From the PCI to the PDS
The long march of the
Italian Communist Party

Livio Maitan
A complete balance sheet — from a national and international point of view — would have had to take into account the Czechoslovak experience of Soviet repression and the political and social crisis shaking Italian society, as well as that of the other capitalist European countries, and disturbing the relative equilibrium established at the end of the 1940s. But this balance sheet was not made after 1968-69 either. There were then other rectifications and corrections, with clearer positions about the USSR than previously, but there was never a total balance sheet of the analyses, arguments and orientations.

This is not the first time that Italian workers' movement has had to make a balance sheet.

There should have been one made in 1948 after the victory of conservative forces in the 18 April election, which marked the defeat of the policy of anti-fascist unity and of gradual democracy. The analytical premises of this policy turned out to have been mistaken. Nationally, the hegemonic groups within the ruling classes and their party, Christian Democracy, were more decided to impose their choice of rebuilding the country on the ruins of war by restoring the traditional state with its institutions and modes of functioning and traditional capitalist mechanisms. Has had to make a transition period of the emergency, they had no intention of establishing systematic collaboration with the workers' parties by associating them with the government. At an international level, after Fulton on the "Iron Curtain", the imperialist powers had started the Cold War, rapidly dropping the illusion of the possibility of a lasting agreement between the "democratic" countries for the unification of a free and peaceful world. In June 1948, the first striking demonstration of the crisis of Stalinism — the break between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union — should have stimulated some critical thinking, particularly as, until then, Yugoslavia seemed to Italian Communists to be the best model, after the USSR, of a socialist country.

Another major occasion occurred in 1956, after Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's crimes and the lasting of a free and peaceful world. In June 1948, the first striking demonstration of the crisis of Stalinism — the break between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union — should have stimulated some critical thinking, particularly as, until then, Yugoslavia seemed to Italian Communists to be the best model, after the USSR, of a socialist country.

There should have been one made in 1959 after the Yalta conference, preceded by ten years of the party's decline, to decide to put a whole historical experience into question. It should be obvious to everybody that the balance sheet necessary should have an international and not simply national aspect. It should start from a complete rethink, from a historical reconstruction capable of avoiding apologetic or justificatory temptations, Is it not the balance sheet of several decades of "building socialism" in the bureaucratized transitional societies, and first of all of the tragic experience of Stalinism since the end of the 1920s and in the 1930s and 1940s. At the same time, not to go further back, it is the balance sheet of fifty years of history of the workers' movement and of the Communist parties in the industrial capitalist countries. The themes were so deep, the failures so striking, the contradictions so heartrending, the ideological and moral aberrations so serious, that the arguments calling on so-called realism with which the PCI has accepted the current reality as inevitable for several decades, excommunicating all those who challenged its analyses and perspectives, its tactical or strategic choices, its leadership and organizational methods, well these arguments no longer stand up! The results of the work of the so-called realists appear today in a dramatic light and this makes it possible for the ruling classes to intensify the funeral march of communism and socialism by proclaiming the everlasting nature of the existing order.

There is now a colossal job of work to do. It is a very difficult task of reconfiguration and rebuilding, if not of restarting from scratch. A balance sheet of the past is an indispensable starting point. The goal of this essay is to contribute to it through a critical reconstruction of the itinerary of a party which, after having played a leading role for fifty years, has been affected by a crisis which has led it to put into question not only its past but also its very reason for being and future.

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1. In an article by Luciano that will be referred to later, Palmieri (Il Tempo) noted the "failure of the communist party's anti-fascist Front" from August 1949 (Pietro Sacchetti uses a similar time scheme).

2. At the end of the war, the PCI leaders strongly denied the creation of two zones with their own zones of influence. During the discussions I was at a Socialist Party meeting had had the impression that I was not very pleasant manner simply because I mentioned the Yalta concept where Europe had been divided between zones of influence.
1. The Communist Party in the Italian political and social context

1921: In January the founding congress of the Communist Party of Italy (PCI) takes place in Livorno. The new party, of which Amado Bordiga was national secretary, brings together 763 members and the majority of the Young Socialist organization. Some 100,000 "united communists", led by G. Serrati, and 14,000 reformists led by F. Tongianni, do not participate.

1922: Second Congress of the PCI in Rome. The Communist International criticizes the Bordiga orientation of the Italian party, which rejects the united front tactic in the fight against fascism. October: "the march on Rome". The fascists take power and Mussolini is named prime minister.

1923: The Comintern removes Bordiga from the leadership of the PCI, despite the fact that he still represents the majority of the party.

1924: Assassination of M. C. Togliatti by fascist agents. Evolution from fascist repression. The PCI sets up its party organization.

1926: Third Congress of the PCI in Rome. Progress within the PCI of the "anti-fascist opposition" to the PCI. The PCI becomes the "anti-fascist political force" in Italy.

1928: Some 100,000 "unity communists" and about 10,000 PCI members join the PCI are formed which are gradually absorbed by the PCI (the biggest are those of the PSI, around 10,000, and the minority PCI led by Savelli, Rome, 1972, Dinamica del PCI, 1976). The PCI remains an essential component of the anti-fascist movement.

1929: Spanish Civil War. Italy intervenes on German and French sides. War of fascism against anti-fascism. Fascism and anti-fascism (about 3,350) join the International Brigades to defend the Republic. Togliatti is the main figure responsible for the PCI's policy in Spain.

1930: German Soviet pact. Togliatti opposes it (he is expelled from the party).

1940: Italy enters the war on the side of Nazi Germany. The PCI is excluded from the last International Congress of the Comintern.


1944: Togliatti leaves Moscow and returns to Italy. He imposes the famous "turn" on the PCI which means that it should support governments of "national unity" (including with representatives of the monarchy) and put off the perspective of socialism in the name of the "anti-fascist revolution". The PCI joins the government of national unity but is valued by the monarchist Badoglio. Start of the policy of "gradual democracy". Togliatti is assassinated by a fascist in the liberation of the camp where he was interned by the French in France. Several thousand Italian communists join the PCI.

1945: End of the war and execution of Mussolini by the resistance. Liberation. The PCI develops strongly and the Italian workers' movement, including the Socialist Party. To sum up, it was in this context, between the end of the war and the 1970s, that the workers' movement was able to build, strengthen and maintain such strong political and trade-union organizations (as well as a vast network of underground social organizations) as to exercise considerable cultural influence, occupy solid positions at all levels of institutions, even though its main structural component (the PCI) remained excluded from government.

1946: Break between the PCI and PSI. The PCI is excluded from the government. Formation of the Communist Information Bureau (CIB) of the Communist Parties, under the control of Moscow. The PCI increases to 2,252,716 members.

1947: Start of the "Cold War". The PCI is excluded from the government. Formation of the Communist Information Bureau (CIB) of the Communist Parties, under the control of Moscow. The PCI increases to 2,252,716 members.

1948: Break between the USSR and Yugoslavia. Togliatti participates actively in the hasty renegotiation of the December 1947 "Innocenti-Malatesta" Dilemma. Defeat of the electoral alliance between the PCI and PSI; the Christian Democracy imposes its hegemony (beginning of crisis). Attempts on Togliatti's life, followed by a popular uprising which leads to an insurrectionary-type movement, but which the PCI manages to control.

In the 70s the PCI as the foundation of the Italian Communist Party has been an essential element of the workers' movement. Since the 1940s it has been clearly hegemonic, with a leading role in the political struggle in the country.

The historical context

To understand how this was possible, we have to briefly retrace the PCI's development. This was a society which experienced unequal capitalist development and whose parliamentary institutions made possible only a partial expression of the interests and aspirations of the population. Thus the context was marked by many conflicts and frequent social explosions.

During the years immediately following the First World War, Italy was shaken by a social and political crisis a lot deeper than that of other Western European countries (except of course Germany). There was a radicalization and politicization of wide sections of the working class, the peasantry, and sections of the petty bourgeoisie. This emphasized even further the specific characteristics of the Italian workers' movement, including the Socialist Party. There were, among other elements, the formation of a strong communist tendency and a majority, a major component which drove the reformists led by Filippo Tarrasi into a clearly minority position.

This context of revolutionary or pre-revolutionary crisis which, despite its potentialities, was not exploited in a favourable direction, explains why the fascist phenomenon emerged for the first time in Italy.

On the other hand, it was the years 1922-1928 of Mussolini's dictatorship which determined the type of struggle and mobilizations which developed at the regime explosion. We should remember for example that in March 1943, and the following year, there were big mobilizations, certain of which for example that of May 1948 in France represented by De Gaulle's rise to power and the installation of the Fifth Republic.

In 1948-49 a new political and social crisis developed. This is not the place to retrace the causes and expressions of this crisis. In Italy there was not a concentrated revolutionary explosion like that of May 1948 in France. But the crisis touched more deeply the political, administrative and even judicial institutions; relations in the workplaces; and was marked by an unprecedented political radicalization. This crisis, which was once again a radical exceptional variant in capitalist Europe, continued with its ups and downs for more than five years, with continuing effects in the following period.

In sum up, the most important in this context, between the end of the war and the 1970s, that the workers' movement was able to build, strengthen and maintain such strong political and trade-union organizations (as well as a vast network of underground social organizations) as to exercise considerable cultural influence, occupy solid positions at all levels of institutions, even though its main structural component (the PCI) remained excluded from government.

It is in this context which explains, in the last analysis, the growth and consolidation of the Communist Party, a party which for decades stayed the strongest among those in capitalist countries and was able to avoid the same sort of catastrophic decline as that suffered by the French and Spanish Communist Parties.

Different stages in the development of the PCI

1. Among these factors should be emphasized the increased weight of the working class and the erosion of the new political and social forces represented by the student movement (on this see what I wrote in PCI 1945-49: storicismo e organizzazione, Soprintendenza, Torino, 1971; II partito lavorativo, Samonà e Savoia, Rome, 1972, Dinamica delle classe sociali in Italia, Samonà e Savoia, Rome, 1976).
interpretation, we should also look at the subjective factors which existed, and indicate more concretely how the PCI was able on each occasion to exploit the potential that existed in the objective situation in its own favor. We should look briefly at certain stages in its development.

The Italian Communist Party was created when the second phase of the French revolution was beginning, and it was created in Italy in the Second International, and the PCI was able to exploit the potential that existed in the objective situation in its own favor. We should look briefly at certain stages in its development.

The PCI's growth after the war

At the end of the war, the PCI already had a predominant influence in the working class, and was scarcely less strong electorally than the Socialist Party. Its members were in the forefront of building workers' and peasant's trade unions, as well as other mass organizations.

In the years that followed, the PCI increased its influence within the workers' movement, while it was able to retain its own orientation and its contradictions in this period. It is enough here to recall that, to the extent in which the PCI grew weaker as a result of its political inconsistence, of its growing tailendism of the Communists and finally the split by Palmi Barbertini (which gave birth to the Italian Social Democratic Party (PSDI) of Giuseppe Saragat), the PCI more and more appeared to the masses as the only force capable of opposing the restorationist offensive of the ruling classes and to the imperialistic military and political bloc of the Atlantic Alliance (Nato).

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We know the role played by Communists in the Resistance, which lies at the root of their exceptional growth during these two crucial years of 1943-45. This growth, which was greatly helped by the prestige enjoyed by the PCI in the USSR at the time, was possible because the PCI entered into the struggle with an accumulation of leaders and militants incomparably superior to that of all the other organizations. From July 1945, the number of active members and the arrival of those who had been imprisoned or deported to the islands and the return of those who had been in exile. A significant group of these had had military experience during the Spanish Civil War which turned out to be very useful.

It was thanks to this backbone that the PCI was able to make by far the most important contribution to the underground movement, to the mass mobilizations such as the strikes of spring 1944, and to the flight of the maquis. This led to a flood of new members who were to play a central role in the party's activity and internal life during the following years.

