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# BANDIERA ROSSA

*COMMUNISTS IN OCCUPIED ROME, 1943–44*

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## Abstract

This study is a social history of communists in wartime Rome. It examines a decisive change in Italian communist politics, as the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI) rose from a hounded fraternity of prisoners and exiles to a party of government. Joining with other Resistance forces in the *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale* (CLN), this 'new party' recast itself as a mass, patriotic force, committed to building a new democracy. This study explains how such a party came into being. It argues that a PCI machine could establish itself only by subduing other strands of communist thought and organisation that had emerged independently of exiled Party leaders. This was particularly true in Rome, where dissident communists created the largest single Resistance formation, the *Movimento Comunista d'Italia* (MCd'I). This movement was the product of the underground that survived across the Mussolini period, expressing a 'subversive' politics that took on a popular following through the disintegration of the Fascist regime. Standing outside the CLN alliance and the postwar democratic governments, it reflected the maximalism and eclecticism of a communist milieu that had persisted on the margins of Fascist society. In the Occupation period this dissident movement galvanised a social revolt in the *borgate* slums, which would also trouble the new authorities even after the Allies' arrival. Studying the political writing of these dissidents, their autodidact Marxism and the social conditions in which it emerged, this study reconstructs a far-reaching battle to redefine communist politics. Highlighting the erasure of the dissidents' history in mainstream narration of the Resistance, it argues that the repressed radicalism of this period represented a lasting danger to the postwar PCI and the new Republic.

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## Preface

This study is a social history of communists in wartime Rome. It centres on the period between the Wehrmacht invasion on 8 September 1943 and the Allies' arrival in the capital on 4 June 1944. These nine months were a decisive turning point in the development of Italian communism, as the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI), rose from a hounded fraternity of prisoners and exiles to a party of government. The *partito nuovo* created through the Resistance was quite unlike the Communist Party that had succumbed to Fascism two decades earlier. Joining with other Resistance forces in the *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale* (CLN), Palmiro Togliatti's party cast itself as a mass, patriotic force, committed to building a new democracy. So, too, was the PCI's social profile radically altered, as young Italians without past communist affiliation now flooded into its ranks.

This study focuses on the other side of the *partito nuovo*'s formation: the communists who rejected Togliatti's approach. For the PCI's party machine to take form, its cadres had to impose their leadership over a series of communist movements that had emerged outside of their control. This was particularly true in the Italian capital, where dissident communists created the largest single Resistance formation. Their *Movimento Comunista d'Italia* (MCd'I) was the product of the underground that survived across the Fascist period. Standing outside of the CLN alliance, it expressed the maximalism and eclecticism of a subversive milieu that had long been detached from Party leaders. In the Occupation period and after it galvanised an unruly social revolt in the *borgate* slums, a proletarian rebellion that clashed with the PCI's politics of 'national unity'.

Central to our research is the autodidact Marxism that flowered within this milieu, expressed in papers and pamphlets, bulletins and handwritten polemics. A militant minority used this worker-writing to endow its activity with a grand historic mission and a global perspective, even despite its long isolation from the international Left. This thinking drew on earlier Italian communist politics as well as a subculture that had evolved across the Fascist period. As this study shows, these militants' texts often bore the mark of the conditions of repression in which they were produced. Yet this autodidacticism also stood in defiance of the political illiteracy that Fascism had sought to create. It embodied workers' and artisans'



attempt to free themselves from the condition of those consigned only to follow leaders and execute commands.

These Roman militants' pursuit of a class-war and revolutionary agenda set them in sometimes sharp opposition to other anti-fascists. In the Occupation period the demands of self-preservation compelled a degree of cooperation among all clandestine militants, whether resisting Nazi raids or sheltering the endangered. Yet in rejecting the idea of a common national interest, the dissident-communists strongly opposed both the CLN alliance and the democratic governments that followed.<sup>1</sup> After Liberation they like other dissident partisans continued to build their armed bands, waging expropriations and blackmail, occupying public buildings and even extorting Allied supplies. As Nazi-Fascist<sup>2</sup> tyranny gave way to a new government of 'national unity', this intransigence drew these militants into open conflict with the new authorities.

The Roman dissident movement did not create any lasting political force. Paralysed by Nazi repression and criminalised under the Allies, it represented a Resistance that did not shape the new Republic. Yet even in defeat, its militants left an enduring legacy. The repression of partisan radicalism and a botched defascistisation process left behind bitter weeds of disappointed hope; 'unfinished business' that repeatedly returned to the centre of Italian public life. Making their own turn to the underground, new generations of armed militants continued to destabilise the Republic into the 1970s. A study of this history thus sheds light on the tensions at the origin of the postwar PCI and the Republic itself. It highlights the subversive culture that developed across the Fascist era and then re-emerged in the war period and beyond.

Each chapter of our study focuses on this fight to shape the Italian communist movement as it emerged from two decades of repression:

**Chapter One** frames this study historically, explaining the blinkers that both official Resistance remembrance and PCI self-mythology have placed on existing

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<sup>1</sup> 'Antifascismo', *Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie*, 5, 30.4.1944.

<sup>2</sup> *Nazifascismo*, the common Italian term for the overlapping rule of Benito Mussolini's Fascist régime (the formally independent *Repubblica Sociale Italiana*, widely called the Salò Republic in reference to its *de facto* capital) and Adolf Hitler's control of the country, occupied by Nazi Germany from 8 September 1943 onward.

understandings of wartime communism. It outlines a research perspective focused on worker-militants' own strategies for transforming Italian society, and not just the decisions of professional politicians. It emphasises the generational divide between the traditions inherited from earlier working-class radicalism, and the new model of Party organisation forged in the interwar Comintern.

**Chapter Two** examines the culture of the Roman communist underground in the early phases of the Second World War. It highlights the culture clash between the intellectual fellow-travellers drawn into the orbit of Togliatti's party during the Popular Front era, and the proletarian underground that had survived across Fascism. This chapter highlights the effects of the Fascist experience on this clandestine milieu, including the spread of a millenarian cult of Stalin, outside of and in tendency opposed to the PCI's new strategy.

The clashes among the Roman communists become more sharply defined in **Chapter Three**, which spans the 45 Days between the palace coup against Mussolini and the German invasion. The liberalisation period following Marshal Badoglio's appointment allowed the formation of the political movements that would go on to shape the Resistance. This chapter explains how the PCI's 'national unity' policy hardened it against the dissident MCD'I.

The German invasion marked the beginning of a harsh Occupation regime, and **Chapter Four** turns our focus to the social conditions in which armed bands now emerged. Exploring the differences between the slum proletariat in Rome's peripheral *borgate* and the industrial working class of the North, we explain how their respective forms of mobilisation related to communists' differing conceptions of 'class struggle'. This focus on the particular forms of social revolt on Rome's periphery allows us to explain the relative strength of the dissident communists in these areas compared to all other Resistance forces.

**Chapter Five** takes on a more international dimension, with the Anglo-Americans' January 1944 arrival at Anzio, 35 miles south of the capital. For many anti-fascists these landings offered hope that Liberation was close at hand. This chapter explains how this prospect drove tensions within the anti-fascist coalition, as the parties advanced their rival visions of the next government. This is also informed

by a study of the Allies' efforts to impose order on the democratisation process in the 'laboratory' of the liberated South.

**Chapter Six** focuses on the effect of repression on the Roman Resistance, focusing on the counter-insurgency that struck in February-March 1944 as the Allies' march toward the city was halted. In particular, it highlights the contested place of terrorist tactics in communist strategy, and the increased opposition to their use in the face of devastating Nazi reprisals. It argues that this wave of repression succeeded in demobilising the Roman Resistance.

**Chapter Seven** revolves around Togliatti's 'Salerno Turn', as he led his party and its allies into government. It argues that the Turn embodied the overlapping of the PCI's new democratic approach with its ongoing Soviet inspiration, allowing the Party to unite widely varying political sensibilities. It highlights how communists both within and outside the Party sought to reconcile Moscow's diplomatic moves with their understanding of their own strategic possibilities.

The controversy over the 'Salerno Turn' again poses the question of what potential communists really had to transform an Italy liberated thanks to Anglo-American invasion, and **Chapter Eight** explains why Rome did not see a popular insurrection upon the Allies' arrival. It explains that the weakness of Resistance movements in the capital was compounded by the new institutional deal and the Allies' own efforts to prevent social unrest.

**Chapter Nine** proceeds into the post-Liberation period, with the disarming of the partisans and the formation of Ivanoe Bonomi's Allied-backed 'government of national unity'. It highlights the tensions between the CLN parties in government, the state machine inherited from Fascism, and the armed bands continuing to operate on the Roman city periphery. This allows us to see how a new Republic built itself on the pacification of social unrest.

Finally, the concluding **Chapter Ten** explores the echoes of the so-called 'Red Resistance' in the culture of the postwar Italian Left. Tracing the continual reemergence of militant anti-fascism and the politics of insurrection, it points to the disappointed hopes of the Resistance period that continued to fuel political violence. It thus presents repressed partisan radicalism as an enduring factor for instability in Togliatti's new party, as in the new Republic.

