, where the demand for the division and re-allotment of the land is much more indecent than it was when it was advocated under the Czarist regime. When the theses of the doctrine of the party are established as invariant and inviolable by both the party center and the militant rank and file, they constitute the defense against the future threat of the opportunist plague, and the thesis of nationalization is an appropriate and typical example.

### **Nation and Society**

The term "nation", however, presents an advantage with respect to the term "society", whether it is employed in the context of theory or agitation. As an extension in space, it is well known that we consider socialist society international, and that internationalism is a concept that is firmly rooted in the class struggle. Marx advises us, however, whenever he engages in the critique of the capitalist economic structure, that he will be speaking of the nation in his study of the dynamic of the economic forces, even though society spans the different nations, but never with the intention of imprisoning the revolutionary transition to socialism within strict national limits. Furthermore, although it might be useful to speak of the nation rather than the state, we must not forget that, as long as the class state which expresses the rule of the capitalist class exists, the nation will not constitute the unity of all the inhabitants of a territory in a homogeneous complex, and this will not even be realized after the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat in one or more countries.

The term "nation", restrictive with respect to class, internationalist and revolutionary demands, is still useful as an expression of the contrasting position against the surrender of particular spheres of productive means (the land, in this case) to isolated parts and classes of national society, to local or enterprise-based groups, or to professional categories.

The other advantage that we mentioned, is reflected with respect to the limitation in time. A nation is born, and it includes the succession of living generations, future and even past. For us, the real subject of social activity becomes more extensive, in time, than the same society of living men at any given date. The idea of progeny (keeping in mind, of course, that we are referring to the progeny of the whole human race, the species, a word that was employed by Marx and Engels, and which is more powerful than the nation and society) goes beyond all the bourgeois ideologies of power and juridical sovereignty that are professed by democrats.

The concept of class alone is enough to refute the idea that the state represents all the living citizens, and we laugh at those who propose to draw such a bold conclusion from the grant of universal suffrage to all adults. We know quite well that the bourgeois state represents the interests and power of one single class, even when it holds general elections.

There is more, however. Even if a representative or structural network is enclosed in the limits of a single class, that of the wage labor force (it would be worse if it assumed the generic designation of the Russian people), we are not satisfied with a construction of sovereignty based on the mechanism of consultation of all the individual elements of the rank and file (assuming that this mechanism could exist). And the same is true both under bourgeois power, in order to direct the revolutionary struggle, and after it has been overthrown.

We have often proclaimed, especially in the “Fundamentals of Revolutionary Communism”, that only the party—obviously a minority within society and the proletarian class—is the form that can express the historical influences of successive generations in the passage from one form of social production to another, in its unity in space and time, in its doctrinal, organizational and strategic unity.

Consequently, the proletarian revolutionary force is not expressed by a consultative democracy within the class, neither during the stage of the struggle nor after its victory, but by the uninterrupted course of the historical line of the party.

Obviously, not only do we admit that a minority of the living and present generation can direct, against the majority (even of the class), the historical advance, but, even more importantly, we think that only this minority can constitute the directive layer that can provide the guidance that will link it to the struggle and the efforts of the militants of past and future generations, acting in the capacity as guides of the program of the new society, as has been exactly and clearly pre-established by the historical doctrine.

This construction that, in spite of all the philistines, leads us to proclaim the frank demand, dictatorship of the communist party, is undeniably contained in the system of Marx.

### **Not Even Society Will Own the Land**

In the third volume of *Capital*, edited by Engels after the death of Marx, Chapter 46 bears the title: “Building Site Rent. Rent in Mining. Price of Land”. Its conclusions are especially striking in the powerful doctrine of land rent, reiterated line by line by the great combatant Lenin throughout his life. Since it is maintained and proven in our economic science that the rent extracted by the landlord has the character of an aliquot part of the surplus value that the class of wage laborers produces and which is converted into capitalist profit, it is clear that our adversaries may pose this objection: there are business transactions in which the owner receives the rent, as in the case of residential and commercial property transactions, while the land lies sleeping under the sun and not even one worker puts a shovel to it. From what labor, and from what resulting surplus value, does this owner’s profit derive?

Our economic science, however, is not invalidated by this objection. We are not an academic department, but an army formed in battle order, and we defend the cause of those who have worked and died as well as those who have not yet worked and have not yet been born.

If you seek to reason following the bureaucratic formulas of the debts and assets of corporations, or if you deduce legal power within the limits of the names and results of elections, please leave now.