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2. The international context

In our summary of the historical trajectory of the PCI we have in general ignored the international faction, except for a few references. It seemed necessary to take this approach at a time when there is the blossoming of so many simplistic historical reconstructions which reduce everything to the crimes of Stalin, and Togliatti’s complicity. But a complete analysis and assessment must naturally include the full international dimension, while refusing not only the summary condemnations but also the apologetic interpretations which have prevailed for years and which have not yet been completely abandoned.

The PCI and the Communist International

From the beginning — this also appears in the works of Paolo Spriano his main historian — the formation and the evolution of the PCI were very largely determined by the direct or indirect interventions of the Third International.

In the first phase of the party’s existence, the International tried, not without difficulty, to use its weight to counterbalance Bordigist conceptions and orientations. This was particularly evident in getting the concept of the proletarian united front accepted, and encouraging collaboration with the PSI. Another goal was reunification with the maximalist current which had predominated at the Livorno congress.

Later, international pressure and interventions contributed to the formation of a new leading group which broke with Bordiga. In the same way, without the international discussions and experiences there would not have been the Lyons Congress theses in 1926, which marked a very important turning point in the development of the party.

There was a broad discussion in the revolutionary left on their assessment of these theses as the Bordigists considered them a step on the path that would lead to the policy of popular front and national unity. In our opinion this was just as mistaken as an interpretation as that supported for years by the official leadership of the party which, fundamentally, went in the same direction. The only difference was that this path was considered negative by one side and positive by the other. In reality, the Lyons theses were a valuable contribution to the analysis of Italian society and its dynamic and for developing a revolutionary strategy. Gramsci’s contribution to their elaboration was decisive.

However, another aspect should not be forgotten. The discussion on strategy and political orientation in Italy took place in the very ambiguous framework of the so-called “bolshevization” of the Communist Parties. Started by the Fifth Congress of the Internationale, “bolshevization” tried to answer a demand for political homogenization and for changing the methods of organization and functioning inherited from the old reformist parties. But, under the influence of Zanovio — who was then president of the International — among others, it undoubtedly marked the beginning of a period of bureaucratization. Even during the preparation of the Lyons congress some not very democratic methods were used. On this, the Bordigists’ complaints were not completely unfounded.

In any case, international constraints took on a qualitatively different character after the consolidation of Stalinism. This fact can no longer be challenged by anybody. As it is not the place of this study to go into the details, and with all the ups and downs of this period which has already been widely dealt with by different historians, we will only touch on the problems which arose at the most significant moments.

3. As the Third Congress of the Communist International, Zanovio demanded the “bolshevization” of the following term. For us, bolshevization means that the parties accept what was in general accepted in Bolshevikism and what Lenin said about an international dimension, while refusing not only the summary condemnations but also the apologetic interpretations which have prevailed for years and which have not yet been completely abandoned.

4. As we know, the polemic against Stalinist orientations of the third period was at the time the leitmotif of Trotsky’s criticism, whose arguments and formalities were almost universally recognized, but unfortunately only decades later.

5. It is not to be added that the category of social-fascism was not a pure Stalinist discovery. During the Fifth Congress of the Communist International, the PCI would have arrived nevertheless at the analyses and policies of the “third period”. The answer can only be no. For example, it is difficult to imagine that the PCI would have taken a new start could be seen differently, as the rejection of any unity with the Socialist Party.

6. As Lenin taught us, bolshevization is Marxist in character. It is a faithful answer to the ideations of the proletariat and the ideas of Leninism. But neither of them can be understood in a mechanistic sense and the dogmatism of the PCI on these points. Limiting itself only to “the development of the struggle,” which was on one of the main reasons for the PCI’s reversal of its party’s orientation contributed in Bolshevism and what Lenin said about an interpretation as that supported for years by the PCI.

7. In the call for the Cologne Congress (1931) we read: “the elements of a revolutionary crisis are accumulating. In the present situation the tasks of the party is to set speed up the maturation of a revolutionary crisis. One is the growing contradiction between the working class and the capitalists. From this arises the necessity to raise the consciousness of the proletariat and to the ideas of Leninism. Bolshevization means also not mechanically imitating the Russian Bolsheviks, but keeping what was and remains essential in Bolshevikism.

Livio Maitan

From the 1930 turn to the popular fronts

First of all, we should look at the 1929-30 “turn,” linked to the “third period” conceptions of the Communist International. This turn was based on the forecast of generalized revolutionary crises in the short term, and obliged the PCI to abandon the policy of united fronts with the social-democratic parties, which were now denounced as “social-fascists.” The most bitter fruits of this policy were harvested in Germany, where the Communist Party’s orientation contributed in large part to the tragic defeat of the workers’ movement in the rise of Hitler. But the Italian party also paid the price of a turn made under orders from Moscow.

On this there is an interpretation put forward by two people as different as Giorgio Amendola and Pietro Secchia which says that the “turn” — voluta — was decided in Italy by special factors and was implemented in a particular way. There is a kernel of truth in this in that the turn did seem to answer a need for a certain radicalization of the struggle, which was one of the main concerns of the younger layer of the leading group, and for restarting organized work within the country, leaving behind the quarrels of the emigrant community. It should be added that certain Stalinist formulations, for example “social-fascist,” seemed to be on the same wavelength as statements already used by Bordigism, one of whose features had always been the rejection of any unity with the Socialist Party.

This does not deny that the turn was decided internationally, in line with the demands of the Soviet leadership, and imposed on all the sections by any means necessary. We could ask the following question: if there had been no PCI in Italy, how would the Communist International, would the PCI have arrived nevertheless at the analyses and policies of the “third period”? The answer can only be no. For example, it is difficult to imagine that the PCI would have taken a new start could be seen differently, as the rejection of any unity with the Socialist Party.

In any case, international constraints took on a qualitatively different character after the consolidation of Stalinism. This fact can no longer be challenged by anybody. As it is not the place of this study to go into the details, and with all the ups and downs of this period which has already been widely dealt with by different historians, we will only touch on the problems which arose at the most significant moments.

As the Third Congress of the Communist International, Zanovio demanded Bolshhevism in the following terms. For us, Bolshhevism means that the parties accept what was in general accepted in Bolshevikism and what Lenin said about an international dimension, while refusing not only the summary condemnations but also the apologetic interpretations which have prevailed for years and which have not yet been completely abandoned.
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their strategy. In reality, things were not so simple particularly as there was the German-Soviet pact which, despite its temporary nature, represented a break in continuity. In any case, the reference to the policy of united front is not a valid argument for proving the specificity and autonomy of the PCI, which, quite the contrary, represented an adopted orientation dictated by the International leadership according to the needs of the Soviet Union and its ruling group.10

From Salerno to the Twentieth Congress

Mach has already written about a third turn, that of 1943-44 - the of combining the anti-fascist opposition united front is not a valid argument for proving the existence of this turn to assert that at that time — in 1943-44 — the PCI had already adopted a democratic/institutional perspective and abandoned any revolutionary/insurrectional perspective, then this argument is undoubtedly pertinent.11 But this does not imply that there was a specific and autonomous choice. In fact, the line applied in a more and more systematic manner after Togliatti's return to Italy was shared by all the Communist Parties in Western Europe — and in its general lines not only in Western Europe — and had been decided by the Soviet leadership at the Cominform and the Communist International just before its dissolution. 12

 Amendola insists on the fact that Togliatti's propaganda from Radio Moscow was already oriented to anti-fascist unity before his return, but this only proves the opposite of what he wants to say. At the time Togliatti was not linked to the leadership in Italy which as a body had already launched, in the sense before not be the spokesperson for a line that had been developed independently by his party. In addition, anyone who has even the vaguest idea of the developments of the period and the debates of the day in the PCI cannot seriously think that its leaders would have given a foreign communist the means — in this case a powerful radio transmitter — to express his ideas independently of the orientations of the Kremlin. It is just as inconceivable that Togliatti would take a decision to return and introduce a new line which provoked discussions and clashes within the PCI completely independently and without any approval from higher up.13

More generally, the choice of the national road to socialism cannot be claimed as an expression of originality and autonomy. It is enough to remember that Stalin himself, before the start of the Cold War, during a conversation with a delegation from the Labour Party, and shortly afterwards in a meeting with the leader of the Czechoslovak CP Gottwald, had envisaged the possibilities of different roads to socialism. This possibility had a favourable reception from several Communist leaders. After the creation in 1947 and the criticisms of opportunism made by Jdanov during the founding meeting in relation to the PCI and PCF, the party adapted to the new climate and without substantially changing its policy — which the Soviets themselves did not ask — discretely abandoned the theme of national socialism which had already been taken up again five years later during the 1956 Congress.14

In reality, this congress represented another decisive step in the history of the PCI. It was the texts of this congress and not the three previous ones of the post-war period, which systematized the conception of an "Italian road to socialism." This systematization had been prepared by the PCI since the previous congresses. But, once again, the turn was inspired by the leaders of the CPSU. In fact, in February of that year the Twentieth Congress took place, where Khrushchev introduced the idea of a peaceful and institutional transition to socialism in the

10. We will not here take up another aspect of the problem: the line of popular fronts did not and could not have in Italy the same practical consequences as in France or Spain. The Popular Front was presented as a project of unification of all the opposition currents against fascism, including a critical, or supposedly, so fascist current. During the Central Committee of the end of October 1935, Ruggiero Gricci stated in his conclusions: "We will be the leaders of the Popular Front if we are capable — as Enrico said — of combining the anti-fascist opposition with the Fascist opposition."

11. The slogan of "national reconciliation" and "a programme of peace, freedom, and defence of the interests of the Italian people" was thus launched. There was a statement of preparedness to fight alongside the anti-fascist opposition, with the regional Federation was opened, Tito’s alliance with Moscow’s choice with Togliatti was not linked to the leadership in Italy - which state the contrary: those who had left the party or had been deported camps. Those who did not share the line had already written, with summary methods, which were the majority expelled by administrative measures and attacked in a huge campaign of calumnies. At the time of the Moscow trials, the anti-Trotskist campaign was directed neither against the PCI nor against the Italian Trotskyist movement hardly existed (there was only a small nucleus of comrades, almost all emigrants). This campaign took place even in the prisons and the interior party apparatus. Those who did not respect even the line or even certain of its aspects (to say nothing of the CPSU and Cominform line) were harshly attacked, isolated and expelled by summary methods (the most striking case is that of Lucio Togliatti). After Lyons, there was only one congress in twenty years: that of Cologne in 1931. There was no discussion on the turn of the previous year which had nevertheless led to the expulsion of half the Political Bureau. Nor should it be forgotten that in 1939, when the Comintern decided to dissolve the Central Committee of the Italian Party and to create an "ideological" or "reorganization centre" in Moscow, designating its new secretary without consulting or informing anybody, that the PCI did not have the slightest reaction. It lined up with Moscow in the same way as did the other Communist Parties internationally.15

12. The measure did not have the same tragic consequences as did similar measures in other Communist Parties for example in Poland, which was literally destroyed (an episode in which Togliatti is certainly not completely innocent). But it could only worsen the leadership crisis which existed at the time and adapted in any case to a more democratic solution to this crisis, the party would have been able to face the crucial test of the war in more favourable conditions.