This study begins, however, by examining the role of Resistance commemoration in Italian public life.

### A note on sources

This study focuses on the political and strategic debates among communists in the war period, and thus draws heavily on their public press; internal bulletins; and organisational reports.

The MCd'I did not have any institutional heirs to preserve its records, and much of its archive was destroyed upon its dissolution. The most substantial set of documents from the movement is that collected by Silverio Corvisieri, author of a 1967 essay on *Bandiera Rossa nella Resistenza romana*. His archive, deposited at the *Museo Storico della Liberazione* in 2014, includes the documentation collated by Francesco Cretara in the immediate wake of Liberation. It features minutes of some of its committee meetings; its press and internal bulletins; and postwar conference proceedings. While this archive offers a limited view of the MCd'I's internal organisation, it does include the reports that each of its armed bands were asked to produce after Liberation, detailing their activities. These were produced for the sake of seeking official recognition for MCd'I partisans, and thus list its members in each zone, the partisan actions to which they laid claim, and histories of their activity by band leaders.

Diaries by militants offer further insight into the mood of the times, as do the personal archives of figures such as Otello Terzani (at the *Biblioteca Comunale di Follonica*), Matilde Bassani Finzi (*Unione Femminile Nazionale*), Gerardo Bruni (at the *Fondazione Basso*) and Rosario Bentivegna (at the *Archivio Storico del Senato*). Terzani's archive also preserves the internal documentation and press of the *Armata Rossa*, a militia closely linked to the MCd'I. This study also draws on a wide array of memoirs and militant histories written by other figures active in the Roman and Italian Resistance. Given the distance of time I was not able to rely on collecting oral testimony as the basis for my study. I did however interview the surviving MCd'I militants Modesto di Veglia, Osvaldo Schiavoni and Renato Fratini (each members as teenagers) and also had repeated meetings with the veteran GAP partisan Mario Fiorentini. I also drew on the testimony collected by Alessandro Portelli (for the *Circolo Gianni Bosio*) as well as the Lazio region's *Banca della Memoria*.

Given the MCd'I's limited historical imprint, this study relies greatly on sources produced by those outside observers who sought to control or repress its activity. In particular, this means the official records at the *Archivio Centrale dello Stato* (ACS). This archive is home to the police reports produced under the Salò Republic (RSI). While these records do not extend across the entire Occupation period, they are an important source on the growth of armed bands and their action in the capital. They also include some of the MCd'I's own internal documents and organisational reports, seized by police. The Interior Ministry archive spanning both the Fascist and postwar period includes a welter of documentation on the political, economic and social situation in wartime Italy. The *Casellario Politico Centrale* features personal files on 'subversives' (and in many cases, their only surviving photograph). This is also useful in reconstructing the history of the circles at the origins of the MCd'I during the first years of World War II. Another source for reconstructing the dissident movement's activity and internal clashes are the records from the postwar trials of its militants, as well as of the spies in its ranks. These documents appear in both the *Archivio di Stato di Roma* (ASR) and the files of the Allied Control Commission. This latter archive, together with the National Archives at Kew, documents Allied plans for occupied Rome and its view of partisan movements.

This study also draws extensively on sources produced by the PCI, held at Rome's *Istituto Gramsci*. The *Fondo Mosca* and *Fondo Direzione Nord* cover its national leadership bodies, and *Fondo Agostino Novella* its sections in the Lazio region. The *Archivio Partito Comunista* includes both correspondence between the Rome and Milan PCI leaderships and a wider array of documentation on the Party's local sections. These archives together offer a rich documentation of the internal life of the wartime PCI as well as a close observation of dissident communists. However, they focus more on the PCI's own political dynamics and relations to other parties than the activity of partisan bands. Resistance institutes around Italy offer further important sources on the PCI's partisan activism. In Rome this includes the *Museo Storico della Liberazione* and IRSIFAR, in Milan the INSMLI, in Sesto San Giovanni the ISEC, and in Turin the ISTOREC (with the *Fondo Arturo Colombi* offering special insight into the PCI's internal life). These institutes are also useful sources of

Resistance press, and in 2017 INSMLI published its entire archive from the clandestine period online.

This study does not draw on primary sources from the German Occupation forces, except insofar as these also exist in RSI archives. Lutz Klinkhammer's *L'Occupazione tedesca in Italia* and Amadeo Osti Guerrazzi's forthcoming *La persecuzione degli ebrei a Roma. Carnefici e vittime* are key works on the machinery of Occupation. The history of the role of Soviet representatives in Occupied Italy remains to be written, although the volume *Dagli archivi di Mosca. L'Urss, il Cominform e il PCI (1943-1951)*, edited by Francesca Gori and Silvio Pons, does cite some among these officials' reports on the Italian situation.

## Chapter One

### What remembrance forgets

#### 1.1. Myths and martyrs

Lusty cries of *Duce! Duce!* echoed around the square facing Rome's city hall on election night 2008, as Fascist-saluting crowds hailed the capital's first far-Right mayor since World War II.<sup>1</sup> With extremists chanting Mussolini-era slogans long into the night, elderly veterans of the Resistance reacted with consternation, protesting the police's failure to enforce the ban on Fascist symbols. Faced with a potentially explosive situation, Rome's new first citizen Gianni Alemanno opted for a gesture of reconciliation, as he sought to distance himself from his most hard-line supporters. Within days of his poll triumph, Alemanno announced plans to pay tribute at the Fosse Ardeatine caves, where SS officers murdered 335 anti-fascists and Jews on the afternoon of 24 March 1944.

The mayor's plans to visit the 'Monument to the Martyrs' did little to placate his opponents, who highlighted his past activism in the neo-fascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI).<sup>2</sup> As MSI youth leader in 1989 Alemanno was notoriously arrested while leading a protest against a remembrance service at Nettuno's Allied war graves. The erstwhile Fascist had declared this commemoration of US troops 'offensive to the memory of the thousands' of Mussolini-loyalist troops who 'fell for the dignity of the *Patria*' in resisting Allied invasion.<sup>3</sup> Despite the mayor's belated embrace of democratic politics, Resistance veterans' groups labelled his planned appearance at the Fosse Ardeatine a shallow PR stunt, cynically designed to restore his tarnished legitimacy.

Alemanno's visit went ahead despite protests, with the ANFIM<sup>4</sup> president Rosetta Stames<sup>5</sup> charged with guiding him around the execution site. Like most Resistance

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<sup>1</sup> 'Festa AN tra cori e braccia tese', *La Repubblica*, 29.4.2008.

<sup>2</sup> From the late 1970s to the early 1990s Alemanno was a leader of the most radical wing of the MSI, whose main theorist was his father-in-law Pino Rauti. This party was created in 1946 by former officials of the *Repubblica Sociale Italiana*, the Nazi-puppet government that formally ruled German-occupied Italy from September 1943 to April 1945.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Giuli 2007, p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> National Association of Italian Martyrs' Families.

<sup>5</sup> Her father Nicola Ugo Stame, a member of the MCd'I, was killed at the Fosse Ardeatine: see Chapter 3.1, and the obituary in MCd'I 1944c.



memorials, the Monument closely links partisan ‘martyrdom’ and Italian nationhood. The mausoleum is decked out with *tricolore* flags, Catholic trinkets and military medals; the curators tell visitors that it was in fact the SS’s victims who ‘fell for the *Patria*’ at the hands of Italy’s ‘centuries-long enemy, Germany’. As well as commemorating the dead, the display also offers a more enduring message. Concluding the tour, Stame pointed Alemanno’s attention to a strip of paper bearing the last scrawled words of one murdered captive, Tigrino Sabatini: ‘Don’t forget what we died for, don’t exploit our death!’<sup>6</sup>

For Alemanno’s critics, the symbolism was clear. *La Repubblica* lamented that Sabatini’s posthumous words expressed ‘what was, indeed, happening’,<sup>7</sup> underlining the demise of the ‘zero-tolerance anti-fascism’ of decades past.<sup>8</sup> This *cordon sanitaire* had dissolved together with the First Republic<sup>9</sup> in the early 1990s, allowing the ‘post-fascists’<sup>10</sup> to enter the mainstream for the first time since the war. The divides of the Resistance period nonetheless remained a key motif of Italian public life. When Rome’s new mayor condemned ‘the crimes committed *by all sides* in the civil war’,<sup>11</sup> his opponents retorted that this left him outside the ‘national community’ forged in the Resistance.<sup>12</sup> Defending the old constitutional-arch

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Alemanno celebra le Fosse Ardeatine’, *La Repubblica*, 6.5.2008. Sabatini’s words are displayed at the caves although he was in fact executed at the Forte Bravetta six weeks after the Fosse Ardeatine atrocity.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> I.e. the parties that wrote Italy’s 1947 Constitution and effectively bounded the limits of republican legitimacy (if not parliamentary representation) from the early 1960s until the early 1990s.

