

Fragments Of An Interview With Amadeo Bordiga

Voice-over: Among the main supporters of the need for revolutionary action, there was Amadeo Bordiga, at that time neapolitan socialist leader. In 1921, he founded with Gramsci and Terracini, the Communist Party. He gave us, already ill and close to death, the only interview granted in his life.

Interviewer: Engineer Bordiga, at the socialist congress of Bologna in 1919, you were the leader of the fraction, so-called, abstentionist who supported the need not to participate in the elections to devote themselves to the revolutionary project, what was your thesis?

Bordiga: We have published several times the writings that posed this strident alternative: "either revolutionary preparation or electoral preparation". Given the traditions of the Socialist Party and also of the workers' movement in Italy, electoral action was of such magnitude that it absorbed all available energies, in all senses, even in a pecuniary sense, so to speak. Instead, our fraction said: let's abandon the way of elections, we cut the bridges behind us, and so the masses will have to launch themselves on the path of direct action.

Interviewer: What was missing, in your opinion, for the revolutionary watchword to be launched?

Bordiga: It lacked the political consciousness of the party, which did not have a clear vision of the possible developments of the situation in the near future.

Interviewer: Engineer Bordiga, what was your attitude toward the occupation of the factories?

Bordiga: Our assessment was very different. We wrote a series of articles in the SOVIET that have been republished recently. They were based on this problem: "take the factory or take the power?" It was not necessary to occupy the factories and the workshops, it was necessary to occupy the state and all its offshoots - A cut to the video, continue - the assessment was markedly different. I do not believe that in that period, after the return to Italy of the delegates who had been at the Second Congress of the International in 1920, a revolution was possible.

Voice-over: Amadeo Bordiga, one of the founders of the communist party, who will direct for years- Another cut to the video, the interviewer's question is cut off.

Bordiga: The expulsion of the reformist wing headed by Turati, Treves, Modigliani, the well-known leaders of Italian reformism, was supported by me since the Congress of Bologna. My proposal was sharply rejected and therefore the matter had to be referred to the International and was discussed at the second Congress del 1920. Almost all the communists of the International were in favor of the idea of eliminating the reformists, not only in Italy, but also in the other sections of the International itself. The party was forced to convene the Congress of Livorno, I think the seventeenth of its congresses, to comply or not to comply with this injunction of the International. In fact so it happened. The maximalist fraction had an imposing majority and so we decided to leave; we left the hall of the Goldoni theater, where the socialist congress was being held, and went to the nearby San Marco theater in Livorno. And it was me who read the declaration and all those who had voted for the communist thesis left the room and went to form the other party.

Interviewer: Engineer Bordiga, is it correct to say that with the split, the popular socialist front was further weakened to the advantage of fascism?

Bordiga: Of course, the old party, dividing itself into two wings, first had a much greater sum of adherents, followers, and especially voters than the two parties could have, one of which was ours. But you have to distinguish between the structural fact and the tactical fact. That is, the two parties split in Livorno, they greet each other: "goodbye" and everyone goes their own way. They will never meet again. On the other hand, another part of our own splinter group, precisely the one headed by L'Ordine Nuovo of Gramsci, thought that after the organizational split we could study a combination of battle, of action, of maneuvering: The two parties would meet again, they would march together to confront the bourgeois reactionary force that in the meantime giantised, that is, fascism. We, on the other hand, representatives of the pure tradition of the left, thought it more appropriate to throw ourselves against the socialists than against the fascists. Fascism was considered by us a great misfortune, a nefarious thing, but above all in this sense: that it would generate behind it an anti-fascist movement with the accumulation of all the hatreds and all the revenges that fascism, with its abuse of power, had left behind in all the countryside and in all the villages of Italy. We believed that the new phase of post-fascist Italian politics would be worse than the old one, worse than Risorgimento and then Giolittian Italy, worse than reactionary fascist Italy itself.

Interviewer: Engineer Bordiga, you were the leader of the Communist Party in its early years of action, later and throughout your life, accompanied you the accusation of having considered the political struggle in its abstractness, of having adopted a method that has been called "doctrinaire schematism", this according to your critics would have led you to make serious mistakes.

Bordiga: I certainly reject the accusation, although I may find the formula "doctrinaire schematism" right, because in its correct interpretation "doctrinaire schematism" is a necessity of the life of that organism which constitutes the Communist Party. Therefore, I do not believe that this way of seeing has led to serious errors in my action as a party leader: but I accept that my way of thinking is defined by others as "doctrinaire schematism," as long as I am allowed to give to this formula the interpretation that corresponds to it according to correct marxist and revolutionary doctrine.