13. During the period opened by the crisis and the fall of fascism, some very vigorous discussions started within the party, which remained nevertheless strictly limited to the leading groups, that is to say the two centres in Milan and Rome, without any participation from the organizers and thus even the rank and file. After Togliatti’s return and the meeting of the National Council which had approved the new line, the new line was rapidly imposed. To use Spriano’s words: it was the end of the regime of free discussion.16

The Togliatti cult then developed in more and more open forms, while the most important decisions were

14. According to certain testimonies from former deputies in the House, ex-members, above all during the last years, were correctly treated by their comrades who remained in the party. We do not have any reason to doubt these testimonies. But there are others, more numerous, which state the contrary: those who had left the party or had been expelled were the victims of a relentless repressive campaign. Similar attitudes were widespread during the Russian trials (for example in relation to militants of Stella Rossa in Turin and Bandera Rossa in Rome).17

15. This meeting was Giuseppe Berti.


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Reserved to the limited group of main leaders. When there were different points of view, they were discussed in this nucleus without ever being communicated not only to members but even to other leadership bodies. In a letter to Togliatti in November 1954, Pietro Secchia, who nevertheless a conception of democratic centralism a lot closer to that of Stalin than that of Lenin, described the decision-making process in the following terms:

Since 1945, many decisions on very important questions for the political orientation of the party and for its practical actions have been taken individually. It has even happened that they were not discussed in advance, but simply once they were taken. And even when they were discussed in advance, the discussions were very rapid and held in such a way that the personality had an overpowering weight and the other interventions could not approve the proposal.

Still according to Secchia, several comrades stated at one point that the Central Committee “was only a meeting of activists called from time to time to distribute tasks.”

Things only changed very partially after the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, despite the very lively discussions at all levels in 1956. Nor was this bureaucratic functioning abandoned in the Berlinguer period. Positions taken and crucial decisions of this period — such as for example the announcement of the historic compromise, or later the abandoning of the policy of national unity — were not preceded by any discussion in the leadership or the Central Committee. In reality the old conceptions and former methods were only abandoned in the 1980s. However, this did not mean a real democratization but rather the replacing of Stalinist and post-Stalinist methods by more typical of social-democratic parties.

We have already underlined the importance of the 1956 congress in the trajectory of the Italian Communist Party. We will now attempt to summarize this evolution from a more general point of view. The PCI incontestably represents the extreme case of a political phenomenon which was very difficult to foresee, at least in its full implications, until the mid-1950s: the transformation of a party — which was formed as a revolutionary party in opposition to reformism and then became a Stalinist party — into a neo-reformist party of a social-democratic type.

The contradictions of Stalinist parties

First of all, let us reconsider the notion of a Stalinist party. During the 1930s, the Stalinist Communist parties developed a specific ideology, that is to say their own conception of the socialist society and its particular features, as well as their own conception of the party and its functioning, of the relationship between the party and the mass organizations; the role of culture, etc. This ideology was periodically subject to changes and adaptations. But what fundamentally marked these parties was a lot less the ideology than their acceptance of the hegemonic role of the USSR, the “socialist motherland”, its single party and its unchallenged leader. In other words, the subordination — first by the Comintern then by other mechanisms — of the interests and needs of the workers’ movement in different countries to the interests and demands of the Soviet state or, more concretely, of its ruling caste.

It was because of this subordination that they stopped being revolutionary parties in the strictest sense of the word. However, they retained a generic difference from reformist parties of a social-democratic type, whose opportunism and bureaucratic deformation had been basically determined by the economic, social and political constraints arising from their insertion in the institutional framework and mechanisms of capitalist society.

Once these elements of definition are sketched out, it should be added that the interests and demands of the Soviet bureaucracy could not be the exclusive component of the policy of a Communist party, or at least of a party which had gone beyond the dimensions of a propaganda group by establishing real links with social layers and mass movements. Two other factors played a role: the need to take into account the needs of the movements in which they worked; and the interests of the leading groups and national apparatchiks which did not necessarily coincide with those of the Soviet state and party. These three factors combined in different ways at different times.

In the case of the PCI, this difference can be clearly understood. In the 1930s, the first factor was by far the determining one in all its aspects (material aid, the strength which the party drew from its membership of a world movement led by the first “socialist” state in history, etc). However, as soon as the party began to grow and acquire a substantial mass base to finally become the hegemonic organization within the workers’ movement, the weight of the two other factors gradually increased. The turn was represented by the 1956 events: from this date, the “national” interests tended to prevail over the international factors, even if the link with Moscow was not broken (which it would only be finally twenty years later). Even after Stalin’s death, when Stalinism no longer had many followers, when the USSR no longer appeared as a model of socialism and its leadership was challenged not only by revolutionary forces but also by the leading bureaucratic groups of other countries, the unbridgeable cord was maintained, because the reference to “socialist countries” and the “communist movement” could be put forward as an element of the party’s strength.

However, when Moscow’s policy risked having serious negative effects for its own battle — as was the case with the invasion of Czechoslovakia or the intervention in Afghanistan, when the PCI did not hesitate to take its distance with explicit statements.

In reality, the fundamental and inherent contradiction of the Stalinist parties — including the PCI — was that of a Marxist party became clear in the second half of the 1920s and particularly from the beginning of the 1930s: they had to submit to the determining influence of the Soviet Union, which there was a question of...
leadership through the bureaucratized International but, at the same time, they could not ignore their national context. During this whole period, this was more a potential than a real contradiction and it was not easy to understand its full scope, particularly as the cases where it had already been demonstrated, for example in China, the parties interested were concerned not to express it openly but rather to hide it behind stereotyped politico-ideological formulae which hardly corresponded to real practices. It was only after the explosion of the crisis of Stalinism and the events of 1956 and 1960, on the basis of the testimonies of surviving protagonists or historical studies, that we were able to know what had already been suspected: that is to say that despite all the pronouncements on this contradiction it had had an effect from the outset in provoking conflicts.

1956, both for the scope of its events as well as its symbolic value, marks a breaking point. In particular this contradiction had to be demonstrated in the PCI in different forms: it was the contradiction of a party which for decades had no longer been a revolutionary party and which was now ceasing to be a Stalinist party, yet without becoming a consummated social-democracy party, because it explicitly refused to be so characterized and it could not act coherently as a reformist party in the context of a society where it had achieved a considerable specific weight. This is how the reasons for its inability to achieve the strategic goals which it had fixed for itself and to overcome the obstacles that the ruling classes imposed so determinedly against its legitimation as a political and governing power should be understood in the final analysis.

The new phase was marked by different and even contradictory developments on which we cannot spend much time. It is enough to point out that after the main crisis from now on the PCI's policy was no longer conditioned — except partially or indirectly — by the USSR and the so-called communist movement which was already on the road to gradual disintegration. From above all by national factors. The decline in prestige of the PCI in the inter-war period.

The origins and stages of social-democratization

Traditional social-democratic reformism developed above all in the decades before the First World War. In western and central Europe these years were marked by the remarkable stability of bourgeois democratic institutions. In this context — which did not see any revolutionary or pre-revolutionary crises despite the escalating political conflicts — the workers' movement goal was above all to win some partial economic, social or political demands. The successes in this domain — although limited — were at the root of the growth of the PCI in the socialist parties, trade unions and other mass organizations. But at the same time we call the dialectic of partial successes operated. As broader and broader new layers of the population were won, broader and broader new layers of the population were won, broader and broader new layers of the population were won, broader and broader new layers of the population were won, broader and broader new layers of the population were won.

A gradualist conception of the transition to a new society was thus born. This way of thinking clearly did not imply that the PCI did not remain a communist party. The PCI definitively took its distance from the PCI in the 1930s, when it was still a party that was the necessary and sufficient framework for the transition to socialism and envisaged this transition in the form of "successive approximations", had an increasing tendency to act as a reformist party, finally transforming itself into a social-democratic party.

On this it is useful to recall the significant features of the most typical social-democratic parties:

- a gradualist conception of the transition to a new society (while this final perspective is retained);
- an ahistorical conception of democracy (as a permanent universal value, over and above the concrete historical forms of the society) and a theoretical and practical conception of the existing framework of capitalist parliamentary and presidential democracies,
- a perspective of rationalization and "democratization" of the existing society;
- a perspective of transformation of international relations above all through international organizations such

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6. The most pertinent example is that of China in the 1930s, when the Manchurian leadership implemented a line that was noticeably different from that of the other Communist parties and also independent of the Comintern, while at the same time respecting its own political identity.

7. We already did so in the works cited above and in Destinazioni dello Stato (Rizzoli, Milan, 1979).

8. The PCI leaders in several occasions made a point of defining the difference between their party and social democracy. But these were often more abstract and partly due to suffix divisiveness.

9. In September 1978, Berlinguer said in El País that "the common features of the PCI, in the form of a social-democratic party remains their renunciation of breaking with capitalism and transforming the basis of society in a socialist direction."
as the League of Nations in the inter-war period and the United Nations today, with the aim reducing arms and guaranteeing peace, without nevertheless putting into question the fundamental orientation of the foreign policy of their respective countries.

- A conception of building and consolidating the workers' movement on the basis of presence in the institutions and convergence with the trade unions engaged in co-management of the enterprises and of cooperatives that respect the mechanisms of the system;
- A conception which transforms the party into an electoral tool and increasingly subordinates the choices of the workers' movement to several centres or pressure groups (parliamentary groups, local administrations, leading groups in the trade unions and cooperatives, intellectuals who organize cultural life, etc.) with a more and more marginal role for organized activists.

Traditionally, the social-democratic parties have established and maintained many links with broad layers of society. But their inherent weakness has resided in the fact that the representation of these layers has been in a sectoral and partial fashion, sometimes in a clearly corporatist way. This is the result of an optic of adaptation to the existing society and of giving up any anti-capitalist orientation. As a consequence, even though social-democrats still wield considerable weight and play a hegemonic role in several countries in capitalist Europe and lead struggles which have made it possible for their social base to win partial gains, they still also bear the responsibility for decisive defeats of the workers' movement.

Towards the mid-1960s, it was already clear that the PCI acted as a neo-reformist party, was inserted into the institutional framework with a primarily electoralist perspective, and aimed essentially to strengthen its traditional tools such as the local administrations, the trade unions and the cooperatives. The logic of such an evolution implied a whole series of consequences: a reduction in the percentage of members compared to the electorate, which has had a socialist president since 1981.

All this inevitably had deep repercussions on the action and consciousness of the workers themselves and on their political and trade-union organizations, particularly if we not that, apart from short period and in any case only in partial forms, the counter-tendencies difficult in asserting themselves (the rapid decline of the far-left formations of the 1960s and 1970s reflect this limit). The tendency of the PCI to draw nearer to and then to identify with social-democracy, a tendency whose origins we have seen was in the 1956 turn, was strengthened. The result of this process was a sort of historical paradox. The PCI transformed itself into a party of a social-democratic type at a time when the most representative social-democratic parties were noticeably different from what they had been at their highest point.

But the novelty of the last decades - whose precursors were for very particular reasons the Swedish experience - resides in the fact that the social-democratic parties assumed responsibility for the government in capitalist countries for long periods and sometimes even became the only instrument possible for running the system. This was the case of the Spanish state where - from the beginning of the 1980s - the bourgeoisie was no longer able to form a hegemonic party and had to use - not without reason from its point of view - the PSOE of Felipe Gonzalez. This was also, with some differences, the case of France, which has had a socialist president since 1981.

This has brought about a change in the very composition of these parties. Wage-workers are still the big majority of the electoral base, but this is no longer the case for their members. As for their organizers and leaders, they are usually petty-bourgeoisie if not bourgeois origins. In addition the parties as such are more and more inseparably involved in the state apparatuses and the local administration as well as different public and private economic organizers. Their main contradiction can be synthesized in the following terms:

- On the one hand if they do not want to completely give up their identity and lose their social base — or more prosaically, their electoral base — they cannot completely ignore the needs and interests of the working class, of other popular layers and sections of the petty bourgeoisie also hit by the long wave of economic stagnation.
- On the other, as managers of the government — or even as responsible "candidates" for this — they accept the current framework of the system, with its economic imperatives, committing themselves to make their own electorate bear the burden of the policy of centralization, concentration and austerity.

