

INTERVIEW WITH LOTTA CONTINUA

(this interview took place in Rome in mid-May. Members of the International Committee of BF talked with a member of the IC of Lotta Continua. The meeting was very fruitfull - LC were very acceptable to the idea of a trip of working-class members of BF to Italy in Sep-Oct, they also agreed to send a delegate to our conference. I have not included that part of the discussion where we talked about the situation in this country, the notes of it are poor.

PA (MBF) )

BF: Last June Lotta Continua (LC) line on the local elections was to ask for a vote for the Communist Party (PCI) for the coming general elections LC has decided to put forward candidates with the other revolutionary left groups under the banner 'Proletarian Democracy' - why this change of strategy?

LC: Our attitude to the elections is a tactical one - unlike the other left groups, AO and PDUP, we do not see it as a matter of principle. We saw the elections last June as a referendum as 'a moment in which the working-class can measure its power in votes'. Over the last year, the political project of the PCI has been clarified. In a time like the present of left-wing momentum there is the need within the working class of critical opposition to the PCI.

For AO the electoral unity of the revolutionary left is part of their stagist theory of building the revolutionary party - which concentrates on the building of links between organisations first AO&PDUP, then AO-LC etc. Central to the strategy of LC is the building of unity at the base, for us electoral unity will permit unitary expression of communists. We see this coming together of communists at the base as starting from the reality of building popular power. We see the growth of the revolutionary party to the left of the PCI as an expression of the contradiction between the working class and the PCI. For us the revolutionary party is a projection of the mass struggle NOT a sperate moment from it.

BF: It seems to us that at present 'Proletarian Democracy' is no more than an electoral front. How do you see a unitary revolutionary party coming out of it?

LC: Right now it is an electoral front but it could develope into a mass organisation. We have specific proposals on how to encourage this process. Right now its a good time for the discussion of unification. We will ask for a delegate conference of the revolutionary left to discuss our agreements and disagreements, we want practical unity over more strategic issues and we want a convention to discuss a political programme for the revolutionary left.

We disagree with AO who seem to believe that there can be a short way to the building of the revolutionary party (through the merging of organisations. For us an essential part of the building of a rev party is the bringing together of mass vanguards. We are trying to do this in the selection of our candidates for 'Proletarian Democracy' - all of them are militants who have come out of the struggle.

BF: For us there is a certain uncertainty over LC's position on the unions and the factory delegates (shop-stewards). We know that at one time you supported the factory delegates - what is your position now?

LC: We do not think that there can be a line on mass organisations that can be applicable to all work-places. In some work places, factory councils can be used as mass organs of the working class but this is not the case everywhere. The continuity of mass organisations is never guaranteed - the Bolshviks could not guarantee the mass representivity of the soviets. At the present time, we see some of the organisational structures coming out of the sector as having greater continuity than ever before - this is the case for the organisation of the unemployed in Naples. In some cases

the revisionists (including the PCI) have been able to recuperate sectors of the working class in factories that were led by the revolutionary left - this has happened to many factory delegates; there tends to be more room for us in the social arena. But it is impossible to generalise, relations between union leaders and factory delegates are constantly changing - the factory councils are not the same in 76 as they were in 73. Because of the restructuring of the productive process and the political clout of the PCI and the Trade Unions many of the factory councils have been 'normalised', have become part of the trade union apparatus. This attack on the councils has also come through mobility of labour and the 'cassa d'integrazione' (guaranteed lay-off pay for a year for workers made redundant). In the recent aggro over the 3-yearly contracts the role of the councils has been limited, in the chemical works it is the mass assemblies that refused the contracts.

(we then discussed the parallels with the situation in England where centralised bargaining which an essential part of the wages freeze, the phasing out of piece work and redundancy payments have eroded the power of the shop-stewards. At the same time, there has been a fierce ideological attempt through union courses and telly programmes to fully incorporate the shop-steward within the T.U. apparatus. But also, it is dangerous to generalize about the role of the shop-steward - it varies from industry to industry; to a small extent it varies from individual to individual)

Our action around the contracts was not to accept the t.u. programmes but to propose alternative programmes for a working-class solution to the crisis. But also strategic demands like the reduction in working time (35 hour week); state investment to eliminate redundancies and wage demands. This is very contrary to the strategy of the PCI which labels our demands 'simplistic' and calls for a new model of economic development. For the PCI, socialism is the resolving of the contradictions of capitalism. Their solution to the crisis in the car sector is to build buses. Lenin said socialism was 'soviets + electricity' for the PCI it an economic plan + buses. They see the public sector as parasitic (it is non-productive) so their demands for teachers are an increase in hours worked with no increase in wages. To 'save the nation', the PCI is prepared to use its leadership position within the working class. For them 'working class power' is the 'full, efficient use of human resources'.

Of course we are not into building alternative union - for us the move towards unity of the trade unions is a good thing. For us the autonomous process of building working class power inside the factories must be parallel with the building of organisations outside the factories.

BF: There is no doubt that the PCI has control over large sections of the working class - how do you explain this? Also we don't see the PCI as a social-democratic party - are there signs that this is changing?