Marx responds by bringing future generations onto the scene of the battle (this is an old aspect of our doctrine and not a clever invention on our part to make our thesis seem more correct, since, in opposition to the theory and practice of the revolution, the majority of the currently existing proletarian class could also be mistaken and could find itself in the ranks of the enemy):

“That it is only the title of a number of persons to the possession of the globe enabling them to appropriate to themselves as tribute a portion of the surplus-labour of society and furthermore to a constantly increasing extent with the development of production, is concealed by the fact that the capitalised rent, i.e., precisely this capitalised tribute, appears as the price of land, which may therefore be sold like any other article of commerce.”

Is this clear? If I think that a piece of land, which in the future will presumably yield five thousand liras per year to its owner, can be sold for one hundred thousand liras, I

have converted into an active force the surplus labor of the workers who will labor not twenty years from now, but in an infinite number of years from now.

“In the same way, the slave-holder considers a Negro, whom he has purchased, as his property, not because the institution of slavery (which was a gift to him from past generations—[Bordiga’s note]) as such entitles him to that Negro, but because he has acquired him like any other commodity, through sale and purchase.”

He will pay money for the future years of the negro and his descendants!

“But the title itself is simply transferred, and not created by the sale. The title must exist before it can be sold, and a series of sales can no more create this title through continued repetition than a single sale can.” (This allusion of the Doctor of Jurisprudence, Marx, refers to the fiction of the bourgeois legal codes which hold that the “proof of ownership” is obtained by presenting the documentation of title conveyances reflecting the chain of ownership for a certain number of years, twenty or thirty, for example—[Bordiga’s note].) What created it in the first place were the production relations. As soon as these have reached a point where they must shed their skin, the material source of the title, justified economically and historically and arising from the process which creates social life, falls by the wayside, along with all transactions based upon it.”

For example, we shall add, in order to clarify the concept for the reader, when the slave system of production collapsed because it was no longer profitable and due to the revolt of the slaves, all the latter became free men, and all previous contracts of sales of slaves were nullified! Here, however, we shall invite the reader, once again, to read this powerful passage of the brilliant and original interpretation of history of human societies, which is no less applicable to the society of tomorrow:

“From the standpoint of a higher economic form of society, private ownership of the globe by single individuals will appear quite as absurd as private ownership of one man by another. Even a whole society, a nation, or even all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the globe. They are only its possessors, its usufructuaries, and, like *boni patres familias*, they must hand it down to succeeding generations in an improved condition.”

### **Utopia and Marxism**

Marx’s method is also clearly displayed in this decisive passage. Our forecast of the death of property and capital, of its disappearance (which is a much higher goal than its inept transference from the individual subject to the social subject) and also our refusal to attribute it to the decision and the will of the individual-subject (even if it is the subject of the oppressed class), but only to the party-collectivity, a collectivity whose energy does not derive from quantity, but from quality, are constructed on the basis of a total scientific analysis of today’s society and its past. The capitalism that we want to hang from the gibbet and kill, must first be studied and understood with regard to its structure and its real development. It is a duty, not in the moral and personal sense, but an impersonal function of the party, an entity that is superior to the changing opinions of men and the confines of successive generations.

It is this point that provides the response to a possible objection to our acceptance of Marxism, the only one that captures its power and scope. The Marx that has been presented for decades by the revolutionary current when the latter champions the maximum program of the communist social structure, is precisely the Marx who went beyond, fought against and left behind all utopianism.

The opposition between utopianism and scientific socialism does not reside in the fact that the Marxist socialist declares that, with regard to the nature of the future society,

he is looking out the window waiting for its forms to pass by before he describes them! The error of the utopian lies in the fact that, after verifying the defects of contemporary society (which, in some of the utopian masters, Marx respectfully praises), he does not deduce the framework of the future society from a concatenation of real processes that form a chain that links their previous course to the future, but from his own head, from human reason and not from the social and natural reality. The utopian believes that the destination point of the course of social evolution must be contained in the spirit of man. Whether it is God the creator that they have induced in the spirit of man, or the introspective philosophical critique that they have discovered in the spirit of man, it is ideological systems composed of Justice, Equality, Liberty, etc., that comprise the colors of the palette in which the socialist idealist dips his paintbrush to depict the world of tomorrow as it should be.

This naïve, but not always ignoble, origin, causes utopianism to expect its utopia to come about from a labor of persuasion and emulation among men, according to the word that is so fashionable today to express in a truly inappropriate way the conflagration of history. The utopians, impelled by their good intentions, once thought they could be victorious by winning over the existing power centers to their rose-colored projects. Their preconceived ideas prevented them from participating in the process of the struggle and the social conflict, of the overthrow of power and the use not of persuasion, but of unmitigated force, in the work from which the new society will emerge.