Having been excluded from government since 1947, the PCI has not yet been hit by the full scope of this contradiction. Its contradiction lies more in the fact that for many years it put forward a reformist perspective without being in a position to put it into practice. But it has started in its turn to pay the price of the social-democratic approach, particularly in the "national unity" period when it supported the governments led by Christian Democracy and became the advocate of an austerity policy, playing the role of a brake on struggles, either directly or through its trade-union leaders. Thus its identity has been increasingly effaced.

It was in this context that, under the impact of the international events of 1989, Occhetta put forward in November 1989 the proposal for a radical transformation of the party and a change of name. He thus marked the opening of the most serious crisis in the history of the party.
In a critical moment for the future of the Communist Party, more generally of the workers' movement, we can legitimately ask the question: were the choices made during the 1930s, on both the national and international level the only possible, or could other things have been done with very different results?

Let us say at this point that the classic objection that it is useless to rewrite history on the basis of "might have been" does not seem valid to us. From the political point of view, there could not be any critical or acritical thinking if we thought that what had happened had been inevitably what had to happen. This attitude is a sort of self-justifying faulism which we cannot accept.

But this objection does not stand up from a historical point of view either. It goes without saying that a historical reconstruction should above all try to explain events in their most intimate connection, to explain their genesis and to grasp their dynamic. But this does not give us the right to forget that, in a given situation, there are potentialities and possibilities of different developments that should be taken into account if we want to analyze the situation in all its aspects and particularly if we want to examine the role of its protagonists whose actions is not determined in advance.

In the case of the Soviet Union, and the international communist movement, this problem of method was present in the mid-1920s. We have already rejected, on the basis of concrete analyses and arguments, the idea that bureaucratization was inevitable and thus that there was no other way to proceed but to fight against the steadily growing bureaucratisation of the party. Togliatti had already mentioned this problem of method, Togliatti said:

"It is all the more interesting to remember that the line developed by the leading Communist group was challenged several times at several levels and that different choices, although they were never diametrically opposed, were proposed or sketched out."

It is not necessary here to recall certain well-known episodes that have already been mentioned, such as the opposition and criticisms expressed in 1929-30 in relation to the line, not only by three members of the Politburo, but also by some of the other leaders who were then in prison, such as for example Umberto Terracini. There were also criticisms and opposition to the German-Soviet Pact in 1922, which professedly showed the need to alter the party line. Terracini took a critical attitude that he would pay for — paradoxically at the moment when the USSR was already attacked by the Nazis — by expulsion from the party.

Anti-fascist unity: Reservations and oppositions

In the context of this study, it seems to us more useful to recall the resistance and criticism if not the real oppositions which occurred between 1943 and 1945 and, in certain aspects, in the following period.

The policy of anti-fascist unity had already raised objections and reaction before 25 July 1943. The policy of collaboration with the other parties in the Committee of National Liberation (CLN) during the Resistance had also encountered strong opposition and was subject to different interpretations. This did not only concern current and former rank-and-file activists, but also the leading bodies with a differentiation between the nucleus in Florence and that in the North which was more directly linked to the Resistance and the partisans movement.

Amendola tried to grasp a common element among these different attitudes by explaining:

"The line of national unity elaborated by the Communist International and the non-fascist left in Italy, without any critical thinking on the real ideas of direct action to install the dictatorship of the proletariat."

This remark seems fundamentally correct as does another remark concerning the differences on the role of the PCI:

"On the one hand there were those who accepted the limitation of this role to developing and applying a common policy to all the parties that participated, and on the other those who wanted to strengthen the presence of mass organizations within the committees in order to "enshrine a real hegemony of the working class".

Amendola writes:

"Pursued to its furthest limit, this line led, despite its democratic pretences, to a split in the PCI and to opposition to the government in Rome and in Italy. A new phase followed which took the form of an isolation indicated by the Yugoslav example. The Yugoslav example was the subject of many discussions between the PCI and PSIUP."

Sprinta talks of a Longo-Secchi line that aimed to "transform the anti-fascist base of workers’ power" particularly through "strengthening their democratic features and moving from party representation [of the different parties] to a real representation if not leadership of the masses". The objective should be in the last analysis for the resistance to "take power" before the arrival of the allies. This would have been decisive for the political orientation and the future development of the Italian people.

Currents or feelings of opposition to the line of anti-fascist unity and collaboration with the parties of the bourgeoisie were expressed several times within the Socialist Party. Before the fall of Mussolini there was a radio message of Togliatti (op. cit., p. 121-122 and 131-133) in certain southern regions and not an important number of members considered the new line of the party as a betrayal (see the intervention of Vittorio Spada at the Fifth Congress)


Amendola, op. cit., p. 373-375.

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and 1930s, and young members for whom the opposition to fascism also took on the dimension of a struggle for a more democratic society. They were inspired not only and not so much by an ideological differentiation but more by the practical consequences of the party’s orientation. Their achievements were the lack of a complete strategic vision, which flowed basically from a mistaken analysis of the evolution of the PCI and above all of the USSR’s policy.

The evidence is that of the Bandiera Rossa movement which, while it sometimes took up some vaguely Trotskyist themes, considered the USSR a socialist country and identified with Stalin without the slightest critical thought. It even reproached the work of Basso and Togliatti for not applying the orientation of the Soviet leadership which, in its opinion, put forward a revolutionary line.12

It is interesting to remember that the thesis of the PCI was in opposition to that of the CPSU and Stalin was partially taken up during the 1950s by another communist group — Azione Comunista (Communist Action) — which was also a passing phenomenon. Such an interpretation of Stalin’s position was proved false by, among other things, an episode related by Pietro Secchia. During a visit to Moscow, Secchia had expressed his doubts about the left-wing line, undoubtedly with the hope of being encouraged by the Soviet leaders. But Stalin had not hidden his agreement with Togliatti’s doctrine.

It was this fundamental weakness which made the existence of above-mentioned groups inevitably precarious and condemned them to a rapid disappearance. The party was, as the PCI, having trasformed itself in the most Stalinist style by accusing them even of being enemy agents, then used clever manoeuvres to coopt them.14

Similar considerations could be made in relation to a rather singular—from several points of view—personality. Lello Basso moved from a criticism of the positions of the PCI and Stalinism to opportunistically accepting them as far as to justify the trial of the above-mentioned groups inevitably precarious and condemned them to a rapid disappearance. The party was, as the PCI, having trasformed itself in the most Stalinist style by accusing them even of being enemy agents, then used clever manoeuvres to coopt them.14

In a 1971 text, he stated:

Already during the Resistance and particularly on the eve of the intervention, the conflict between the left forces, particularly the PCI, and the modern party, namely particularly on the question of the form of the state and the type of democracy which should be built. The attack against the PCI which represented the new structure of power which had been launched just after the liberation and we were not to refer to adequately. We had to make a decision and did not have confidence in the possibility of creating a new state, different from the precious pre-fascist one, built with a determination of a construction and of repeating the Greek experiment.20

In another text, he expressed the same judgement, in a way which poses the problems more clearly:

If we had not been carried by a more decisive action and broader more united struggles by the labouring masses, it would have been possible to prevent the “restoration of capitalism” with the return to power of monarchist and fascist forces. The PCI, and moreover the party had previously adopted. Starting from this critical attitude Secchia had enthusiastically accepted the “turn” of which he could consider himself partly the precursor. Forty years later, he still stubbornly defended this interpretation. In his opinion it was important for the party to emphasise most of its forces on building the party within the country. From his point of view the criticisms of opportunists appeared unacceptable (as far as we know) he always evaded the problem that among them were many imprisoned activists and Gramsci himself.18

As a result his judgement largely coincided with that of Gramsci. In Gramsci’s articles retrospect the mistakes of the party’s analysis and the small results obtained, justified, even in his 1978 book, the condemnation of the opposition of the “three” (Lonnert, Rosselli and Treso). But the reason the turn was the condition for the later growth of the party. This is a typical example of the tendency to justification of which Amendola was a master, even when he pretended to play the role of an iconoclast, he had defied the traditional taboos and raised questions that others preferred to avoid.21

Secchia several times came back to the problems which were posed in the last stages of the war and the early post-war period. In his opinion, it was above all in this period that the party should have adopted a different line. For example, in 1998 he wrote:

I do not think that we could have made the revolution in 1945. Our country was occupied by the Anglo-Americans, etc. I share completely the analysis made by the party as well as the conclusion it arrived as, it was rather a question of edging more on the mass movements, defending more strongly certain positions and having more effective action when we were in government. In addition, sooner or later, the Anglo-Americans would have to lead and we could have become more intransigent.22

18. According to Terracini, the perspective of a possible return to the democratic method”, that is to say a perspective opposed to that of the turn went "without saying in the ideas of communists of Regina Coeli (the prison in Rome)"

19. Amendola ventured to write a history of the Communist Party, which cannot all be compared to that of Togliatti. His justification appears very clearly in relation to Stalinism (in 1978) and even the Moscow Trials (op. cit. p. 307).21

20. Archivio Piero Secchia, p. 132.


22. Ibid., p. 1061.

For Secchia, a particularly serious mistake was:

- To have considered DC as a democratic and popular party, which represented the masses, the middle layers and the labouring classes.
- The influence of the party did not change the party and in class character or the direction which it accomplished after the Liberation.23

Another theme in Secchia’s criticism was that of workers’ struggles. Referring to the 1947-48 period, he considered that “in trade-union policy and mobilization of the broad masses — particularly in the industrial centres — we could have done more.” Elsewhere he added “It is certain that there were delays in the struggles Morandi wrote to defend the autonomous committees and democratic freedoms in the factories.”24

Other remarks deal with more specific problems. For example Secchia expressed his disagreement with the party’s decision to vote for Giolitti as president of the Republic, in 1932, and did not hide his scepticism concerning the slogan for democratic control of the monopolies.25 At the time of the struggle against the legge truffa, in 1933, he criticized Togliatti’s attitude which was in his opinion too moderate and revealed “once again a parliamentarian conception.”26

These were not unimportant overall criticisms and always developed from the party’s line, more or less evaded from the point of view which interests us here. However, Secchia and Togliatti’s party were more a harder and more uncompromising perspective for implementing the general strategy of the period than a real alternative to the same period. The party confirmed unanimously by the fact that Secchia expressed his agreement with the central goal of “gradual democracy” even if he proposed a more radical version.

The goal of the Resistance could not be social but had to be a new, gradual, democracy, based on new institutions directly representing the popular masses and the structures which were created during the Resistance.28

However, Secchia’s fundamental limit did not lie only in his way of approaching strategic questions at a national level, but above all in his inability, even in the last few years of his existence, to settle accounts with Stalinism. Concerning the 1930s for example, he never questioned the arguments with which his party justified the Moscow trials, or tried to understand the roots and the dynamics of the events in the USSR. Even after the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, he wrote that the USSR “must be at the centre of the Communist movement, because, whether we like it or not, the Soviet..."
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...It would have been necessary to try to develop them in line with a dynamic which was rooted in reality, to orient the workers' movement against the dictatorship of Mussolini (and, in Germany, to oppose the rise of Hitler). It was perfectly possible to organize the work within the country without having to accept the most unseemly, independent of the Communist Congresses, initiatives. The basis for a relaunch would thus have been created. All this is not only said now, after the events. Indications going in this direction were already present in the PCI. But they were always partial alternatives, lacking an...
the new social movements into its neo-reformist political strategy. Its operation was successful on the only terrain fundamental for it: the electoral terrain. But the big movement stopped after having won some partial gains — which were later won away one by one — and with a relative change in the relationship of forces, electorally. The system did however manage to overcome its crisis and, since the end of the 1970s, the bourgeosie was able to carry through its systematic operations of restructuring and restoration with results that ten years later cannot be challenged.