Interviewer: You have also been accused of being not very ductile, incapable of adapting action to circumstances and prone to forming revolutionary sects, how do you respond to these objections that Lenin also made to you?

Bordiga: Lenin never raised these objections, but I recognize them as right and I attribute to myself this double quality: to have a sectarian tendency and to be not very ductile when situations change.

Interviewer: Engineer Bordiga, you have been accused of having underestimated the strength of fascism, of having considered it a bourgeois phenomenon similar to other previous ones and therefore of not having fought it with sufficient energy, how do you respond to this accusation?

Bordiga: Fascism was not the first reactionary and repressive phenomenon to enter Italian history. We had other precedents: we had Crispi, we had Pelloux, Bava Beccaris in 1898 in Milan. The Italian bourgeoisie had always put its hand, alternately, in the two saddlebags: the stick and the carrot. That is, when it could give democratic concessions, even reformist ones, even pro-proletarian ones; but as soon as the situation and its interests advised it to do so, it passed to the method of violent blows, of truncheons, of squad actions. So it was but one of these turns.

Interviewer: Forgive me if I insist, engineer Bordiga, compared to other previous reactionary movements, you are not willing to recognize that there were elements of novelty, originality and danger in fascism?

Bordiga: Fascism had its own original characteristics. It was immediately interpreted in two ways: one was that Fascism relied on the agrarian and landed bourgeoisie, which was socially represented by real estate; the other was that it relied on large-scale modern industry, which was growing as a result of a fact that happened in all the nations of the world. Gramsci's interpretation seemed to advocate the thesis of fascism as an agrarian fact. We, on the other hand, considered fascism an industrial and modern fact, in a certain sense even democratic. Fascism was an attempt to give an original function, in Italian society, to the middle and small bourgeoisie:

artisans, professionals, students, all these half-classes that we heartily despise from the height of our pure classism.

Interviewer: On what elements did you base your accusations of complicity against the industrialists?

Bordiga: This was evident because without a doubt the supreme classes of the industrial and commercial plutocracy began to nourish and encourage the fascist movement, providing for its own material armament. It can be said that the owners of the companies distributed to the fascist squads the bombs and truncheons that were to be used to destroy the workers' organizations, because they had an obvious interest in the elimination of this apparatus antithetical to them.

Interviewer: How do you explain the ideal agreement that united Antonio Gramsci and Piero Govetti? And how is it that you, who were always opposed to the unity of action between communists and other opponents of fascism, did not oppose that collaboration?

Bordiga: Gramsci was of the opinion, as we have already established, that it was useful to make an agreement between all the anti-fascist forces, including liberals like Gobetti, and therefore he wanted to maintain relations with Gobetti himself. I could not, of course, encourage him in this attitude which was contrary to all my principles. I remember this, at that time I turned to Antonio Gramsci and said to him: give me a great gift, get me a collection of Gobetti's newspaper which was entitled *Rivoluzione Liberale* (Liberal Revolution). Gramsci, who knew me, Gobetti and himself well, immediately understood that I wanted to make a ruthless critique of Gobetti's method and he was sorry about that, so he answered me: "No, Amadeo, don't be angry, I can't do you this pleasure, do me a favor, don't deal with the subject of Gobetti". I must admit, maybe it was an act of weakness or it was a sympathy that the person of Gramsci inspired with his great loyalty and intelligence that came out of his blue eyes. And so I said: all right, Antonio, don't worry, I won't do anything else. And I no longer attacked Gobetti.

There is another cut to the video, the interviewer's question has been cut and partially so has Amadeo Bordiga's answer.

Bordiga: the answer is incomplete- proletarian force was not the march on Rome, the famous October 28, it was more of a comedy between bourgeois forces, as I have said on other occasions. But it was precisely the strike movement of August 1922 which could have been the last occasion for a great shock in which the fascist squads could have been beaten. In this regard, I recall, in relation to what we said about the famous *Arditi del Popolo*, that we, the Communist Party and the Communist Left, both Italian and international, had supported rejecting the political unified front, that is, a bloc among many political parties, and had supported another tactical expedient, the trade union unified front. This was not because we wanted to defend the shattered Italian state structure because whoever destroyed it would have done a good thing. This movement was not at all a joke, it was a very serious thing, and then we can remember some episodes referring to some cities. Ancona for example was eradicated only by sending several regiments of *Carabinieri* in perfect war formation that occupied the city. A division of destroyers of the Italian Navy was sent to Bari to drop anchors in the waters facing the roadstead of Bari. Another very strong battle took place in Parma.

Here the interview stops