Our conception of the human problem is completely the opposite. Things are not the way they are because someone made a mistake, or was deceived, but because a causal and determinate series of forces has entered into play in the development of the human species: it is first of all a matter of understanding how, and why, and by what general laws; and then, to deduce its future directions.

Marxism, then, does not shrink from declaring in its battle programs what will be the character of the society of tomorrow and, specifically, how the rigorously individualized characters that comprise today's capitalist and mercantile social form measure up against each other. Marxism makes it possible to explicitly describe them with much greater validity and certitude than those who sketched out the pallid depictions of utopia, even if they were sometimes quite bold for their time.

To renounce the effort to engage in such anticipation of the features of the communist social structure is not Marxism, nor is it worthy of the powerful corpus of classical writings of our school. It is truly a regressive and conservative revisionism that parades as objectivity what is nothing but mean-spirited cynicism, that is: waiting for the revelation, on a virgin background, of a mysterious design that would be a secret of history. In its philistine pride, this method is nothing but the alibi prepared in advance by the professional cliques that have never experienced life on the heights of the party form and have reduced it to a stage for the contortions of a handful of activists. If these features are to remain secrets, one might just as well wait for the fortunate turn of events in the sacristies for the revelation of the divine will, or in the antechambers in service of the powerful where you can lick their plates in the kitchen.

### **Property and Usufruct**

One proof of the total opposition between Marxism and utopianism, which we have sought to highlight on the terrain of doctrine, is the passage where Marx traces the outlines of the future structure, a passage that is just as obligatory as the one that describes society as not being the owner of the land.

The administration of the cultivation of the land, in reality, must not be conducted in such a way as to only satisfy the appetites of the present generation. Marx's accusation,

constantly invoked against capitalism, that the prevailing form of production exhausts the resources of the soil and renders the problem of feeding the people insoluble, is correct. Now that people are becoming increasingly more numerous, “scientists” are studying—with the seriousness with which we are so familiar—new ways to end hunger among the inhabitants of the planet.

The management of the land, the cornerstone of the whole social problem, must be oriented in such a way that it will correspond to the best future development of the population of the globe. Human society today, even if we were to understand this term to transcend the limitations of states and nations, and when it has established a “superior form of organization”, and even to transcend classes (then we shall not only have advanced beyond the somewhat vulgar opposition between “leisure classes” and “productive classes”, but also beyond the opposition between urban and rural productive classes, and manual and intellectual classes, as Marx teaches), this society, which will consist in the aggregate of several billion men, will always be a set restricted to the “human species”, even though it is becoming increasingly more numerous due to the extension of the average lifespan of its members.

The management of the land will be voluntarily and scientifically subordinated, for the first time in history, to the species, that is, it will be organized in the forms that most effectively respond to the goals of the humanity of the future.

This is not fantasy—heaven preserve us from science-fiction!—or utopia, but is instead based on the realistic and practical criteria that Marx used: the difference between ownership and usufruct.

In modern legal theory, property is “perpetual”, while usufruct is temporary, limited to a pre-established number of years or the natural life of the usufructuary. In bourgeois theory, property is defined as “*ius utendi et abutendi*”, that is, ownership confers the right to use and abuse. Theoretically, the owner could destroy the thing he owns; for example, irrigate his fields with salt water, sterilizing it, as the Romans did to Carthage after having burned it to the ground. Today’s jurists engage in subtle discussions about a social limit to property, but this is not science, only class fear. The usufructuary, on the other hand, has a more restricted right than the owner: the right to use, yes; the right to abuse, no. Once the term of the contract of usufruct has expired, or when the usufructuary dies, in the case of a life estate contract, the land reverts to the owner. Positive law requires that it be returned in the same condition that it was in when it was delivered into the power of the usufructuary. Even the modest sharecropper who rents his little piece of land cannot neglect its cultivation, but must administer it like a good *paterfamilias*, just as the good landowner does, for example, for whom the perpetuity of its use or enjoyment consists in its hereditary transmission to his children or heirs. In the Italian Civil Code, the sacramental formula of the good *paterfamilias* may be found in Article 1001 and also in Article 1587.

Therefore, society will have only the use and not the ownership of the land.

Utopianism is metaphysical, Marxist socialism is dialectical. In the respective stages of his gigantic theoretical construction, Marx can successively support:

- a) large-scale property (even capitalist large scale property, although the wage workers employed in such property are mere beasts of burden) against small-scale property, even when the latter does not hire wage labor (no reference is made, for the sake of decency, to the small farm, like that of the French tenant farmer of 1894 or the Italian tenant farmer of 1958 who, by employing human beasts of burden, adds to the reactionary trend of micro-parcelization);

- b) state property, even if it is capitalist, against large-scale private property (nationalization);
- c) state property after the victory of the proletarian dictatorship;
- d) for the higher organization of integral communism, only the rational use of the land by society, and putting the disgraced term of property in Engels' museum of old rubbish.