In this case as well, the policy followed has not been the only one possible. It would have been possible to create a dynamic of struggles aiming to deepen the crisis of the system, to develop democratic grass-roots bodies, rather than trying to institutionalize those which had appeared, to put forward a project for rebuilding Italian society on an anti-capitalist basis. With such a perspective it was possible at the time to create a large front of social forces — not only of the working class — by encouraging an increased mass consciousness of the need for revolutionary solutions. In addition, in this context the traditional argument of a military intervention by imperialism could no longer be put forward.

A balance sheet of failure

The implementation of alternative strategy and orientations would not automatically have assured a historical success of the working class and its movement. There were not and still are not easy solutions. But we can nevertheless note that all the supposedly realistic strategic perspectives that PCI leaders successively put forward failed.

In the period 1944-45, the strategic perspective was that of "gradual democracy." The aim was, to use Togliatti's formula:

To destroy fascism, to apart it and to move our country in such a way that a similar regime could never rise... "Gradual democracy" will organize a government by the people for the people and, in this perspective, all the living forces of the country could have their place, advance in order to satisfy all their aspirations.

In other words, it was supposed to represent the most advanced stage of capitalism that could reach in a capitalist society. On the strictly political level, the success of this strategy required, according to the PCI leader and conceptualizer of two perspectives, "the democratization of the country as a whole" and, still according to Togliatti, "the democratization of Italian conservatives themselves." This did not happen and this gradual democracy never happened, as Togliatti himself recognized.

The fact that a goal was not achieved does not necessarily mean that it was wrong. An unbalanced balance-sheet can act against it and there can continue to be a struggle to change it. But, on this occasion, it was a formula in which there was not a possible dynamic of development that would have been objectively and politically fruitful. If the conservatrices or, more precisely, the leading groups of the bourgeoisie did not experience the evolution desired by Togliatti, it is not because they made a mistake or suffered from political shortsightedness. Their goal was the reconstruction of the country in the framework of a capitalist economy and institutions able to guarantee their hegemony. From this point of view, their action was completely coherent. To the extent that the situation imposed collaboration with the workers' parties on them in order to avoid explosive tensions and conflicts, they accepted the utilitarian perspective of the CNL and the tripartite governments (including DC, PCI and PCI) but, as soon as that was no longer necessary because a new situation had changed and the presence of workers' parties in the government had become an obstacle to their own reconstruction, they prepared and provoked a rupture.

Leaving aside certain formulas developed later, like that of the "democratic government of the working classes" (Eighth Congress) and the other, still vaguer, of "democracy of a new type", we should ask something about the demand "democratic control of the monopolies" which was presented, particularly during the 1960s, as a central element of a "democratic programme." It was once again an inherently inconsistent demand. It was based on the hypothesis that it was possible, in the framework of capitalism, to control the function of the monopolies, by returning to a sort of capitalism based on intervention and capable of taking into account the interests of the popular masses. This forgot — or wanted to forget — that the monopolistic phase was not a "degeneration" but rather the inevitable result of capitalism. Capitalism without the domination of monopolies was quite simply inconceivable. Taking into account the overall strategy of the party, this perspective was also untenable from the political point of view. In fact, a break in the power of the monopolies would have implied such a change in the relationship of forces and such a qualitative leap and provoked such conflicts, that the workers' movement would not have been able to avoid a general confrontation in the perspective of a struggle for power.

Given the weakness of all these approaches, the PCI could not avoid finding itself in difficulties faced with the center-left governments, at least during their first phase. In fact, on the one hand, it had to oppose an operation which openly aimed to weaken and isolate it, and on the other hand it could not reject the programmatic, political and ideological orientations which, at least on paper, were not qualitatively different from its own.

It was precisely after the event of center-left governments that the contradictions of the PCI began to deepen and come to the surface. It had had a reformist perspective for a long time. Towards the end of the 1960s and in the first half of the 1970s, the emergence of mass movements of different types but all marked, at their high point, by great dynamism and by an ability to have an effect on the overall relationship of forces, created conditions favourable to making important social, economic and political gains. In order to avoid a dynamic which was dangerous in their eyes, sections of the ruling class considered it necessary to make concessions. As we have already understood, the PCI was involved in these movements. But it did not succeed in giving them a total strategic perspective and at the same time it retained always excluded from the government. This is where, in the last analysis, we should look for the cause of its weakness, despite its electoral successes.

The strategy of the "historical compromise" elaborated by Berlinguer aimed to overcome this impasse. But it did not turn out any more effective than the others (we will come back to this in the following chapter). In practice, the only goal it obtained was collaboration with the government in the so-called "national solidarity" experience between 1976 and 1978, whose only result was to make the PCI appear as covering for the policies of austerity and restructuring implemented by the ruling classes. Finally, the failure had to be explicitly recognized.

The hour of the "democratic alternative" had come. These were still recent events on which we do not have to insist, particularly as the new strategy — if this expression can be used — not only did not lead to any concrete results but from the beginning created problems of definition which were never resolved despite all the ideological and conceptual balancing acts. It thus contributed to the deepening of a crisis whose most striking manifestation was a decade of electoral defeats.

39. Contrary to the opinion of those who used it, the argument of the inevitability of a US intervention was not decisive in the end of the war either. The Washington leadership would have had difficulties, at this point, in convincing the American people that they should get involved in a new military action. In addition, a perfectly orthodox CP leader like Emilio Sereni had himself asserted in April 1945 that it was not certain if the German occupation took place in Northern Italy that it would have been represented by the Anglo-Americans (see Spini, doi, "Guerre e sociale in Europa", p. 216).


41. The formula of gradual democracy was also used in the countries of Eastern Europe under the influence of the Soviet Union. This gradual democracy was quickly ruined in those countries at the first stage of the dictatorship of the proletariat (or rather as the introduction of the bureaucratic dictatorship through the relationship of forces caused by the presence of Soviet forces). See, for example, the case of Hungary.

42. Rimini, August, 1946.
5. The protagonists: from Togliatti to Berlinguer

We have seen, the history of the PCI has been determined by a series of factors which have marked Italian society and the international scene over the last 70 years. It is as the same time the history of tens of thousands of organizers and activists whose devotion and sacrifices made it possible for the party to play a major role, independent of the judgment we can make on the role itself. But the PCI’s history has also been determined by its successive leaders who defined its conceptions, strategy and orientations.

Concerning the first secretary, Amadeo Bordiga, we will limit ourselves to reading a judgement of Pietro Tresso which, despite his rather old-fashioned language, remains valid.

Under Bordiga’s leadership, and despite the fact that his orientation was wrong, the party became conscious of itself and of the truth that, without a revolutionary doctrine the proletariat could not win. These are basic, fundamental truths. Under Bordiga, not only did the party become conscious of itself and begin to define itself, but, in the midst of the hardest civil war, it made its “selection,” acquired an iron discipline and developed a spirit of sacrifice: so many parties that are independent to the creation of a Bolshevik party.

We will not deal here with Antonio Gramsci. We have already given our appreciation of his political and theoretical work as a revolutionary Marxist on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of his death. During the last years of his life, Gramsci played a determining influence for a short period, from the formation of a new leading group opposed to Bordiga until the end of 1926. It was only twenty years after his death that people started to study and appreciate his political and cultural contribution.

Longo and Natta were party secretaries for only twelve years between them. Palmiro Togliatti and Enrico Berlinguer exercised this function for much longer periods, during which they had to a very large extent determined the conceptions and orientations of the party.

Togliatti: from the Comintern to Yalta

During the last twenty years, the judgement made of Togliatti has suffered, in proportion, the same vicissitudes as that on Gramsci. It has changed in line with the conceptions and orientations of the party, if not even of its tactical requirements.

Togliatti was for a long time presented as the closest collaborator and most faithful successor of Gramsci, then as the person who had made explicit and developed what had remained implicit and embryonic in Gramsci. Finally, after the Twentieth CPSU Congress, he became the leader who was able to influence the course of the party in line with his own past.

More recently, and particularly since the launch of the Ochettino operation, despite a certain continuity in the positive and often still apologetic judgements, the accent has been put on the need to make a difference between the party of Togliatti and that of today.

We can share the judgements of Togliatti’s supporters on one point: the comparison with other political leaders in Italy in the post-war period can only be favourable to him.

At the epoch of Togliatti, the ruling class produced one man as its democratic and, by his nature: Alcide de Gasperi. But De Gasperi himself had obvious limits and imposed himself much more through a convergence of circumstances than thanks to genuine originality. As for the Socialist Party, it was incapable of bringing forth any leader of the stature of Togliatti. The same thing could be said about the leaders of the international Communist movement: especially after Stalin’s death it was difficult for anyone who could be put on the same level as the PCI leader.

But to his lucid intelligence, his skillfulness and his flexibility, Togliatti was able to add a strong element of resistance to anyone else the movement to which he belonged and to express its demands, particularly in certain phases (the popular fronts, anti-fascist unity, the period after the Twentieth Congress). If the end of his party was participating in the government of Czechoslovakia, he was, under cover of the Moscow trials and the witch-hunt of dissidences, able to get both the new and the old generations of the party to converge on this position.

The second, Alessandro Natta, presided over the last phase of the social-democratisation of the party, without making any particular contributions.

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The supporters of Togliatti have insisted a lot on his contribution to the analysis of fascism and to developing a line of unity with the socialists, as well as his democratic and himself by his nature: Alcide de Gasperi. But De Gasperi himself had obvious limits and imposed himself much more through a convergence of circumstances than thanks to genuine originality. As for the Socialist Party, it was incapable of bringing forth any leader of the stature of Togliatti. The same thing could be said about the leaders of the international Communist movement: especially after Stalin’s death it was difficult for anyone who could be put on the same level as the PCI leader.

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To come back to the period of the crisis of Stalinism, we can certainly not consider meritworthy the political condemnation of the Yugoslav communists and unconditional support to Stalin in 1948. But even after the Twentieth Congress, Togliatti insisted on fixing precise limits to the condemnation of Stalinism. For example in a famous interview published in the review Nuovi Argomenti, he went so far as to put on the same level those guilty of the worst repression and their victims. When the Soviet leaders complained of the criticisms of them — which were after very all moderate — he immediately retreated and for some time avoided returning to the idea he had sketched out.9

Still in 1956, not only did he approve the Soviet intervention against the revolution in Hungary, but he participated in the campaign against the insurgents. He published an article in Rinascita an articlecondemning a collective event which was historically inadmissible in the harshest terms which is perfectly typical of his fashion of polemizing, of his typically Stalinist interpretation of the workers' and intellectuals of the party have been, on this terrain, more important and more concrete. Efforts to understand the reality of the capitalism in the 1950s and 1960s were made through analytical work which was immeasurably more thorough than the vague and allusive formulations of Togliatti (marked among other things by very obvious weaknesses in the economic domain). It is also significant that Togliatti did not take a position on the problem of the simultaneous processes then unfolding in Algeria and Cuba.

In an article on the work of the Christian Democrat leader Alcide de Gasperi, Togliatti indicated in the preface to an excerpt from his works that his opinion was the "touchstone" for the qualities of a political personality:

To what extent his ideal orientations and his personal morality made possible for him to understand the course of events, to grasp over and above the confusion of the reality of the situation, what is essential and new, and thus the means of solving the question. What can be visible can be hidden from a principle of a line of conduct which makes him master of events, to the extent of making a permanent mark on them?10

If we apply these criteria to the person who outlined them, the result will not be very (favorable to him). It would in fact be difficult to assert that Togliatti had foreseen "the course of events" and still less that he was able to "grape... the seeds of the future" during the 1930s and in the immediate post-war period, to give just two examples. He accepted, took responsibility for and "theorized" Stalinism and in 1944-45, formulated a strategic project which turned out to be intrinsically incorrect.