<sup>9</sup> An informal term for the political order created after Liberation and which fell apart in the early 1990s, with the explosion of the main ex-Resistance parties. While the PCI dissolved in response to the failure of ‘actually-existing socialism’, the Christian-Democrats and Socialists were destroyed by a corruption scandal called *Tangentopoli* (‘Bribesville’), which came to public awareness from 1992 to 1994. Though this was a crisis of parties rather than the constitutional order itself, the subsequent period, dominated by the rise of Silvio Berlusconi’s new Right (*Forza Italia/Popolo della Libertà*) and the gradual transformation of most of the centre-Left into the *Partito Democratico* is often known as the ‘Second Republic’.

<sup>10</sup> In 1994–95 the MSI and right-wing factions of the now-obsolete Christian Democrats merged into the *Alleanza Nazionale*. In the 1994 general elections, held during the merger process, the party stood as MSI-AN, and it was in this guise that Alemanno entered Berlusconi’s coalition. Most of the AN would join the media magnate’s *Popolo della Libertà* in 2009.

<sup>11</sup> “‘La Resistenza non si discute’ ma Alemanno tace sul fascismo’, *L’Unità*, 6.5.2008. My emphasis.

<sup>12</sup> For a variety of anti-fascist responses to the affair see ‘Alemanno la memoria è un dovere’ and ‘Alemanno celebra le Fosse Ardeatine’, *La Repubblica*, 6.5.2008; “‘La Resistenza non si

slogans,<sup>13</sup> they insisted that partisans like Sabatini had not died for one side in a civil war, but for Italy herself.

Arousing the passions so typical of wartime memory, this affair also revealed a collective blind spot. The historical revisionism so characteristic of Italy's 'Berlusconi years'<sup>14</sup> here once again forced the Left into a defence of Resistance values, insisting that the ideals of this 'Second *Risorgimento*'<sup>15</sup> must remain the very basis of the national community. However, no one was moved to ask what Sabatini really had 'died for', or precisely what 'exploitation' he intended to warn against. This was perhaps unsurprising in the context of a modern media hubbub. Even on the Left, Resistance values are most often understood through the pronouncements of intellectuals and statesmen; rather less discussed is the thinking of partisans like this forgotten tramworker.

When we do study Sabatini's history we find a quite different kind of Resistance politics. The clandestine press that he helped produce tells us not of *amor patria* or even a thirst for democracy, but the ambition to found a 'Soviet republic on Italian soil'.<sup>16</sup> This is all the more important when we consider that his *Movimento Comunista d'Italia* (MCd'I) was no mere 'splinter group',<sup>17</sup> but Rome's very largest partisan force, rallying some three thousand militants in the Nazi-ruled capital.<sup>18</sup>

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discute" ma Alemanno tace sul fascismo.', *L'Unità*, 6.5.2008; and Alessandro Portelli's 'Il fascismo del senso comune', *il manifesto*, 28.5.2008

<sup>13</sup> Alemanno celebra le Fosse Ardeatine', *La Repubblica*, 6.5.2008

<sup>14</sup> Berlusconi was prime minister 1994–5, 2001–6 and 2008–11, and even when not in government succeeded in polarising Italian politics around his own person. Beyond bringing former Fascists into the political mainstream, Berlusconi was notorious for his provocative jokes trivialising the Mussolini period.

<sup>15</sup> See Pavone 1959. This notion held that while Italy had remained fragmented after the Wars of Unification (the 'first' *Risorgimento*, waged by a Piedmont-based élite), the Resistance had truly succeeded in uniting the nation across class, regional and political divides. This idea of the need for a 'second *Risorgimento*', a key theme of wartime PCI propaganda, was in fact originally taken from philosopher Giovanni Gentile.

<sup>16</sup> 'In linea', *Bandiera Rossa* [henceforth, *BR*], 5.10.1943.

<sup>17</sup> Portelli 2003 quite mistakenly refers to the MCd'I as a 'PCI splinter group'. This is telling of the general difficulty in reflecting on this movement's history, in particular given that Portelli is one of the most insightful students of the construction of historical memory, and elsewhere in this same work speaks critically of the historiographical tendency to collapse the history of the Italian workers' and revolutionary movements into a 'disorganised pre-history of the PCI'.

<sup>18</sup> This estimate is based on the MCd'I's own membership records, as distinct from the postwar list of *recognised combatants* that the *Associazione Nazionale dei Partigiani Italiani* (ANPI) finished compiling in August 1945. Neither set of numbers is wholly reliable, compromised as they are by Resistance participants' multiple allegiances and the circumstances in which these registers were produced. Whereas the MCd'I's band

As one police report warned just weeks before the Allies' arrival, this movement had 'the secret aim, together with the other extreme-Left parties, of seizing control of the city, overthrowing the monarchy and government and implementing a full communist programme while the other parties are preoccupied with chasing out the Germans'.<sup>19</sup>

Sabatini and his comrades expounded this programme in no uncertain terms. Their clandestine newssheet *Bandiera Rossa* claimed the legacy of 'a shining path of thinkers, apostles and martyrs' that dated back to the very origins of the socialist 'faith'.<sup>20</sup> It prophesied the imminent advent of socialism in Italy, a 'revolutionary situation which the European proletariat has been awaiting for a century'.<sup>21</sup> Sabatini's comrades sharply attacked all who blocked 'the proletariat's march to redemption'; the 'old defenders of private property who now change[d] their names, and for a while at least, their attitudes'<sup>22</sup> in order to preserve Italian capitalism.<sup>23</sup> The proletariat could have 'no community of action or of ideology' with the Italian ruling classes: to 'hold off the class struggle until the future' was to 'drug the masses with the illusion of freedom'.<sup>24</sup>

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commanders authored its internal lists, the official records issued by the ANPI were based on individuals' requests for accreditation at its various Rome offices, either for themselves or for relatives. While the ANPI list thus attributes some 2,548 recognised combatants to *Bandiera Rossa* and *Armata Rossa*, many hundreds of other members are listed only according to their local area, the particular band in which they operated, or even parties they joined between Liberation and the compilation of the list. This points to the broader problem of overlapping identities and organisations, stemming from the fragmentary character of wartime politics: not all partisans maintained a constant activity in a single organisation across the whole Occupation and then remained in its ranks after Liberation. These caveats considered, this list does nonetheless hint at the scale of the MCd'I's armed organisation; by comparison, ANPI lists 2,336 combatants as belonging to the PCI, its *Garibaldini* and *Gruppi d'Azione Patriottica*; 897 for the republican-socialist *Partito d'Azione*; 1,451 for the *Partito Socialista Italiano d'Unità Proletaria*; 744 for the combined forces of the *Movimento Cattolico-Comunista* and liberal ex-premier Ivanoe Bonomi's *Democrazia del Lavoro*; and 671 for the *Democrazia Cristiana*.

<sup>19</sup> Notizie sui partiti della concentrazione di sinistra', 8.5.1944, copy in FGPCI/62/1362-1364.

<sup>20</sup> 'Serena intuizione', *BR*, 22.10.1943.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. The messianic tone of the movement's press was exemplified by its continual reference to communism as 'the Ideal' or 'faith'.

<sup>22</sup> 'Partiti e nomi vecchi e nuovi', *BR*, 15.10.1943.

<sup>23</sup> Note also 'Chiarificazione', and 'Perchè collaborare?', *BR*, 5.10.1943. See Chapter Two for militants' analyses from before July 1943, foreseeing the royalist coup against Mussolini.

<sup>24</sup> 'Moniti', *BR*, 15.10.1943.

This 'intransigence'<sup>25</sup> also set these militants in opposition to the new Communist Party leadership. They rejected the Party's pursuit of a policy of 'national unity', first in the CLN coalition and then in the Allied-backed government. In practical terms the dissidents did work together with partisans of other political hues, in the interests of solidarity and defence against repression.<sup>26</sup> Yet their movement was also governed by a politics that prioritised the antagonism among class interests over the clash between nations. In Sabatini's terms, while Lenin 'turned war into revolution', Party leaders enrolling partisans in the CLN were 'sending revolutionaries off to fight the war'.<sup>27</sup> This class-war politics was concretised in the attempt to build an Italian 'Red Army', and the campaign of reprisals and expropriations that continued even after Liberation.

Sabatini was executed on 3 May 1944, without ever seeing the 'sun of the future' rise over Italy. The months and years after his death saw not an Italian re-run of October 1917, but the defeat of his comrades' hopes. The Occupation period took a heavy toll on the movement, with its 186 fatalities including six of its fifteen-strong leadership. Torn apart by months of Nazi reprisals, bitter internal factionalism and a paralysing lack of structure, the Roman dissidents were gravely

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<sup>25</sup> 'In linea', *BR*, 5.10.1943 described as its programmatic bases: '(Integral) Marxist socialism, intransigent tactics, and the revolutionary conquest of power - Soviet constitution of workers by hand and by brain'. A positive self-identification with 'intransigence' had a long history on the left wing of the Socialist Party and then in Amadeo Bordiga's PCd'I.