### **Use Value and Exchange Value**

The fundamental thesis of revolutionary Marxism easily extends the negation of individual ownership and then social ownership of the land to the other instruments of production that are the result of human labor, and to the products of labor, whether they are production or consumption goods.

There are capital goods on agrarian properties that are essential for their exploitation. One fundamental case, which is the source of the word, capital (as Marx frequently reminds us), is that of the draught animals and cattle. In Italian we call this, *scrota viva*; in French, *cheptel*, which is the same word as capital. The term for pigs raised commercially comes from *caput*, which means "head" in Latin. But the bourgeois do not delude themselves when it comes to the human head, and lead us to prepare another natural law: Capital, as the extension of the Person.

This is the head of the bull. The extension of the head of the bourgeoisie is not the eternal principles of human law, but only the horns.

It is clear that the person who administers the land cannot eat all his cattle—we have seen historical examples of this—without destroying that special instrument of production, capable of reproducing itself if it is wisely cared for.

Society will be the usufructuary, rather than the owner, of the animal species. In the book by Engels there is an amusing passage about the ludicrous proposal that the peasants should be allowed unrestricted rights to hunting and fishing in France, with regard to the danger posed by the destruction, which subsequently did take place, of certain species of game animals.

It might take some time, but it will not be difficult, to extend our deduction to all private capital in agriculture and industry. But we shall attempt to proceed by sketching the broad outlines of our position.

In his magisterial chapters on the land, Marx demonstrates that its price and value, derived from capitalized rent, does not enter into the capital of exploitation of the agrarian enterprise because, if there is no unfortunate devastation of the fertility of the soil, it will be intact at the end of the annual cycle. He also draws the obvious comparison with the "fixed part of industrial constant capital", the part that only enters into the calculation of the circulating capital by the part that is expended in one cycle and is reintegrated (amortization). The land renews itself; and this is also true of the cattle (with a certain amount of labor on the part of the rancher). In agriculture, the tools are replaced to a large extent each year from the total value of the products. In industry, on the other hand, these tools are only replaced annually to a very small extent.

Setting aside the quantitative examination, we want to draw attention to the fact that humanity also has fixed capital that is amortized over very long cycles, as is the case with the Roman Aqueducts which, after two thousand years, are still in use. Criminal capitalism seeks to amortize its investments in very short terms and attempts to rapidly replace—at the expense of the proletariat—all the fixed capital. Why? Because it is the exclusive owner of the fixed capital, while over the circulating capital it only enjoys rights of

usufruct. We refer the reader to the distinction between dead labor and living labor that is elaborated in the reports of Pentecostés and Piombino.<sup>6</sup>

Capitalism insists on the frenzied activation of the labor of the living, and makes the labor of the dead its inhuman property. In the communist economy we shall limit ourselves to what the bourgeois theoreticians call amortization, that is, replacement of fixed capital goods, in an opposite way, by revivifying them.

The antithesis between property and usufruct corresponds to that between fixed capital-circulating capital; and to that between dead labor-living labor.

We are in favor of the eternal life of the species; our enemies are on the sinister side of eternal death. And life will sweep them aside, synthesizing the opposed terms in the reality of communism.

We must add one more formula under this same antithesis: monetary exchange and physical use. Mercantile exchange value versus use value.

The communist revolution is the death of the world of buying and selling.

### **Objectified Labor and Living Labor**

Our comrade readers, who, according to our method of work, collaborate in the common activity of the party, should refer at this point to the entire second part of the summary of the meeting at Piombino, where the *Grundrisse* of Marx is thoroughly summarized.

In this vast construction, economic individualism is annulled, and Social Man makes his appearance, whose confines are identical with those of Human Society in its entirety, or rather, those of the Human Species.

In the capitalist form, industrial fixed capital is counterposed to human labor, which is converted into a measure of the exchange value of the products or commodities. Fixed capital is the monstrous enemy—whether or not the capitalist as an individual person lies behind it, and with reference to this question our quotations from Marx have been innumerable—that weighs on the mass of the producers and monopolizes a product that not only concerns all, but is also of concern to the entire active course of the species for millennia, to Science and Technology elaborated and deposited in the Social Mind. Now that the capitalist Form is descending down the developmental scale into degeneracy, this Monster is killing Science itself; it mismanages it, it criminally administers its usufructuary rights by destroying the patrimony of future generations.