In the following period, he gradually adapted to events, often very skilfully, but, to use his own words, he was never able to become "master of events". In particular, he was aware of the fact that he had not tried to give a response to the event what had happened in an attempt at self-judgment, he could not be an original thinker.11

People who knew him well at different times have made very negative judgements of him. According to Pietro Togliatti, Togliatti:

Does not believe in any policy, but he is an advocate always ready to defend them, to the extent that it is true that Togliatti was one of the fortieth anniversary of the October Revolution — in itself quite revealing of his conception of "de-Stalinization" and his desire to cover up his past responsibilities.12 Certain of his assertions would merit publication in an anthology of self-justifications. For example:

We did not have and could not have any knowledge of the facts which were the starting point for the trial of Kirov. 13 "Mementi della storia d'Italia", Crítica marxista, special issue, p. 206.


15. According to Sparano, the original aspects of Togliatti's theorectical-political contribution were his judgements on religion and religious conscience and on the question of nuclear war (Crítica marxista, special issue). It would be justified to say that those were original and systematic contributions. But it is true that Togliatti was one of the first to raise these questions within the Communist parties.

16. Quoted in the Archivio Secchi, p. 158.

17. Ibid. p. 295. As at the moment of Togliatti's death, Secchi was made a more favourable judgement, whereas we however did not eliminate the previous considerations (ibid., p. 546).

The judgement made by Pietro Secchia was basically no less severe. In relation to the statements by Togliatti on the dissolution of the Cominform, he wrote:

These wise comments, like many others of this same Togliatti, always come several years later, that is to say when it no longer takes any courage to give, they come when the "turn" has already started, the "decision" has already been taken and it would even be impertinent to resist or oppose them.

And then, rather than looking at himself doing the same as the others, that is to say to recognize that we have to change, he takes the attitude of being top of the class, the attitude of he who would like it believed that he has been doing what, to repeated it was not as it had already been previously accepted only by discipline and can finally exclude (see, I was right). In reality he had almost always followed the same orientation first of the Communist International and then of the Cominform. He has always been an integral part of the C.P.I., giving proof of deep conviction and fighting against all those who expressed doubts.16

In the first case we can take into account a tendency...
to polemical exaggeration, to a very hard faction fight, and in the second, a form of resentment for the second, a form of resentment for the leader, due to a very hard faction and Secchia have these judgements go in the same direction as Gramsci's famous letter to the Central Committee of the PCI.

Considered as a specific contribution of Togliatti — a contribution — the actions during a period of twenty years which transformed a Stalinist party into a neo-reformist, social-democratic type of party, while maintaining and increasing its mass influence and even its strength of attraction at a cultural level.

This project had not been conceived in a systematic fashion from the outset because Togliatti was far from grasping all the national and international factors which made it possible, and, in fact, at different times and with different arguments, he wanted to underline the division separating his party from traditional reformist, social-democratic type of party, while maintaining and increasing its mass influence and even its strength of attraction at a cultural level.

However, within an overall evaluation we can consider as a specific contribution of Togliatti — although for the most part it was not an exclusively personal contribution — the actions during a period of twenty years which transformed a Stalinist party into a neo-reformist, social-democratic type of party, while maintaining and increasing its mass influence and even its strength of attraction at a cultural level.

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From the PCI to the PDS: the long march of the Italian Communist Party

Livio Maitan

was always accompanied by a denunciation of the price that had to be paid for this compromise? The Lyons theses themselves explicitly underlined the conservative aspect and the negative consequences of the compromise which had marked the process of national unification. Berlinguer seems to forget all that and prefers ahistoric abstraction to determined abstraction. In offering up the thesis that the traditional evils of Italian society — all its "backwardsness" and its "distortions", all its deformations in the development of the democratic revolution, — could be overcome by a new practice of "compromise" while in fact the roots of all these lie in the historic compromises of the past!

It was at the moment of its broadest influence, particularly at the electoral and parliamentary level that the PCI played a leading role in the development of the Eurocommunist project. It was an attempt, with the Communist parties faced with social democracy, to redefine an identity of bourgeois society increased its influence in several domains and made it possible for it to occupy a bigger place in the "normal" political area but, at the same time, prevented it from appearing as a real alternative, particularly in the eyes of the layers hardest by the long wave of stagnation.

Then the attempt to develop a Europe-wide alternative was hampered from the beginning by the fact that the Eurocommunist parties themselves tended to have differences on not unimportant questions — for example in relation to Nato, the extension of the Common Market, and the policy in relation to Socialists — as a result, in the last analysis, of their "national" demands and the differentiation of the leading bourgeois groups of each country.

Finally, Eurocommunism could not avoid another fundamental contradiction: to the extent that a reformist strategy could take shape in a given context and be accepted by broad sectors of the masses, the social-democratic parties appeared necessarily more credible, but inevitably led to a blurring of their advantages, but inevitably led to a blurring of their identity. At the same time, the abandoning of the in a purely and simply utopian form by inviting the workers to tighten their belts! 25

On several occasions, particularly in the last years of his life, Berlinguer insisted strongly, in dramatic accounts, on the dangers which were threatening human society, and, paraphrasing Marx, put forward the hypothesis that, without revolutionary transformations, we were going towards the "ruin of social classes in struggle".

These are real worries which we share. But the solutions laid out were out of proportion with the problems raised. It should not be forgotten that it was under Berlinguer's leadership that the PCI accepted austerity as a universal value. Democracy is a historical category which cannot be correctly defined if we ignore its content and the socio-historical context in which it exists. If not it becomes an ahistoric concept, absolutely abstract and of very little practical use. In any case, it is not an original contribution of Berlinguer or other leaders of the PCI who, on this terrain, as everyone knows, were preceded for more than a year by liberal-democratic theoreticians and, to stay within the framework of the workers' movement, by social democracy.

As for austerity, reading the best-known definitions — for example those of the speeches of Berlinguer at the Elysée or those in theses of the Fifteenth Congress — prove the suspicion that it is a conceptual or terminological abuse. The perspective is put forward of a radical transformation of economic choices, of a hierarchy of consumer goods, or ways of living and cultural aspirations, which does not have a lot to do with austerity as it is usually understood and which, in the context given, can only appear as illusory as the music of a far off future. 26 But all Berlinguer's formulations come down to an ideological mystification of the fact that at the time the PCI supported governments of "national solidarity" which presented austerity in a much more prosaic form by inviting the workers to tighten their belts! 25

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Even at this level, Berlinguer's contradictions stand out clearly.

24. See among others the choice of writings by Berlinguer in Risanamento (22 June 1984). The following quotations were significantly, Far from being a concession to the dominant groups or to the demands of capitalism, austerity can become a conscious choice against them. This is not at all a very high class content. It can and should become a path by which the workers' movement becomes the vehicle of a different way of organizing social life and even struggles (in today's conditions) for the old and still valid ideals. In fact it is unthinkable, in such conditions, to wage a real and effective struggle for a new and richer society in one does not start from the fundamental necessity of austerity.

25. In the congress theses cited above they talk of the need to freeze wages.

26. For example, in the already-mentioned speech at the Elysée.

27. For example, on the occasion of the Oslo General Council in 1982.
6. The last turn?

The theoretical justifications in the pages of L’Unità during the congress, which went further than all the formulations even by the social-democratic parties who have been involved for years in the institutions. According to Fassino, the new party could become a model inspired by the democratic state based on the primordial ones and, more precisely, introduces a new configuration of power, based on the parliamentary model. The central committee is seen "as a chamber, as a leadership, as a government, the secretary as the figure of president of the central committee is introduced".

Remembering that the PCI was in favour of an increased role for the prime minister, we can conclude that the goal is that of giving the secretariat a clearly hegemonic function in relation to other leaders. At the end of the congress, L’Unità did not hesitate to headline "Occhetto’s PCI".

There would be the temptation to evoke the infamous cult of the personality. In fact, it was not so much an impossible return to the charismatic leader of the Stalinist era, but rather an attempt to build up, by "modern" use of the media, a leader in the model of the most traditional parliamentary parties (and which could be counterposed to the "decisionist" Craxi).¹

The rupture of 12 November and the last congress

Recalling what could be anticipated after the Eighteenth Congress should not lead to an underestimation the "rupture" of 12 November 1989, which is symbolically represented by the proposal to change the name of the party. For the essential, Occhetto’s project was to go even further than the traditional conceptions of the social-democratic parties: the traditional opposition between workers’ parties and bourgeois parties should be replaced, according to him, by the contradiction between "progressives" and "conservatives".

The PCI was very vague, references to the role which would be that of the workers in the new organization did not change anything of substance. Occhetto knew very well that without the support (first of all) of the broad masses that is — despite what the most casual "modernists" might think — of waged workers, no "progressive" force can hope to impose itself. But it does not flow from this that he accepted the primordial idea of the political independence of the workers as a social class fighting for its own hegemony. The very concept of hegemony — which had been in its most disparate variants a leftist moral law — also disappeared from his thinking. Hard luck for Gramsci!

In the ideological field, Occhetto and his supporters finished off the break with Marxist or even quite simply managed positions. They put all their emphasis on the possibilities of liberal and social democratic orientation. They delude the extreme of their criticism of existing society and even the opposition between different political forces.

Occhetto states, among other things, that it is not a question of:

1. contesting anti-Christian Democrats and anti-communists, as there is no sense in being anti-Socialist. The alternative implies a new programmatic position on all the fields of progress and the differences between moderate conservatives and reformists could only run through the present decisions to give birth to unexpected majority and opposition coalitions as well as new political forces.

2. In his "coup" on 12 November and other personal initiatives, Occhetto has put the conception in practice.

3. In fact, with his "coup" on 12 November and other personal initiatives, Occhetto has put the conception in practice.

4. The concept of "decisionist" which now exists in Italian journalistic language, is borrowed from the thought of Carl Schmitt, a enlightening documentation of Weimar-Germany who is correctly considered as one of the ideological forerunners of Nazism. The PCI seems to accept without any problem that its general secretary is considered a "decisionist" by the whole press.

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13. Without the party "coup" on 12 November and other personal initiatives, Occhetto has put the conception in practice.

14. Without the party "coup" on 12 November and other personal initiatives, Occhetto has put the conception in practice.

15. Without the party "coup" on 12 November and other personal initiatives, Occhetto has put the conception in practice.

16. Without the party "coup" on 12 November and other personal initiatives, Occhetto has put the conception in practice.
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majority. But the split and the birth of what is for the moment called the Movement for Communist Refoundation was noticeably bigger than expected, for various reasons. The main ones: some former PCI leaders, who had left the party individually, particularly over the last ten years, associated themselves with it.

The new contradictions

Finally, there is a question which has to be asked: what will be the future of the new party, Refoundation? As always, a distinction should be made between what is projected and what will happen in reality. First of all, it is difficult, if not excluded, that a completely new organization could develop (as was implied by the idea of a "constituent assembly" put forward at the beginning). The new party will not be, in general, anything but a new metamorphosis of the PCI with liberal-socialist or radical-democratic features and with a more eclectic political profile than today. In fact, it will continue to play a role similar to the role played by the social-democratic parties in the other European countries, deepening the dynamics of a "progressive" party. Over and above the possible quantitative variations, its social base will remain fundamentally the traditional workers' and popular social base of the PCI.