<sup>26</sup> See Chapters Four, Six. From Martin Broszat onward many historians of Nazi Germany have distinguished between *Resistenz* - non-engagement with the régime aimed at self-preservation, ranging from mass workplace absenteeism to the efforts of institutions like the Church to protect their autonomy - and the *Widerstand* that made more assertive efforts to attack Hitler's authority. Though some Italian historians use the term *guerra di liberazione* [war of liberation] to emphasise the military character of the anti-fascist struggle and its parallels with other national-liberation movements, the term *Resistenza* remains far more widespread in common parlance, as a way of describing a vast range of anti-régime activities and forms of disobedience. While the present study lays great emphasis on different anti-fascist formations' competing social agendas as well as the class struggles that continued even after the collapse of the Mussolini régime, it does assume that in a loose sense the MCd'I's history belongs to that of a wider 'Resistance' movement, albeit a fragmentary and politically divided one. Arturo Peregalli has written both of the 'Left Wing Opposition in Italy During the Period of the Italian Resistance' (*Revolutionary History*, Vol. 5, No. 4) and of 'The Other Resistance' (in his 1991 book *L'Altra Resistenza*). The former description seems more appropriate to far-Left forces standing outside the partisan struggle (with groups like *Prometeo* in Milan seeing this latter as inevitably subordinate to

Western and Soviet imperialism), whereas 'the Other Resistance' refers to communist movements who did join the armed Resistance but attempted to give it an alternative political direction.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Chilanti 1969, p. 49.

weakened even before the Allies' arrival. This organisational crisis was aggravated after Liberation, as the incoming authorities moved to break up its militias and press. As Ivanoe Bonomi's new 'government of national unity' moved to disarm the dissident partisans, their movement soon collapsed. Dissolving in 1947, it left behind no lasting organisation.

Dominated by the main postwar parties, Resistance remembrance had no place for the Roman dissident movement. The Fosse Ardeatine mausoleum venerates its fallen fighters, commemorated by plaques and street-signs around the capital. But the MCd'I itself is consistently ignored. The *Museo Storico della Liberazione* honours the CLN parties and even the monarchist Resistance while ignoring the forces to the coalition's Left. This is a blindspot common to all other memorials in the capital, whose official historians are similarly quiet on Rome's largest partisan force.<sup>28</sup> This owes not to any lack of sources, but rather to an ideological focus on the effort to unite Italians across class and political divides. Directed at asserting the Republic's roots in the CLN pact, the 'constitutional arch' narrative silences the history of movements who stood outside of this coalition.

This mythology left its mark on Resistance historiography as well as the remembrance industry proper. The romantic idea of a 'people united in arms' provided something of a collective alibi after the Fascist period, in particular expressing the PCI's identification with a national history. Faced with right-wing attacks on the partisan war's darker episodes, this narrative sought to defend the Resistance's patriotic character. This was difficult to reconcile with the history of those formations who openly advertised their particularist agenda, expressing not only their own maximalism but also the limits to CLN universalism. The defeat of Sabatini and his comrades stands in defiance of republican mythology. It points not to the unity of patriots across political divides, but a battle among different Resistance forces to impose their stamp on the new Italy.

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<sup>28</sup> This typically takes the form of referring to *Bandiera Rossa's* partisans' contribution to a general Resistance movement, but without discussing their political ideas. In 1996 Roberto Gremmo issued a self-published volume on *Bandiera Rossa*; having agreed to host a presentation of the book the *Museo Storico della Liberazione* pulled their permission on the same day as the planned talk. The reasons given for the cancellation were straightforwardly political, with the museum's curators accusing him of failing to represent the 'unitary' character of the Resistance.

A pacification process at the end of the war sought to leave behind past antagonisms, closing the Fascist 'parenthesis' in Italian history.<sup>29</sup> Bracketing off the *ventennio* meant forgetting the records of thousands of judges, army officers and party hierarchs now serving the Republic, and indeed many of the intellectuals flooding into the PCI. It meant forgetting that the prime minister who led Italy's first 'government of national unity' had in the early 1920s so appeased the rising Blackshirts that Antonio Gramsci could term him 'the true organiser of Italian Fascism'.<sup>30</sup> It meant forgetting that the head of the *Pubblica Sicurezza* attending the first commemoration of the Fosse Ardeatine massacre had spent two decades hunting down 'subversives'. And it meant forgetting that a 'martyr' like Tigrino Sabatini had not 'fallen for his country', but died fighting in a movement that stridently opposed the idea of a common national interest.

It was in these circumstances that the monument erected in 1949 displayed Sabatini's final appeal to historical memory. The *tricolore*-hued memorial ignored this worker's own politics as it recruited him to a litany of national heroes. With the history of conflict thus replaced with bland patriotic mythology, figures of radically opposite intent could try and claim his memory as their own. Visiting the Fosse Ardeatine six decades later, Gianni Alemanno offered but the most egregious example of this, as he declared 'Resistance values' 'the property of all Italians'. Asserting his mainstream credentials with a hollow tribute to the Resistance, Rome's new mayor had brought the trivialisation of this history full-circle. Recognition of Sabatini's 'values' did not long survive his comrades' defeat. With the collapse of the 'First Republic', the same fate now befell the parties of the constitutional arch.

## 1.2. The PCI's partisan legends

Doubtless the leading proponent of the constitutional-arch narrative in postwar years was the PCI, which closely identified with its formative Resistance

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<sup>29</sup> Benedetto Croce's notion of the *ventennio* as an aberration from the normal path of liberal progress is rather ironic given his own changeable attitudes, actively supporting Mussolini's rise to power in 1922 before turning to the opposition and co-authoring an anti-fascist intellectuals' manifesto in 1925. Even after the fall of Fascism, he quixotically supported the monarchy in the 1946 institutional referendum. His status as a leader of anti-fascism was little-recognised by the MCD'I, whose postwar newspaper *L'Idea comunista* sharply ridiculed his 'intellectual masturbation' ('Basta con questa "Croce"!', 30.9.1945).

<sup>30</sup> 'Bonomi', *l'Ordine Nuovo*, 5.7.1921.

experience. Bearing an imposing popular-culture and intellectual influence,<sup>31</sup> its evolving self-depiction heavily shaped mainstream portrayals of the Resistance even after its 1991 demise. The PCI's concern to defend the Resistance legacy was evident from the start of the Cold War, as a party countering anti-communist attacks on its patriotism emphasised its role in building a national cause that united all classes. Defending the centrality of 'Resistance values' to Italy's republican institutions, the Party painted the anti-fascist struggle in duly politically-correct terms, repudiating its more sectarian and maximalist aspects in favour of democratic and 'national-spirited' sentiments. Rebutting accusations that it was a tool of Russian foreign policy, from the mid-1950s the PCI also moved to airbrush its past of a now-embarrassing Stalinism.<sup>32</sup>

The Party's patriotic-hued presentation of the Resistance was delimited by the boundaries of its so-called Gramscian strategy. In this perspective, the working class (as 'represented' by the PCI) would accrue a hegemonic role in national life by leading broad progressive movements, identifying its cause with the Italian people rather than sharply asserting its 'particularist' class interests. If this approach nominally derived from Gramsci, it was more the PCI's Resistance strategy that shaped its framing of the late Sardinian's writings. This was evident in Togliatti's 1949 edition of the *Prison Notebooks*, portraying Gramsci as a 'great Italian' while downplaying elements of his outlook that stressed grassroots democracy and working-class autonomy from bourgeois politics. This 'nationalised' Gramscianism coloured Resistance histories by Party leaders like Luigi Longo, Pietro Secchia and Giorgio Amendola, as well as more 'scientific' studies by Party-loyalist scholars such as Roberto Battaglia<sup>33</sup> and Paolo Spriano.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ajello 1997a and 1997b offer a general study of the PCI's influence among intellectuals. Gundle 2000 is a fine study of relationship with popular culture and the challenge to this from across the Atlantic.

<sup>32</sup> Ajello 1997a, Zaslavsky 2004.

<sup>33</sup> As Cooke (2011, p. 54) aptly notes, citing another former Actionist comrade of Battaglia's, this book both reflected his past loyalty and the new one he was taking on. Stigmatising the dissident Left in the manner Battaglia does was a way of asserting his PCI allegiance, even as he was critical of aspects of his new Party's record.

<sup>34</sup> These two authors, who respectively produced the standard works on PCI history and the Resistance of their time, were themselves both veterans of the CLN-attached *Giustizia e Libertà* partisan units.