In these pages we see the current phenomenon of Automation predicted and theorized for the distant future. What we shall permit ourselves to call the Romance of objectified labor has its metamorphosis for an epilogue, by means of which the Monster is transformed into a beneficent force for all of humanity, which will not allow the extortion of useless surplus labor, but will reduce necessary labor to a minimum, “for the total benefit of the artistic, scientific, etc., training of individuals”, who will from that point on be elevated to the status of Social Individuals.

Here we would like to draw from the classic and authentic materials, which are more valid and obvious today than they were when they were first conceived, another no less authentic formulation. Once the proletarian revolution has put an end to the destruction of Science, which is the work of the Social Mind; once labor time has been compressed to a minimum that will be transformed into a pleasure; once Fixed Capital—today’s

<sup>6</sup> See “Trayectoria y catástrofe de la forma capitalista en la clásica y monolítica construcción teórica del marxismo”, which is the report of the General Meeting of the Party in Piombino (September 1957), in Amadeo Bordiga, *Economía marxista e economía controrivoluzionaria*, Ed. Iskra, Milan, 1976. See also Marx’s “Wage Labour and Capital”.

Monster—has been elevated to human forms, that is, once Capital—a transitory historical product—has been abolished, rather than conquered for man or for Society, then industry will be like the land, once the productive machinery, equipment and buildings as well as the land have been liberated of all ownership, regardless of the owner.

It would not be much of a conquest if the productive apparatus were to remain a monopoly of a clique of non-workers, which is a rather hollow phrase insofar as the bourgeois were, at first, a bold class that constituted the bearers of the Social Mind and the most advanced Social Praxis. For its part, society organized in a higher form—international communism—will not possess the productive apparatus in the form of property and Capital, but in usufruct, saving the future of the Species with each step it takes against the physical needs caused by Nature, which will be the only adversary then.

Once property and Capital have died out in both agriculture and industry, another commonplace, i.e., “individual ownership of consumer products”, which was a concession to the arduous task of traditional propaganda, must be tossed on the ash-heap of the past. In reality, any revolutionary transformation will fail if every object does not shed its commodity character, and if labor does not cease to be the measure of “exchange value”, another form that, together with monetary measures, must die along with the capitalist mode of production.

Here we shall provide some textual citations:

“As soon as labour in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labour time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value.”

Taking pity on the mediocrity of Stalin and the Russians who persist in claiming that the law of value prevails in socialism (!), we were led to conclude: May the lightning of the Final Judgment fall upon your heads!<sup>7</sup>

The drunk who waves his bottle, saying, it's mine, I bought it with the money from my wages (paid by private or State institutions), while he is a victim of the Capital form, is also a usufructuary traitor to the health of the species. And so is the idiot who smokes cigarettes! Such “property” will be eliminated from the higher organization of society.

The debasement of the wage slave reaches new lows in the crisis of unemployment. Engels wrote to Marx, on December 7, 1857:

“Among the Philistines here, the crisis drives them terribly to drink. No one can endure his life at home, with the family and all its worries. The circles become agitated and the consumption of spirituous liquors undergoes a steep increase. The deeper they sink into boredom, the more they want entertainment. But on the next day they present the most discouraging spectacle of physical and moral complaints.” 1857 or 1958?!

Therefore, man will not consume himself as a beast-person, in the name of the infamous ownership of the object of exchange; use, or consumption, will be conducted in accordance with the higher requirement of social man, the perpetuation of the species, and no longer under the influence of drugs, as is the rule today.

### **The Death of Individualism**

It is not possible for the proletarian class party to orient itself in the correct revolutionary direction if its agitational material does not totally correspond with the stable, invariant foundations of the theory.

---

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*



The questions of everyday action and the future program are only the two dialectical sides of the same problem, as has been demonstrated on so many occasions by Marx right up until his death, and by Engels and Lenin ("April Theses", Central Committee of October!).

These men did not improvise or rely on revelations; they grasped the compass of our action, which is too easy to lose.

This clearly indicates the danger, and our questions are well posed when they go against the general mistaken directions. Its formulas and terms can be falsified by traitors and mental defectives; but its use always provides a sure compass when it is continuous and consistent.

If we employ the language of philosophy and history, our enemy is individualism, or personalism. If we employ the language of politics, our enemy is democratic electoralism, regardless of the camp. If we employ the language of economics, our enemy is mercantilism.

Any tactic that seeks to utilize these insidious methods in an attempt to achieve an apparent advantage, is equivalent to the sacrifice of the future of the party to the success of one day, or one year; it is equivalent to unconditional surrender to the Monster of the counterrevolution.