LC: The PCI has a great attraction for the working class - it gives the working class a chance to govern Italy. We must be clear that the revisionism of the PCI has objective roots in the working class. It responds to the workers' demand for efficiency in their continuous struggle against the anarchy of capitalism. It is clear that the political situation will be radically changed when the PCI enters the government - it cannot bring about a stable social-democratic regime because of the political/ideological history it carries. We want the PCI in government; it will be a government of instability. In the cities where the PCI governs, it represses some struggles, favours others. There has been a blossoming of social struggles in cities under its control. It is not against NATO but even so cannot bring about stable government.

BF: How strong are the Fascists in Italy now?

LC: The ~~xxx~~ role of the Fascists cannot be seen in a national perspective - it follows a strategy laid down internationally by imperialism which also involves the secret service and the carabinieri (police). There is no separate policy of Italian reaction. Within the imperialist camp there are 2 conflicting

views as to the best way to destroy working class power in Italy.

- 1. Seeing that a coup is impossible right now, to use financial destabilisation to bring the right wing back into power.

- 2. To accept the PCI in government (this is the line of Carter). To use the opportunity of the PCI being in government to social-democratize it and to bring about a division between Moscow and Rome (PCI).

Anti-fascist work is not as important as in 72; the Fascists are losing their mass base. The main tools of international reaction are now (as a military tool) the secret service generals who control sectors of the armed forces, (as a political tool) the Bank of Italy and, above all, Christian Democracy. The strategy of tension exists but only to win votes (for CD).

BF; It was unclear to us from your writings on 'fascistisation' whether you meant the development of separate fascist organisations or a move towards repression of the existing apparatus of the (bourgeois) state.

LC (My personal opinion is that our writings on fascistisation need revision.)

Fascistisation is not an either/or process. The fascists are the unskilled workers of imperialism but they do not reap the political fruit of their work. Previously we have over-estimated the international components of fascistisation and under-estimated the national components. The slow degeneration of bourgeois democracy cannot be carried out in Italy - the working class is too ~~strong~~ strong. In Italy the process must be more violent and traumatic.

BF Presumably the starting point of international reaction will be to further the divisions inside the 'people'. That brings up the problem of the alliances of the working class - how does LC see this problem?

LC: Their strategy will not only to turn the petty bourgeoisie against the working class but also some sections of the working class against others. Inside the working class, Christian Democracy is powerful amongst the public-sector workers and the peasantry.

The PCI is making the same mistakes as the Popular Unity government in Chile; in an attempt to 'neutralise' the bourgeoisie they are building alliances with them (with FIAT etc). They are prepared to govern together with private capital. At the same time they are not prepared to attack the parasitic privileges of sectors of the petty bourgeoisie and the labour aristocracy. The current strike of the Alitalia pilots is a good example; the pilots already earn £800 a month and are using their very strong bargaining strength to get a better settlement than the other airline workers. They are organised in an autonomous, fascist trade-union (they are like the lorry drivers in Chile). Now it is clear that 2 possible strategies present themselves. Either as we say to struggle for the assertion of working class unity around the needs and demands of the lower paid airport /airline workers. Or as the PCI is doing - to attempt some sort of compromise between the working class and the pilots. The PCI is attempting to win the sympathy of the pilots by demanding in the wage negotiations a higher percentage increase for the pilots than for the other airline workers! But, of course, the pilots have quite rightly taken this as a sign of weakness and are sticking out for a separate agreement that will give them even more. This is part of the wider PCI strategy of the PCI which refuses to attack the differentials and privileges of white-collar workers even when blue-collar workers have made it clear that they want to have a go.

Their strategy is suicidal - you lose the support of the working class and do not get the support of those you know to be dangerous (compare with what happened in Chile). This is having disastrous results in the railways and the public sector where the low paid workers are revolting against the unions and the PCI.

\*This is accounted for by 'clientelism'. In exchange for votes, CD has over the years given jobs in the state bureaucracy to its supporters. Italy now has more civil servants per head of population than any other developed capitalist country. To that extent there is something valid in the PCI claim that the public sector is 'parasitic'. But the charge is a dangerous one and can legitimise whole-scale sacking of teachers and nurses by the capitalists - as is happening in this country. (my note)

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(It is useful to add in here that when we talked to an LC militant in the ~~LC~~ Alfa-Sud base-group he said that in the discussions about what LC's position should be on the elections it was the workers who totally refused a 'Vote for the PCI' position. They made the point that they were ~~p~~ oppressed every day at work by the strategies of the PCI and were not prepared to vote for them)

BF In the U.K. to-day, the struggle of the labour aristocracy to get back lost differentials is an important component of the wage offensive. Is this the case in Italy?

LC No. The struggle for differentials is not an issue here, except in the public sector amongst professional sectors like the doctors. It's essential to have a very clear strategy towards these sectors. In Chile, the doctors and house-owners were opposed by the 'popular power' of the community. We see the position of the petty bourgeoisie as ideologically caught between the two main classes, they will go towards whichever they feel to be strongest. Our attitude towards small shop-keepers can be seen clearly in our programme. We want a complete nationalisation of the distribution system - shop keepers would become state employees in a state distribution system.

(For the discussion on women see SM's report. To follow an interview with an Alfa-Sud militant, an election speech by Sofri and the odd general comment. The installation of a left government in Italy will have international consequences which should be discussed throughout BF)