

Antonio Gramsci 1921

The parties and the masses.

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Translated: for Marxists.org by Mark Camilleri.

The heavily debated constitutional crisis by the Socialist Party interests the Communist Party as it is a deeper reflection of the constitutional crisis which is discussed by the Italian people. From this point of view the crisis of the Socialist Party can not be considered as isolated: it is part of a wider and more comprehensive picture, which it is also connected with the Popular Party and fascism.

The masses don't exist politically, if they are not framed in political parties: the mutations of opinion which are verified through the masses under the pressure of the determined economic forces are interpreted by parties which first divide by tendency, and then divide in a multiplicity of new organic parties: through this process of disarticulation, neoassociation and fusion between homogenates, is revealed a more profound and intimate process of the decomposition of democratic society for the definite diversion of classes in a struggle for the conservation or the conquest of the power of the State and its power on the functions of production.

During the period of the armistice and the factory occupations, the Socialist Party represented the majority of the working people, constituted from the three fundamental classes: the proletariat, the petty bourgeois

and the poor peasants. From these three classes only the proletariat was essentially and thus permanently revolutionary: the other two classes were only “occasional” revolutionaries. They were “socialists of war” and accepted the idea of the revolution in general, due to the anti-government sentiments which accumulated during the war. Since the Socialist Party had a majority of petty bourgeois and peasants elements, it could do the revolution only in the first periods of the armistice, when the sentiments of anti-government revolt were yet vivacious and active. Furthermore, since the Socialist Party was predominantly made up of petty bourgeois and peasant elements (whose mentality is not very different from that of the urban petty bourgeois) it could not fail to waver and hesitate, without any clear or precise programme, without address, and especially without an internationalist consciousness. The factory occupations, essentially proletariat, had already found the socialist unprepared as it was in a crisis of conscience due to the first blows of fascism. The end of the factory occupations vanished completely the Socialist Party, the revolutionary sentiments and infantile beliefs fell completely; the pains of war were partly implemented (a revolution can't be made with only memories from the past); the bourgeois government yet looked strong in the period of Giolitti^[1] and in the fascist activity; the reformist leaders affirmed that thinking of a revolution was madness; Serrati^[2] stated that thinking about the the communist revolution in Italy was madness. During that period, only a minority of the party formed by the most advanced of the industrial proletariat, did not mute its communist and internationalist point of view, was not demoralized by the every day events, did not let itself be deceived from the appearances of robustness and energy from the bourgeois State. In this way, the Communist Party was formed; the first autonomous and independent organization of the industrial proletariat, of the only class essentially and permanently revolutionary. The Communist Party hasn't become immediately the party of the masses. This proves one single thing: the conditions of great demoralization and great discouragement in which

the masses were sealed as a result of the political failure of the occupation of the factories. Trust in most officials was lost: that is those who had been exalted are now looked upon with derision: the most intimate and delicate sentiments of the conscience of the proletariat became brutally smeared by these officials. Subaltern officialism became sceptic and corrupted in its repentance of its maximalist past^[3]. Immediately after the masses diverted from the Socialist Party, became segmented, liquefied and dispersed. The petty bourgeois who sympathized with socialism, now sympathizes with fascism; the peasants support, than with the Socialist Party, now beheld sympathies for the Popular Party. But this does not pass without any consequence: this confusion of the old effects of the Socialist Party on one side and the fascists on the other, and the populars on another.

The Popular Party came near the Socialist Party in the parliamentary elections during the parliamentary elections. The open popular lists in all circumscriptions collected hundreds and thousands of names of socialist candidates. During the municipal elections, in some rural communes, from the political elections until now, many a times the socialists presented lists of minority and consulted their adherents to reverse their votes on the popular list. At Bergamo, this phenomenon, had a clamorous manifestation. The popular extremists broke off from the white organisation, and fused with the socialists and founded a Labour League and a weekly journal written by populars and socialists together. Objectively the process of rapprochement by the socialist and populars represents a progress. The peasant class unites and acquires the conscience and the notion of its diffused solidarity, breaking the religious covering in the popular field, breaking the covering of the anticlerical culture of the petty bourgeois in the socialist field. Because of these tendencies by the rural effects, the Socialist Party broke further away from the industrial proletariat and thus broke its strong unifying link which the

socialist camp seemed to have created between city and country. Since this link was not a reality there emerged no negative effect from this situation. A real advantage seems to be evident; the Popular Party undertook a strong oscillation to the left and became more secular; thus it will end up breaking off from the right and will decisively enter in the camp of class struggle with a formidable weakening to the bourgeois government.

The same phenomenon is profiled in the fascist camp. The urban petty bourgeois, reinforced by all the deserters of the Socialist Party, had tried after the armistice in making something out of the organisational capacity and the military action acquired during the war. The Italian war was directed in absence of a major and efficient state; from the subaltern officialism, that is from the petty bourgeois. The suffering delusions during the war had created strong sentiments of anti-government rebellion in this class, that which has lost, after the armistice its military unity in its formation. It dispersed in the various mass parties, carrying with them fermentations of rebellion but also uncertainties, oscillations and demagogy. As the strength of the Socialist Party fell after the factory occupations, this class reorganized rapidly and reconstructed its military formations and organized nationally under the pressure of the same major state which had exploited it during the war. Rapid maturation with the rapid constitution crisis. The small urban bourgeois, a toy in the hands of the major State and to the most retrograde forces of the government, allied itself with the agrarians and broke off at the expense of the agrarians and the organisations of the peasants. The pact of Rome with fascists and socialists signalling the point of arrest of this blind and disastrous politics for the urban petty bourgeois, that which comprised its selling of its “primogeniture” for a plate of lentils. If fascism continued in its punitive expeditions through Treviso, Sarzana, Roccastrada the population would be inserted en masse in the hypothesis of popular defeat. The petty

bourgeois would definitely not win power but the major State and the big land owners. Fascism came again near socialism while the petty bourgeois tried break its links with the great property owners and tried to have a political programme which ended up strangely looking like that of Turati and D'Aragnona.

And this is the situation of the Italian masses, a great confusion created by superficial unity created by war and personified in the Socialist Party which is in great confusion and finds points of dialectical polarisation in the Communist Party ; an independent organisation of the industrial proletariat, in the Popular Party an organisation of peasants and in fascism, an organisation of the petty bourgeoisie. The Socialist Party which during the factory occupations represented the demagogy of these three classes of workers and today the most exposed is most meritorious victim of the process of disarticulation (for a new definitive asset) which the Italian masses are undertaking as a consequence of the decomposition of democracy.

Translator's Notes

1. Giovanni Giolitti: Prime Minister of Italy between 1892-1921
2. Serrati was a central leader of the Socialist Party of Italy
3. Maximalists were a group of socialist reformers who propagated revolution but limited themselves only to parliamentary elections and other legal actions.