As unbroken Christian-Democratic rule suggested that the ‘Italian road to socialism’ had reached a dead end, by the 1960s the PCI came under fire from a burgeoning New Left.<sup>35</sup> The impasse fed the rise of extra-parliamentary and even armed-struggle movements, frontally clashing with the Italian state.<sup>36</sup> Party historians responded by contrasting the PCI’s wartime successes with the record of Greece’s KKE, whose insurrectionary bid for power had led it into an unwinnable civil war.<sup>37</sup> Far from giving ground to these leftist critics, 1970s PCI leader Enrico Berlinguer emphasised the CLN-era roots of his ‘historic compromise’, seeking the alliance with the Christian-Democrats that could return his party to government. Remaining a communist and not social-democratic party even after Berlinguer’s death, it was the collapse of the Eastern Bloc that finally prompted the PCI’s liquidation into the ‘Democratic Party of the Left’. With its heirs now won to the political wisdom of Messrs Blair and Clinton, the Gramscian-Togliattian tradition was itself quietly buried.<sup>38</sup>

The fall of the West’s largest Communist Party also dissolved the internal solidarity of its great Christian-Democratic rival, and the ensuing breakdown of the postwar order drove a surge of revisionist narratives.<sup>39</sup> Lucio Magri lamented

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<sup>35</sup> As Cesare Bermanni notes, the so-called ‘movements of ‘68’ had their forebears in the revolt against prime minister Fernando Tambroni’s 1960 attempt to lift the *cordon sanitaire* against the fascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano*, with his unstable Christian-Democratic government relying on its support in parliament. Tambroni ultimately backtracked in the face of rioting and armed demonstrations: see Bermanni 1997, and also Panvini 2014 on the effect on far-Right culture.

<sup>36</sup> For classic studies of this period see Lumley 1990 and Wright 2017. Wright 1998 offers a unique account of new Left historiography of the Resistance.

<sup>37</sup> Chapter XVI of Spriano 1975 is entirely devoted to this question. It amply demonstrates the British role in suppressing the Greek communists and the differences between KKE and PCI strategy. More difficult to find is any evidence that events in Greece themselves determined PCI leaders’ decisions, more than offering a post facto justification of the Salerno Turn once the scale of the KKE’s defeat was clear. Spriano refers obliquely to Togliatti’s reference to the ‘Greek case’ at a 7 April 1945 PCI national council meeting, which is also cited by Agosti 2008, p. 162. The PCI leader here referred to the dangers of a ‘Greek outcome’, warning of the dangers of ‘a violent clash, an armed conflict between the armed forces of the anti-fascist front and the forces of the old police and the army led by anti-democratic elements’. See also the references to the Italian Resistance and the ‘Greek scenario’ in Sereni 1971, his piece in *Critica marxista* III/2, and the response in issue III/4 by Lelio Basso. On the KKE and the Greek Resistance see Eudes 2010 and Fontaine 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Liguori 2009 is a particularly useful account of its collapse.

<sup>39</sup> If many of these ‘revisionist’ studies were of a hard-Right or at least anti-communist bent – such as the works of Giampaolo Pansa, largely devoted to identifying spectacular ‘crimes’ committed by partisans – such analyses lie beyond the scope of our study.



that the fall of a PCI now deemed a mere ‘fifth column for Moscow’<sup>40</sup> and the scorn heaped on ‘First Republic’ more generally had fed an unreflective counter-tendency ‘to portray the Resistance as a spontaneous, undifferentiated popular epic’, free of such connotations.<sup>41</sup> Yet even this postmodern turn only repackaged a mythology that had long airbrushed the Resistance of its more divisive aspects. The clear standout work in this period was Claudio Pavone’s *A Civil War*,<sup>42</sup> notable as a left-wing historian’s<sup>43</sup> study of ‘morality in the Resistance’ that deeply reflected on partisans’ motives as well as those of their Fascist opponents. Its enthusiastic reception reflected this scholar’s own particular merits, but also a climate in which the old parties could no longer impose their narrative.

For the upholders of the PCI’s Gramscian-Togliattian tradition, this had long meant skating over the class-war militancy and cult of Stalin rampant throughout wartime communist ranks. Seeking to identify the Resistance with a patriotic interest and not any ‘class-particularist’ agenda,<sup>44</sup> most historians attached to the PCI crudely wrote out of existence the communists who did not join the CLN alliance. Roberto Battaglia’s totemic 1953 *Storia della Resistenza italiana* devoted just one line to the ‘anarchoid and Trotskyist [sic!] *Bandiera Rossa*’;<sup>45</sup> while Giorgio Amendola’s introduction to 1965’s *Il sole è sorto a Roma* recognised that ‘it is impossible to write the history of the Roman Resistance without an objective study of *Bandiera Rossa*’s activity’,<sup>46</sup> this ANPI-sponsored<sup>47</sup> volume like Piscitelli’s 1967 *Storia della Resistenza romana* and De Simone’s 1994 *Roma città prigioniera* made no reference to its politics.<sup>48</sup> These studies simply took for granted the PCI’s

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<sup>40</sup> Magri 2012, p. 45.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> In his work Pavone outlines three parallel class, civil and national wars in 1943–45, but the publisher chose the name *A Civil War* over the author’s own preferred title *Essay on Morality in the Resistance* in order to draw attention to his book’s controversial content. Historically only far-Right accounts seeking to relativise the two sides of the conflict had described the Resistance as a ‘civil war’, though Pavone’s study did go some way toward weakening this association.

<sup>43</sup> As a young man Pavone had in fact been active in the liberal-socialist Resistance in Milan.

<sup>44</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>45</sup> Battaglia 1964, p. 202.

<sup>46</sup> ANPI 1965, p. xiv.

<sup>47</sup> *Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d’Italia*, the country’s main Resistance veterans’ organisation.

<sup>48</sup> ANPI 1965, Piscitelli 1967, De Simone 1994.

conception of class struggle in terms of industrial workers' mobilisation in the national, anti-Nazi cause.

A study of the Roman dissidents' history is particularly useful for correcting this perspective. These militants strongly rejected the CLN's politics of 'national unity', even before Togliatti's 'Salerno Turn' led his party into Badoglio's cabinet.<sup>49</sup> Like dissident currents around Italy, the MCd'I denied that class-collaboration could be a first step on the road to socialism: for this Roman-centred movement as for Turin's *Stella Rossa*<sup>50</sup> or Naples's 'Red' CGL union,<sup>51</sup> Togliatti's talk of national unity meant not his party imposing a proletarian stamp on this coalition,<sup>52</sup> but rather the taming of class struggle to suit the Party's bourgeois and institutional allies. While historians have long debated the real motives for Togliatti's pact with Badoglio, it is striking how little this shift surprised dissident-Marxists at the time. Many of these militants had detected the logic of such a turn ever since summer 1943.<sup>53</sup> For those who saw this cross-class coalition as opposed to the basic principles of 'class politics', the PCI's direction of travel was clear.

By war's end cadres had largely succeeded in marginalising such dissent, but by the 1960s the Party again faced sharp criticism of its Resistance strategy.<sup>54</sup> The view that the PCI had missed a historic opportunity gained traction on the '68-era extra-parliamentary Left, which accused Togliatti of sacrificing the 'Red Resistance' on

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<sup>49</sup> See Chapter Seven.

<sup>50</sup> For a specific study on this movement see Lambert 1979, and the relevant section in Peregalli 1991. It is also usefully discussed in Luraghi 1958. Turin PCI organiser Arturo Colombi's papers at Turin's Istoretto (IPR/AC), as well as the records of the *Il Lavoratore* group in the Alto Milanese (ISEC/V) are useful sources for any study of this movement; Lambert appears not to have consulted these latter.

<sup>51</sup> See Chapter Seven. On this movement see Giliani 2014, and the relevant section in Peregalli 1991.

<sup>52</sup> The MCd'I press never used the concept of 'hegemony' but this was a key element of the PCI leadership's thinking, having been a central theme of Antonio Gramsci's *Quaderni del Carcere* (written 1929–35 but first published in 1949, as abridged by Togliatti). In 1965 the libertarian socialist Lelio Basso produced a highly insightful critique of the PCI Resistance strategy, explaining that 'notwithstanding the working-class movement's preponderance in the Resistance in terms of its leading organisational role, it was our opponents who managed to hegemonise it politically' (Basso 1965, p. 19). On Basso's Milan Resistance group, the *Fronte Proletario Rivoluzionario*, and its links to the MCd'I, see Chapter Three.

<sup>53</sup> Note e.g. the articles 'In linea' and 'Perchè collaborare' in the 5 October 1943 first issue of *Bandiera Rossa*: these pieces not only asserted that the CLN 'national unity' policy effectively tied the workers' parties to Badoglio, but backdated this collaboration to the whole period since the 25 July coup d'état.