The PDS will be deeply marked by the coexistence of different positions and currents. There are already within it milites and militants who strive to defend, in mitigated terms, a perspective of "antagonism" to capitalist society by using for example the rhetoric of Berlinguer on the "third road" (this is what was done at the last congress by a small minority represented by Antonio Bassolino which, while accepting the change of name of the party, did not share a series of Occheto's orientations). In the opposite pole there is a current which wants a more "radical" leadership, a more classical form of reformism and which advocates convergence, if not short-term unification, with the Socialist Party (Giorgio Napolitano is the best-known spokesperson of this position). The "new" party will not escape, in any case, the contradiction specific to social-democratic parties which, as we have seen, on the one hand, take on more and more direct responsibility for the management of the system and, on the other, have to be careful not to lose the support of the worker and popular masses which still constitute the basis of their strength.

Such a contradiction will become a lot sharper if the PDS becomes a governmental party. There is no need to be a prophet to imagine what it would do in such a situation. It would, of course, find itself in the same situation as the French Socialist Party (PS) and the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) have done since the beginning of the 1980s: the strategy, political programme and ideology of these two parties were substantially shared by the PCI, and thus will be even more so by the PDS. The fact that the PCI has never tried to make a balance sheet of how the government, some former PCI leader, like Mitrano or — even less — to say in what way its actions in government would be different from either of these, reflects the intrinsic weakness of its perspectives. Even if it succeeded — which it is not going to — in halting a decline which started quite a long time ago and avoiding being torn apart by centrifugal pressures, the transformed party would run into major obstacles: the style which it wants to act that it could only overcome with difficulty.

Specific features and typical character

One of the keys to understanding the trajectory of the PCI, which its leaders, intellectuals and historians — whether Italian or not — have always underlined, is its specificity if not its existential characteristic. There is no doubt that the whole history of the party has been marked by very particular elements. From the beginning it has had two leaders — Amadeo Bordiga and Antonio Gramsci — who for different reasons are difficult to compare to those of other Communist parties.

Secondly, the fact that it acted as an underground party during the 1930s and experienced its greatest growth in the second half of the 1940s, meant that its Stalinization was less deep and less systematic than that suffered, for example, by the PCF. Since 1956, it has developed analyses of the society in which it acts and of the trends of its development which, despite their international conditioning, were notable for a greater relationship to the immediate needs of its sister parties, including those in Western Europe. Thus it has been able to insert itself into institutions (at almost all levels) more deeply and with more continuity than these other parties, and its relations of hesitations and withdrawals, it has confronted the problems posed by the crisis of Stalinism since 1956. For example, certain political and ideological problems around its Eighth Congress — revealed its particular way of understanding the relationship between immediate goals and more general goals, which provoked some harsh criticism, particularly from the French Communist Party. The influence of the political and theoretical conceptions of Gramsci also contributed largely to shaping its specificity. Despite these mystifications of Gramsci, the PCI has acted as at least a partial counterbalance to the schematism and methodological aberrations of Stalinism.

Another important element was the existence in Italy of a Socialist Party, also very specific, which, first as an ally and then as a rival, often forced the PCI to look at domestic and international questions from a point of view which did not exactly coincide with that of the Soviet leadership and Communist movement.

Institutions. Even from a purely theoretical point of view, it is a mistaken conception because the party — this is, a voluntary organization which one joins to achieve certain goals and not to reflect society as it is (nor the secular-idealist perspective of transforming the party into a sort of embryonic state). To do otherwise would mean identifying with institutions which, leaving aside their deformations, have objectives which are different from those of a party. It would also mean, in the last analysis, giving up playing the role of a force which expresses and contributes to developing a strategic proposal which unifies the interests, the needs and the aspirations of certain classes and certain social layers and is accessible counter to those of other classes and social layers.

All these themes are taken up, in a more summarized form, in the majority draft resolution for the Twentieth Congress of the PCI. Thus the idea that the "market economy" is irreparable comes up again, co-management within the workplace is advocated, there is reiteration of the readiness to "reform" Italian political system and reaffirmation of the objective of transforming the EEC into a European federation. However, with the aim of escaping the crisis in the PCI — which was looking to shift into the field of "radicalism and liberal democracy," a short introduction explains that the new party will "retain the great goal of socialism" and "the idea of democracy as the base of power." This does not commit it to anything, but leaves a glimpse of the difficulties Occheto and his supporters will meet in their project of a total break with the tradition of the PCI.

The PCI perspective of the party of Togliatti and his gradualist reformist strategy, and, in questions of international policy, lined between candidates through corrupt propaganda is undoubtedly scan­

Ingrao and Natta reaffirmed fundamentally, "network", an idea of democracy as "network", the affirmation of which they did not bother to explain the formulation of which they did not bother to explain the...
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whether Stalinist or post-Stalinist. In addition, between 1968 and 1975, it had to deal with mass movements and organizations that were the product of a prolonged social and political crisis. To meet this challenge, the PCI had to win back the ground lost it to use not only all its tactical flexibility but also undergo some quite radical revisions and break, at least partly, with its former organizational practice (for example, in adapting its relations with the trade unions to new situations).

It also showed more openness and tolerance in its internal functioning, despite the continuation of authoritarian leadership methods and the ban on forming tendencies and critical currents. The discussions which continued for several months after the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, with both participation from organizers and members, had been an important indicator of the changes which were taking shape. Finally, it is unnecessary to recall the leading role that the PCI played in the evolution of the PCI continued to collect the popular vote but this was no longer vote for a party which seemed to be without perspective, even on the particular terrain of its strategy and action.

Finally, there was a radical change in the role of intellectuals. To avoid misunderstandings, let us repeat that in joining the PCI or participating in its activities, a considerable number of intellectuals took on a progressive role and some of them, thanks to their capacities, undoubtedly contributed to the spreading of the conceptions and methodological instruments of historical materialism, and, more generally, of Marxism. But what we would like to underline here is the evolution — or the regression — which took place. Just after the war most of these intellectuals considered themselves, in Gramsci’s definition, “organic intellectuals” whose work and action were intrinsically linked to the struggles and destiny of the working class and the party which represented it. During the Stalinist period such an attitude had enormous consequences. Nevertheless, a quite important number of intellectuals enriched the patrimony of the workers’ movement with a positive influence. If we look forward by several decades and look at the current situation we see that the picture has changed radically: the intellectuals who are members of the PCI, or sympathetic of it, are in most cases assuming the role of judges on all questions and occupying an increasingly important role in the media as opinion-formers. It is above all them, with different elements of the petty bourgeoisie, who try to shape, and to a large extent do in fact shape, the ideology of the party and even claim to define its strategic perspective, its tactical attitudes and organizational forms. They act in this way while they suffer, still more than the bulk of the party, all the negative impact of the international situation and the complicated trends in the national situation.

These are all the elements which explain the deep crisis of a party which, in order to maintain its strength and experience a new growth, could no longer rely on “sociological weight”, on the unchanging nature of the social context. We are looking for an explanation of the continuation of the traditional loyalties or for a resigned acceptance of the lesser evil. In this sense, at the root of Occhetto’s initiative there were certainly questions of the life or death of the party. But the answer which he gave are either mystifications if not totally fantastic: they go in exactly the opposite direction to that which the workers’ movement should take to lead it out of this dead end.
### 7. Eulogy for the Revolution

It goes without saying that the work of reconstructing the workers’ movement must start from an analysis of society today. We are convinced that if a communist is made to try studying or restructuring Capital, and not simply talking about it on the basis of hearsay or vague youthful memories, the result will not only be to see the validity of the Marxist method, but also the relevance and point of the industrial workers’ struggle. The mechanisms and dynamic of capitalism. But, leaving aside Mars and Capital, it is enough to observe reality as it appears to any honest and critical worker who would not be deflected by setbacks, without prejudices and without apologetic intentions.

First of all, not even all the ramblings of economists and sociologists who have mobilized to whip out even the memory of socialist and revolutionary ideas, cannot suppress one incontestable fact: the fundamental trend of the concentration and centralization of capital — industrial, commercial and financial — acts today much more forcefully than at any time in the past. The big multinationals represent the extreme form of this concentration which implies the extortion of profits on a planetary scale, the despoothing of underdeveloped countries, and their subordination to literally catastrophic economic choices. And it is precisely through the multinationals that the growing interdependence of the economy takes shape, but also through that pathological phenomenon of the “national solidarity”.

The party suffers a great deal from this development, because it is played by Autonomia Operaia) and the far left are expelled from the PCI and forms the Movement for Communist Foundation (Movimento per la Rifondazione Comunista).

The main industrial, commercial and financial groups, have growing economic power and can mobilize in defence of its interests the political and military apparatuses of the imperialist countries.

- While, during the last few years, in the most developed countries, there has been a quantitative and qualitative change in the industrial workers’ struggle, it is not the reorganization of the international trade unions and the defense of new technologies, but rather the facile extrapolation of an analysis that is not simply talking about it on the basis of hearsay.

- Despite the trends mentioned above, on a world scale and in almost all countries, the working class is numerically bigger — both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the whole of the active population — not simply in comparison to the period of Marx or Lenin, but also that of the 1950s. In this sense, it may be rather arbitrary to conclude that its role as the anti-capitalist driving force had lost its material basis.

- The social fragmentation and dilution which have been described by many authors are a real phenomenon, but they would be wrong to interpret this as a general and irreversible trend. For a large extent, it is a typical recurrence of the capitalist mode of production which the working class is not able to change and that the industrialization of the economy as a whole is continuing and growing all the time.

In the other hand, the small and medium-sized business owners tend to stay in the big one and occupy the same positions in the same organizations.

- One conclusion can be made: the inevitable explosion of new cyclical crises, the reappearance, including in the industrialized countries — of mass unemployment and the impoverishing of broad layers of the population, the more and more catastrophic forecast of natural resources, the destruction of nature, the increase of energy which are difficult or impossible to control and for which nobody can accurately predict the medium- or long-term effects. All of this, rather than

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### The history of the PCI 1949-1991

1953: Mobilization of the PCI against the "crooked law" (legge truffa) proposed by Christian Democracy which would give the social parties control of all the main institutions of the state to which the PCI adheres.
1962: Riots in Turin (Piazza Guerini).Luigi Longo is elected secretary of the PCI.
1964: Death of Togliatti. Luigi Longo is elected secretary of the PCI.
1974: Crisis of DC, which is defeated during the referendum for the abolition of the law on divorce.
1975: Administrative elections, marked by a big progress of the PCI which won 32% of the vote in the main cities, in Rome, Milan, Turin, Naples, Genoa, Florence, Venice etc. (as well as, of course, as its traditional strongholds, Bologna). Fifth Congress of the PCI, which definitively approves the policy of historic compromise.
1976: New advance of the PCI during the political elections (34.4% of the vote). First big terrorist attacks by the Red Brigades. Defeat of the DC in the elections where it stood as united force under the label of Social Democratic Party (Democrazia Cristianodemocratica). The PCI is in favor of Italy remaining within NATO, Thortonisation of Eurocommunism.
1977: Wave of youth radicalization (where an important role is played by Autonomia Operaia) and violent confrontations of the PCI and the trade unions.
1978: Kidnapping of the DC leader Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades. The PCI abstains in parliament when Andreotti (DC) presents his new government. Start of the policy of "national solidarity".
1979: Berlinguer decides to abandon the policy of "national solidarity" and to replace it by the policy of the "democratic alternative", which rejects an alliance with DC.
1980: Strike of FIAT workers threatened by redundancies. After 35 days of struggle, the union leaderships agree, to an agreement which allows for layoffs (in fact exclusion from the factory) of 22,000 workers. Most of the union activists of the PCI and the far left are expelled from the factory. This defeat marks the end of the period opened by the struggles of autumn 1969.
1984: Defeat of the struggle to defend the sliding scale of wages (during the referendum 65% of the electorate are for 54.5% against). Death of Berlinguer, followed by the last big electoral breakthrough of the PCI in the European elections (35% of the vote). Alessandro Natta is elected general secretary of the PCI.
1985: Natta is replaced by Achille Occhetto. The party suffers a significant electoral defeat.
1989: After the events in Eastern Europe, Occhetto puts forward the proposal to change the name of the party.
1991: The PCI Twentieth Congress approves the proposal of its general secretary to abandon the name Communist Party and adopt that of the Democratic Party of the Left (Partito Democratico delle Sinistra, PDS). A left-wing current — Cosacca, Libertini, Azor Roa, etc. — leaves the party and forms the Movement for Communitarian Refoundation (Movimento per la Rifondazione Comunista).
posing problems which make revolutionary Marxists feel theoretically disarmed, represent in the last analysis a dramatic confirmation of the theory of alienation.