<sup>54</sup> On the 'continuity of state', see Bermani 1997.

the altar of national unity.<sup>55</sup> In 1960, militants protesting a government dependent on far-Right parliamentary backing raised the rallying-cry 'the Resistance continues'; the following decade saw armed groups explicitly imitate the PCI partisan units of the previous generation, amidst the tragic political violence of Italy's 'Years of Lead'.<sup>56</sup> Certainly, the idea of recuperating a Resistance militancy channelled into institutional compromise satisfied the '68 Left's search for the 'original sin' of PCI conservatism. Yet as a historical narrative, it tended to overlook the record of those wartime communists who had tried, in vain, to advance a strategy different to Togliatti's.<sup>57</sup>

Seeking to expose 'Stalinist betrayals' of decades past, these critiques tended to focus on the decisions of PCI leaders rather than partisans themselves. Evading the question of why the 'betrayed' did not organise around alternative strategies, such accounts rarely confronted the limits of the dissident movements that did emerge. A partial exception was journalist Silverio Corvisieri's 1967 essay *Bandiera Rossa nella Resistenza romana*. Making often powerful criticisms of the PCI's cavalier approach to historical truth, the autonomist's search for a counter-narrative however led him to skate over the dissidents' own Stalinist mores, and the reasons for their political defeat. This also reflected a broader problem facing any student of wartime Italian communism. While Party cadres produced hundreds of volumes of Resistance memoir and history, dissident movements left far more fragmentary sources, offering no similarly organised picture. For the '68 Left it was more politically productive to critique PCI leaders' own narrative than to piece together the history of short-lived dissident milieux.

Even insofar as dissidents' archives offer a different kind of political history, we should also question exactly what – and whom – their texts represent. Two decades

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<sup>55</sup> See e.g. Quazza 1966; Del Carria 1970.

<sup>56</sup> The original 'GAP' set up by the PCI during the armed struggle were in fact called the *Gruppi d'Azione Patriotica*, in conformity with the Party's 'national-unity' strategy, whereas Feltrinelli's Guevarist militants replaced the word 'patriotic' with 'partisan'.

<sup>57</sup> Also telling was the centrality to this debate of heretical PCI grandee Pietro Secchia. If many on the '68 Left were excited to hear Secchia speculate at a quarter-century's distance that that the Party might have achieved more in the Resistance, they seem to have taken less interest in the dissident-Marxist currents that a younger Secchia had grimly smeared as 'the Gestapo's mask in communist ranks', in a November 1943 catechism for the Party's Milan journal – see his grotesque 'Il sinistrismo: la maschera della Gestapo', *La Nostra Lotta*, November 1943.

of Fascism strongly militated against working-class Italians being able to understand the world and disseminate their ideas. Even as Fascism's collapse allowed a flowering of revolutionary movements, clandestine conditions aggravated Leninist currents' tendency to concentrate authority in the hands of small groups of cadres. Such factors make it difficult to gain a representative picture of grassroots communists' views. Police sources often provide useful perspective on their activity, but also bear a strong tendency to identify 'ringleaders' and chains of command with popular mobilisation. It is clear that these Roman militants sympathised with ration-starved women storming bakeries and the displaced families squatting abandoned buildings. It is rather more difficult to establish how far these latter, or even the movement's own recruits, understood their activity in terms of its explicit political project.

The militants at the centre of our study were an unusually radicalised minority, expanding their political horizons even as they rallied others under their banner. Alessandro Portelli quite rightly doubts that the average partisan, perhaps semi-literate and in his<sup>58</sup> early twenties, really opted for one unit over another after comparing their different manifestos.<sup>59</sup> A similar critique of politicised readings of partisan identity also appears in the work of Santo Peli,<sup>60</sup> who likewise draws focus toward the everyday concerns and impulsive aspirations that shaped Italians' Resistance activity. However, any sweeping claim of 'mass political illiteracy'<sup>61</sup> represents a certain blindness to the militants who did look beyond their particular situations, and the determination of some of the humblest Italians to educate themselves politically. If disbanded soldiers formed a clandestine 'communist school' at Grotta Rossa in autumn 1943, and young draft-resisters maintained armed communist cells even after Liberation, clearly theirs became a 'partisan' engagement even in the most politicised sense.

Drawing at length on handwritten polemics, clandestine bulletins and newspapers by forgotten authors, our study focuses precisely on the autodidact Marxism that developed in this milieu. In this sense it departs from that trend of Italian social history which prefers to detach popular behaviours from more expressly political

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<sup>58</sup> Around ninety percent of recognised partisans were men.

<sup>59</sup> E.g. Portelli 2003, pp. 82–3, 122.

<sup>60</sup> Peli 2006.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

organisation. In looking beyond the history of party-political identification, studies of Resistance memory and class identities have made important contributions to our understanding of Italian social history.<sup>62</sup> Yet this also runs the risk of confirming the subaltern in their position as anonymous masses, made historically important by force of numbers rather than dignified by their ideas.<sup>63</sup> Ironically, this can even mean belittling working-class people's more conventionally political horizons, excluding them from an intellectual world reserved to professional politicians and party cadres. Only integrating social history with the tools of political history can we properly investigate the intellectual life of such circles.

Studying this autodidact Marxism is also key to understanding the strands of communism that were cut off by Togliatti's *partito nuovo*. In these militants' writings we uncover ideas widely apparent in contemporary sources yet absent from the Italian Marxist canon. How many scholars know that one of Rome's leading partisan commanders, a carpenter who left school aged 13,<sup>64</sup> termed the CLN the 'National Front for the Salvation of Institutions'?<sup>65</sup> That one electrician wrote polemics against industrial reconstruction, arguing that Italy should become the 'garden of a Soviet Europe'?<sup>66</sup> That a little-known graphic designer maintained that Wehrmacht soldiers were potential 'class brothers' even after SS officers massacred dozens of his comrades - or that some German conscripts even joined partisan ranks?<sup>67</sup> The Italian Marxist canon venerates Antonio Gramsci's democratic-spirited sentiment that 'all men are philosophers'<sup>68</sup> - strange, then, that

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<sup>62</sup> Notably Bermani 1997; Passerini 2009 and 1996.

<sup>63</sup> Particularly interesting is the reflection on the theme of 'representativeness' in Jacques Rancière's preface to his *Proletarian Nights* (Rancière 2012). Far from suggesting that the worker-writing at the centre of his study is 'representative' of the general working class, he instead defends his differentness from any tendency to idealise the masses and their subaltern culture before contact with politics. For such a view is to police the boundaries of who has the right to practice philosophy; in its own way, it maintains the view that 'people like that are the more to be admired the more they adhere strictly to their collective identity, ... becom[ing] suspect, indeed, the moment they want to live as anything other than legions and legionaries, when they demand that individual wanderlust which is the monopoly of "petty-bourgeois" egoism or the illusion of the "ideologist"'.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Mucci describes his youth in an oral history project carried out by Alessandro Portelli: CGB/FAP/Mucci.

<sup>65</sup> 'Carte in Tavola', *Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie*, 27.7.1944.

<sup>66</sup> Poce 1947.

<sup>67</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>68</sup> Gramsci insightfully establishes a distinction between the function of philosophy, inherent to human experience, and those whose social role it is to be philosophers. He highlights that the room for 'specialism' in this field is particularly limited: 'The principle

so few historians contemplate the ‘organic intellectuals’ of the Roman proletariat who did not happen to share PCI leaders’ ‘Gramscian’ politics.

### 1.3. From underground to dissent

This study frames the Roman dissidents’ history as part of a wider battle to shape Italian communism. This conflict involved far-reaching disputes over questions as diverse as military tactics, party organisation, and even forecasts on Stalin’s intentions for postwar Europe. A constant theme of this study is the way in which these polemical concerns shaped, and were shaped by, the Resistance mobilisation itself. Without doubt, these autodidacts’ analyses will frequently strike today’s reader as arcane or founded on glaring misconceptions; often their reasoning imitated the quirks of the few books or pamphlets that they had to hand, hidden in mattresses and chicken coops across Mussolini’s rule. Yet the fact that their analyses are so fragmentary and rough-edged itself has much to tell us about wartime Italian communism. Far from reciting a catechism handed down from Stalin, or even renowned oppositionists like Leon Trotsky or Amadeo Bordiga, their politics expressed a communist culture that had for two decades developed largely isolated from the international Left.

In this sense, their idiosyncrasies reflect a peculiarity of Italian communist history. While the Comintern ‘Bolshevised’ all its national sections over the 1920s, transforming them into near-monoliths subordinate to Moscow’s line, in Italy this process was stunted by Fascist repression.<sup>69</sup> At the moment of its 1926 demise the Party remained a composite force, with a mounting faction-fight between Amadeo Bordiga and Antonio Gramsci cut short before any final split could take place. Bolshevisation continued apace in the Paris-based *centro estero*, as cadres forced into French exile expelled Bordiga and his allies for their alleged ‘Trotskyism’.<sup>70</sup>

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must first be established that all men are “philosophers” that is, that between the professional or “technical” philosophers and the rest of mankind, the difference is not one of “quality” but only of “quantity”’. Gramsci 1971, p. 347

<sup>69</sup> Secchia 1970 attempts to portray an ongoing Party activity into the 1930s. Yet it was impossible to create a ‘Bolshevised’ organisation without there being a continuous clandestine leadership in Italy. Only in 1941 was such a *centro interno* formed.