In the information summarized here, it is perfectly legitimate to formulate in a credible fashion the hypothesis of a persistent vitality and an apocalyptic threat. In any case, it is the specific forms of opposition - anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist mass movements, as well as the probability of new total crises - that is to say not only economic but also social and political - of capitalist societies, in which the very basis of these societies will be challenged. And it is certain that, if this happens, sociological criticism and theoretical thinking will start to play a different music from that which we hear today.

For those who, without losing their bearings faced with the most recent events, are trying to understand reality and its most dynamic trends for what they really are, an absolutely primary task is to relaunch the very idea of revolution, counterposing it to the wave of gradualist conceptions of a positivist and flatly institutionalist tandem, of a weak and timorous reformism or neo-reformism, which is not even capable of defending the gains of the past.

At the end of the twentieth century we see capitalist societies affected by limited rationality and - in the internal logic of their intrinsic mechanisms - condemning a large section of the planet's population to poverty and famine, with unpredictable consequences in the medium and long term for those happy islands of the consumer society themselves. The societies could - as the result of a nuclear war or a succession of ecological crises - provoke the destruction of life on earth. It is an extraordinary paradox that in such a context the existing system should be rehabilitated within the workers' movement itself, or at least be accepted as the only possible form of social organization to which there is not alternative in the foreseeable future.

To suppose that a society governed for decades by an uncontrolable internal logic and an uncontrollable dynamic, where all the decisions which in the last analysis decide the fates of peoples and the future of the world are dominated by charismatic leaders such as Mitterrand himself or Gonzalez, who impose a paternalist internal functioning, based on clientelism, without leaving any space to critical minorities. The Labour leader Kinnock is still just a beginner compared to his colleagues from other countries. But, during his last party congress, he announced openly the shape of things to come. Having been put in a minority by the delegates on a number of questions - including the very question of a possible one-man rule over the party itself - Kinnock, having denounced the 1958 institutions and the paternalist bonapartism of De Gaulle for twenty years, used to the full the mechanisms of the Fifth Republic from the time he arrived in power, to the point of offending the memory of his predecessor.

Things are much more serious as these parties are dominated by charismatic leaders such as Mitterrand himself or Gonzalez, who impose a paternalist internal functioning, based on clientelism, without leaving any space to critical minorities. The Labour leader Kinnock is still just a beginner compared to his colleagues from other countries. But, during his last party congress, he announced openly the shape of things to come. Having been put in a minority by the delegates on a number of questions - including the very question of a possible one-man rule over the party itself - Kinnock, having denounced the 1958 institutions and the paternalist bonapartism of De Gaulle for twenty years, used to the full the mechanisms of the Fifth Republic from the time he arrived in power, to the point of offending the memory of his predecessor.

Is it necessary to add that things are still worse in the Conservative Parties, such as for example the French Gaullist party, where the personalities decide everything and where democratic norms do not even exist?

In conclusion, over and above all the specific and conjunctural analyses, the question should be asked: is it possible that state apparatuses that aim to ensure the functioning of an economy based on profit and the hegemony of a historically determined social class can represent the framework in which qualitatively different goals can be achieved? In which the profit logic and capitalist exploitation can be broken, and a truly democratic social organization and functioning, that is to say in which the active participation of everybody in the life of the society in all its aspects can be guaranteed.

A positive answer could only be given by those who accept a mystifying ideology or who defend an ahistoric conception of democracy, seen as an abstract form separated from its concrete historical context. In return, those who start from real historical experience and do not want to ignore that which "our society" demonstrates to us every day can only give a negative answer. The necessity for a revolutionary break with the state structures - such as they exist, even in the most "modern" forms - summarizes the need for a revolutionary break in its totality.
Amendola, Giorgio (1900-1980). Son of the liberal leader Giovanni Amendola, he joined the PCI towards the end of the 1920s and later became one of its main leaders. While continuing to identify with his past as an orthodox Stalinist, towards the end of his life he stated that the Liberal Party should no longer be a serious mistake for the Italian workers’ movement.

Bandera Rossa (Red Flag). Dissident communist movement active in Rome between 1943 and 1947. Today this is recognized as the nucleus of the Democratic Proletarian linked to the Fourth International.

Beato, Lello. Historian of the left-wing current in Italian socialism, who later became a “fellow-traveller” of the PCI. An intellectual and historian, he contributed greatly to the knowledge and dissemination of the works of Rosa Luxemburg. He died in 1978.

Berlinguer, Enrico (1922-1984). General secretary of the PCI from 1973 to his death in 1984, he developed the strategy of the “Stalinist rehabilitation” between 1973 and 1979 and then that of the democratic alternative. Under his leadership, the PCI went on a long road to socialism-democratization.

Blum, Leon (1872-1950). Historic leader historique of socialism, he became the theoretician of the liberal-socialism. An Italian. He became well-known thanks to his many works on Gramsci and Matteotti and a book of memoirs "fellow-traveller" of the PCI. In 1926 he was expelled from the PCI in name of the party and the project of creating the PCI.

Bobbio, Norberto. Leader of the Italian current in the PCI, he considered himself a representative of the left wing. Despite his opposition to the party changing its name, he remains a member of the PCI.

Blus, Luciana. Leader of the II Manifesto current and member of the European party of the Proletarian Unity for Communist (PDPUI) in the 1970s, she is currently one of the representatives of the left wing in the PCI.

Bonifazi, Armando. Leader of the left-wing in the PCI (considered in a rather simplistic fashion as the most pro-Soviet of the Italian Communists), he is today one of the leaders of the Movement for Communist Refoundation.


Donati, Guido (1894-1985). Liberal leader, head of the government before and after the First World War, first of all between 1911 and 1914 and then in 1920-21.

Gottwald, Klement (1896-1953). Communist., he was among the founders of the PCI in 1921. He became a member of the CC and the PB after the Lyons Congress. Elected in the editorial of the current in Democrazia Proletaria in 1921, in 1929 he opposed the “turn” and was expelled from the party. Joined the International Left Opposition with Trotski and Ravanelli. Leader of the Fourth International in the end of the 1930s. Participated in the Resistance and rejoined the PCI after the war.

Pietro, Leader of the Occhenta current in the PCI and currently one of the spokespersons for the PDS.

Giolitti, Giovanni (1842-1932). Liberal leader, head of the government before and after the First World War, first of all between 1911 and 1914 and then in 1920-21.

Gottwald, Wladyslaw. Polish communist, he was arrested in 1949 on accusations of nationalism. In 1956, under the pressure of the mass movement, he was elected secretary of the PZPR (Polish Communist) Party and led the liberal-socialism liberalization of the regime.


Gramsci, Antonio (1891-1937). Born in Sarzana, he became a socialist in Turin just before the First World War. In 1919, he edited the daily newspaper L’Ordine Nuovo, in which he analysed the experience of the factory occupations and developed his theory of workers’ councils. In 1921, he participated in the foundation of the PCI whose representative to the Comintern he became in Moscow and Yomna, between 1922 and 1924. In 1926, he wrote the “Lyons Thesis” which marked a turn in the party’s orientation by distancing it from its original Bolshevik orientation. The same year he was arrested and sentenced by the fascist authorities. During the ten years of his imprisonment his political and cultural works were published, which are one of the most important contributions to the enriching of Marxist thought.


Manzetti, Giacomo (1885-1924). Socialist member of parliament, assassinated by fascists after his speech on the “tyranny of violence” in other countries.

Morandi, Rodolfo. Leader of the PSI, he was a collaborator of Berlinguer. He was elected general secretary after the death of Berlinguer in 1984. He was replaced by Ochett in 1988.

Mussolini, Benito (1883-1945). Founder of the PCI in 1921. He represented the liberal-democratic wing open to collaboration with the socialists.

Ravazzoli, Paolo (1904-1940). Leader of the clandestine leadership of the PCI and secretary of the CGIL at the end of the 1920s, he participated in 1930 in the foundation of the “New Italian Opposition” and was expelled from the party. In 1931, he defended the positions of the International Left Opposition during a meeting of the ISM in Moscow. He left the Trotskyist movement in 1936, after the split of the Popular Front and became close to the PSI.

Russo, Enrico (1895-1973). Joined the 1924 with the Communist current, active in the emigrant community and the PCUS during the Spanish Civil War. Leader of PCI, he was the leader of the PCI at the end of the 1930s.

Salvemini, Gaetano. One of the main intellectuals in Italy in the inter-war period. A historian of a liberal-socialist orientation, he was one of the first to theorize the “southern question”.

Seccia, Pietro. Leader of the “left wing” of the PCI at the Liberation, he tried to oppose Toppi by advocating a hardening of the line of the party (which he never challenged at a whole). He was gradually marginalized within the apparatus.

Sereni, Emilio. Intellectual and economist. He played a leading role in the party during the 1930s and after the war.

Spirito, Paolo. Undoubtedly the main historian of the PCI, alongside with Emilio Ragni. He is author of a five-volume history of the PCI (Storia del PCI), Emusi, Turin, 1975; L’Unione, Rome, 1990., a work on Stalinism and the workers’ movement in Italy (Stalinismo euro­ peo e Stati, Emusi, Turin, 1983) as well as on the history of Gramsci and Matteotti and a book of memoirs (Le passioni di un decennio, Osservatore, Milan, 1985).

Stella Rossa (Red Star). Dissident communist movement active in Turin at the end of the Second World War.

Terraccia, Umberto. Collaborator of Gramsci in L’Ordine na­ zivo and founder of the PDS. Imprisoned from 1926 to the end of the war, he was temporarily expelled from the party after having opposed the Soviet-German Pact in 1939. He chaired the Communist Assembly in 1946.

Togliatti, Palmiro known as “Eredi” (1893-1944). Founder
Leggenda:

- **Bibliografia e riferimenti**: un elenco di testi e sorgenti utilizzati nella rassegna letteraria.

**Livio Maitan**

**From the PCI to the PDS: the long march of the Italian Communist Party**

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From the PCI to the PDS

The long march of the Italian Communist Party

Livio Maitan

The Italian Communist Party has now completed its process of social-democratization. During its last congress, in Rimini in February 1991, it abandoned its historic name and took that of the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS). For many years proud of its “communist identity” and even of its “diversity” in the context of the national political system and the European left, the PCI was for several decades not only the main force of the Italian workers’ movement but also the biggest Communist Party in the capitalist West. At the end of such an itinerary a balance sheet is necessary. In this study, Livio Maitan looks at the fundamental points in the history of the PCI and underlines the problems and contradictions which prepared the conditions for the present turn.

Livio Maitan was born in 1923 in Venice. He has been active in the Italian workers’ movement since the beginning of the Second World War. A national organizer of the Socialist Youth at the Liberation, he joined the Fourth International in 1947 and is today one of its central leaders. He has taught sociology at the University of Rome and translated and prefaced almost all the Italian editions of Trotsky’s writings. His previously published works include PCI 1945-69: stalinismo e opportunismo, Rome, 1969; Parità, esercito e masse nella crisi cinese, Rome, 1969; Dinamica delle classi sociali in Italia, Rome, 1976; Destino di Trotskij, Milan, 1981; Il marxismo rivoluzionario di Antonio Gramsci, Milan, 1987.

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