<sup>70</sup> A term of abuse in the interwar Comintern, applied to dissidents of all kinds regardless of their particular criticism of the Party line, or their association (or lack thereof) with Leon Trotsky. A means of enforcing party discipline, the ‘Trotskyist’ charge implied that the dissident’s ‘real’ reason for opposing the Party line was support for fascist conspiracies to undermine the USSR (as were absurdly imputed to Trotsky), all the more dangerous

This but was the deed of a phantom apparatus, unable to organise on home soil or even to distribute a clandestine press. Despite its efforts to purge its prison and exile organisations of dissidents, it never managed to forge a Bolshevised Communist Party on the peninsula. With those militants who remained 'at liberty' in Italy cut off from the Comintern throughout the 1930s, PCI cadres instead had to impose their new line during the Resistance itself.

Impeding this 'Bolshevisation' process was an underground foreign to the *centro estero* and its popular-front policy. 'National' communism came to Italy from the outside, stemming not from the underground but from Stalin's concern to isolate Nazi Germany. The 1935 Comintern Congress compelled all Communist Parties to subordinate their policy to building cross-class, national alliances against Hitler. Exiles like Togliatti and Luigi Longo helped build such coalitions in France and Spain, but had almost no opportunity to do so in Fascist Italy itself.<sup>71</sup> In advocating a national front<sup>72</sup> with liberals and conservatives upon their return in 1943–44, they thus met with the resistance of militants inexperienced in such alliances and bemused by the Party's newfound moderation. While for French communists the wartime alliance policy marked the resumption of the 1935–39 People's Front, Italian-based militants never previously drilled in Comintern discipline proved far less prepared to bend to this 'class-collaborationist' line – or the cadres advocating it – than were their PCF confrères.<sup>73</sup>

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because of their leftist 'disguise'. In reality, the genuinely 'Trotskyist' (Left Opposition/Fourth International) tradition was weaker in Italy even than other Western European countries, given not only the strong presence of other autochthonous dissident currents, but also the fact that the PCd'I was crushed by Fascism before the Stalin-Trotsky clash had reached its culmination. For works on Italian Trotskyism and the Stalinist hounding of dissidents see Francescangeli 2005, and *Revolutionary History* Vol. 5, No. 4.

<sup>71</sup> However, the Togliattians certainly did try to exploit splits in the ruling class, through work in Fascist student organisations: see section 2.2.

<sup>72</sup> Barth Urban 1986 sharply counterposes the 'national' and 'popular' front, emphasising the progressive social goals of this latter. It would be more accurate to point to the different sensibilities that could be contained within a popular-frontist vision, reflecting its emergence in the context of rising Nazi power. It was at once a means of uniting subaltern layers not reducible to the working class, and a means of denying the patriotism of Nazi-collaborationist elements of domestic ruling classes. It asserted the radical elements of national traditions while also serving as the basis for alliance with even conservative interests opposed to Nazi Germany's rising power.

<sup>73</sup> A point made by Barth Urban 1986.

For this reason, our study is deeply rooted in what Luigi Cortesi has called a 'proletarian-communist'<sup>74</sup> underground – an antagonistic subculture perpetuated by veteran worker-militants and a more amorphous 'subversive' milieu. Unable to create formal organisations until deep into Fascism's war-crisis, this subculture survived in isolation from Party structures across the 1920s-1930s, sustaining militants' faith in the 'sun of the future' even when open revolt was impossible. As Giorgio Amendola later recalled, this enduring underground impeded returning *centro estero* cadres' efforts to refound Italian communism on a more gradualist, 'national' basis, with 'almost all the groups with which the [Party] Centre entered into contact [in 1941–42] proving sectarian and extremist in orientation, and thus motivated neither to understand nor accept its political initiatives'.<sup>75</sup> Even unorganised expressions of dissent posed problems to cadres' authority, from the reticence of 'old comrades [who had] stuck firm to sectarian positions across long years of repression'<sup>76</sup> to the sudden influx of 'over-enthusiastic' youth 'knocking on the door of the Party' in hope of 'doing like they did in Russia'.<sup>77</sup>

While Party leaders were Stalinist in training, most of the organised opposition they faced was itself imbued with an enthusiasm for the USSR. <sup>78</sup> The cult of Stalin could even feed such dissent. PCI cadres attempted to tar their rivals by association with Leon Trotsky, the ultimate anti-hero of the Comintern imaginary. Yet the largest dissident movement proclaimed its own 'distinctly philo-Soviet character', claiming to uphold 'Marx and Engels's theory, as realised by Lenin and Stalin',<sup>79</sup> and even named its youth wing *COBA* in homage to Stalin's teenage nickname.<sup>80</sup> Lacking direct ties to Moscow, it was precisely its militants' ignorance of the

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<sup>74</sup> Cortesi uses both the terms 'spontaneous' and 'proletarian' communism interchangeably. This use of the word 'spontaneous' is problematic in defining 'spontaneity' only negatively, i.e. in terms of the absence of Party cadres, thus implicitly relegating other worker-militants' political ideas to a more instinctive or automatic level of consciousness. Considering that most of the originators of clandestine groups in the war years had past experience of party and trade-union militancy, and given their evident focus on reading and discussing Marxian texts, this seems like too sweeping a dismissal of their political intelligence.

<sup>75</sup> Amendola 1973, p. 136.

<sup>76</sup> 'Lettera di Luca alla direzione', 25.1.1944, IPR/AC/3.

<sup>77</sup> PCI Federazione Laziale, Comitato direttivo federale, 'Rapporto politico', late November 1943: APC/7/2/14, p. 4.

<sup>78</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>79</sup> 'In linea', *BR*, 5.10.1943.

<sup>80</sup> See Chilanti 1996.



Kremlin's role in determining PCI strategy that allowed them to champion Stalin as bearer of the revolutionary traditions of 1917 while condemning Togliatti as a mere 'opportunist'. Little-aware of Moscow's real political initiatives, its militants instead used the distant 'workers' fatherland' as a cipher for their own projections. Combined with an unfavourable view of Togliattian gradualism, such idolisation of the USSR made 'doing like in Russia' the watchword of an idiosyncratic dissident Stalinism.

Fed by Red Army successes on the Eastern Front, the cult of Stalin peaked at the very moment that Italian communism was itself most fluid and undisciplined. Everywhere in Europe, long-defeated communists felt that history was turning in their direction; such euphoria was particularly strong in an Italy where 'communist consciousness was being reborn'<sup>81</sup> after twenty years of Fascism. Wartime communist ranks were heavily coloured by triumphalism, millenarianism, and often a sectarianism borne of the belief that the 'long-awaited moment'<sup>82</sup> of socialist transformation was now at hand. Such illusions even affected the PCI's own members: organisers in Rome and Turin each complained to superiors that they were struggling to convince local branches that 'national unity' was no mere 'ruse' before the Party 'jettisoned its bourgeois partners and seized power'.<sup>83</sup> Where PCI leaders proclaimed the Party's 'democratic' and 'patriotic' credentials, the 'spirit of separation' that drove its foundation in 1921 lived on in militants' continued belief in Italy's Soviet future.

Animated by similar enthusiasms, the MCD'I fancied itself the bearer of a destiny foretold not only by Soviet advances but also the Leninist creed of 'turning imperialist war into civil war'. It proclaimed that the conflict would 'inevitably' produce opportunities like the one that had been 'missed'<sup>84</sup> in the *biennio rosso* at the end of World War I.<sup>85</sup> If this taxonomy of war and revolution was based on analogies with Bolshevik experience more than more contemporary realities, it was not limited to these militants alone. On the day that the Wehrmacht invaded

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Behan 1987.

<sup>83</sup> A phrase used in 'Lettera di Luca alla direzione', 25.1.1944, IPR/AC/3. On this sentiment in Rome, see 'Rapporto sulla 2° zona', December 1943, FGAN/87/262-70. On this idea of *doppiezza*, see section 7.6 as well as Di Loreto 1991.

<sup>84</sup> 'Orizzonte rivoluzionario', BR, 22.10.1943.

<sup>85</sup> The 'two red years' of strikes and factory and land occupations, 1919 to 1920.

Poland, the Yugoslav Communist Milovan Djilas told his alarmed comrade that past imperialist conflicts were to thank for the 1871 Paris Commune, the *soviets* of 1905 and the October Revolution.<sup>86</sup> Even the Nazi-Soviet Pact, so offensive to anti-fascist fellow travellers, met with other, more positive reactions on Italy's communist underground: bulletins spoke excitedly of the 'Western imperialisms' destroying each other in an attritional stalemate before the Soviet 'bulldozer'<sup>87</sup> moved in to 'Bolshevisé' Europe.

In the West such predictions proved unrealistic. Even an Italy beset by deep military and social crises only superficially resembled the Russia of a quarter-century previously. The Western Allies were in fact taking decisive measures to stabilise European capitalism, and the fall of Fascism heralded not the 'final crisis of capitalism' but its democratic renovation. This meant elements of institutional continuity, genuine reforms, and an international context blocking more fundamental social change. Yet while the Roman dissidents were merely dogmatic in their Leninist definition of Fascism as the 'last stage of bourgeois dictatorship, they also showed greater insight when they looked beyond this passive-teleological view of history. More than any other Resistance force, they sharply delineated the political competition among the anti-fascists seeking to impose their stamp on a new Italy. Militarily speaking, partisans played a small auxiliary role in the Allied liberation of Italy. Yet the clashes of this period decisively shaped the country's new democratic politics.

In this sense, Togliatti's *partito nuovo* was the great winner of the Resistance. It played a leading role in the armed struggle, building a mass, legal Communist Party in a Western country. An organisation of a few tens of thousands during Fascism's rise and for two decades surviving only as a fraternity of prisoners and exiles, by the end of the 1940s the PCI was the second party of Italian democracy, with some two million members. Not only the size of this *partito nuovo* differentiated it from the Communist Party founded at Livorno in 1921. The Togliattians had replaced Amadeo Bordiga's intransigent PCd'I of old with a truly 'mass party', shaped by a new generation of members and leaders; a 'Popular-

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<sup>86</sup> Dedijer 1961, p. 269.

<sup>87</sup> See the four bulletins conserved in ACS/PS/1942/65, principally *Bollettino* no. 5, 4.11.1939, p. 2, 'Francia'.

Front' beast built on the Comintern model, proudly vaunting its democratic and patriotic values even as it built its own organisation on the most hierarchical lines. With even its reforming 'Gramscian' hues heavily filtered through its leaders' long apprenticeship in Stalin's Comintern, this was a party unlike anything previously existing on Italian soil.

Togliatti's *partito nuovo* would become near-synonymous with Italian Marxism in the postwar period, and the PCI a structuring element of Italy's new republican order. Yet by no means were the Party cadres of the Resistance years simply colonising virgin territory. All over Europe during the Second World War, Communist Parties arose from clandestinity to fight Nazism, but nowhere as in Italy had an underground survived so long cut-off from Party organisation, and nowhere else did dissident movements so doggedly challenge the authority of 'official' Party leaders.<sup>88</sup> The creation of a *partito nuovo* meant not only the channelling of a scattered underground into more organised structures, but the suppression of historic traditions of *sovversivismo*, anti-statism and class autonomy that once again raised their head in 1943–45. Ignoring this wartime battle over the fate of Italian communism, mountains of works of Resistance history have overlooked a vital turning-point in the development of the Left. Our study's aim is to highlight what they have obscured.

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<sup>88</sup> The most evident exception would be Georges Guingouin, a partisan leader in the Limousin who came into conflict with PCF leaders. This is a case where the Resistance mobilisation itself drew militants into conflict with the Party, as opposed to pre-existing political divisions in the manner of Trotskyist or Left-Communist dissent against the Communist Parties. Guingouin would after his expulsion from the PCF adhere to Titoite positions, and, as Grenard 2014 shows, create a dissident 'back-story' for himself, dating back to the start of the war. There was also a maximalist opposition in some sections of the Budapest KMP, led by Démeny Pál. Different were the cases of Greece's KKE and Yugoslavia's KPJ, where the Party apparatus itself came into conflict with Moscow as a result of their more aggressive Resistance strategies.

## Chapter Two

**'You just wait till Stalin gets here...'** communist conspiracies in Rome, 1939–42

*The resurrection of communist consciousness in Italy is the privilege of no man. The indomitable will of the few who had the courage to profess their own faith under Fascist tyranny, the undeniable triumph of the Soviet experience, the destruction of the Fascist bourgeoisie's capacities to govern, and the need to see with our own eyes the end of the causes of this barbarism, the direct consequence of the whole organisation of global capitalism; all this determined the formation of groups of the faithful, at first isolated, then ever more compact, in all Italy.*

MCd'I programme, 'The Higher Path'

On 27 February 1942, a brewer was arrested after his lodger's outburst in a butcher's shop bordering the Vatican. The previous afternoon, a Fascist functionary had witnessed a woman launching a volley of abuse at the régime-supporting proprietor: 'The brewer says we'll soon see the smile wiped off your face, when Stalin comes and sorts it all out!'<sup>1</sup> The Axis advance on the Eastern Front had already begun to falter, and clearly made an impression on certain Romans. Fortunately for the Fascist tripemonger, the Soviet generalissimo never made it to Italy. The soldiers who captured Rome in June 1944 came from the United States and Britain, and not the Soviet Union. These troops were, however, joined by an *Armata Rossa* of Romans' own creation:<sup>2</sup> a partisan militia in which this brewer himself fought.<sup>3</sup> Its name expressed a paradox: a 'Red Army' commanded neither by Moscow, nor even the Italian Communist Party.

Like most Roman communists in the Occupation period, the brewer belonged to a formation that militants created independently of PCI leaders. Their armed Resistance only began with the Wehrmacht invasion in September 1943, when PCI cadres were still returning from prison and exile. Yet a communist underground had already begun to reorganise at the very start of the war. In their attempt to

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<sup>1</sup> 27.2.1944 report in ACS/PS/1942/65/6.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Armata Rossa* 6.6.1944, 14.6.1944; Chapter Eight.

<sup>3</sup> ANPI/Database Partigiani.

create a 'new party', PCI cadres had to impose their leadership over movements that had already emerged separately. As Chapter Two demonstrates, in Rome this produced a sharp culture clash between older militants who represented the politics of the proletarian underground, and the young intellectuals linked to the PCI's exile organisation. Where the students led by Giorgio Amendola embraced this Party's patriotic anti-Nazism, the workers and artisans of independent circles remained intransigent and maximalist.

It was from such workers' circles that a *Movimento Comunista d'Italia* (MCd'I) emerged outside of the Party's control in summer 1943, as the largest formation of the Roman Resistance. Its programme boasted that its founders' had maintained their 'indomitable will' through the dark years, claiming the mantle of an unbroken tradition. In maintaining this 'faith', they had kept the communist idea alive even in isolation from exiled and jailed Party cadres. Fascism had cut them off from the Comintern, of whose activity they knew little. But life under the regime had also changed their own outlook, which did not stand still at the party line of the pre-Fascist years. Their marginalisation in Fascist society and the ruling class's unity with the regime had combined to harden them in their maximalist intransigence. Reacting against Fascism's demonisation of the USSR and dramatisation of the 'Bolshevik' threat to Italy, these dissidents also developed a fantastical mythology of Soviet socialism and Stalin personally.

What this created on the underground was a 'movement-Stalinism' distinct from the Party's own 'régime Stalinism'.<sup>4</sup> It venerated Stalin, without being bound by the discipline that Soviet policy imposed on the Communist Parties. Ignorant of Moscow's directives, these militants instead used the 'workers' fatherland' as a cipher onto which to project their own utopianism. This had messianic elements insofar as Red Army successes were read as a sign of the 'advent' of socialism. But as Fascism headed toward collapse, this triumphalism also fed new communist

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<sup>4</sup> I draw these terms from Renzo de Felice's counterposition of fascism as an organised régime and fascism as a movement in society. Note also MCd'I's own explanation of the distinction between Movement and Party amidst the reconstruction of Italian communism:

'We are for the moment called a Movement and not a Party, because we want the Party to emerge from the unanimously expressed will of all the Italian Movements that follow the same principles. If the workers who follow our Movement do so, because they are attracted by a doctrinal position they find more precise than another, this is not a privilege to boast about or a right to impose any pre-eminence': MCd'I 1944b, p. 4.

organisation. This was notably expressed in the creation of the *Scintilla* ['Spark'] group, and in June 1942 the first clandestine press in wartime Rome. Its laboriously produced clandestine bulletins – handwritten, copied and circulated among the underground – expressed these militants' desire to rebuild the Party upon their own initiative. Yet this brought conflict with the cadres who really were in contact with the exiled leadership.

### 2.1. The writing on the wall

For such organisation to emerge, 'subversives' needed a crisis in the regime. They drew confidence from the Axis's very first military setbacks. As the Blitz against London drew to its unsuccessful conclusion in May 1941, one state informant overheard lifelong communist Salvatore Tardioli advising customers in his Ariccia bar that 'if what the [Italian] radio said about the bombing-raids were true, not only would London be no more, but there wouldn't be a single hen left in all England'.<sup>5</sup> Tardioli was detained along with nineteen associates including veteran peasant-unionist Mario De Lisio, reported for proclaiming 'you shouldn't believe the papers ... communism keeps making headway and we'll soon see the day when it dominates Europe'.<sup>6</sup> January 1942 saw the arrest of twelve railworkers who frequented a hat-seller's in the district bordering Termini station. The owner revealed under interrogation that his friends Tolstoi Meloni and Adriano Dolfini had 'discussed the prospect of Soviet victory even in front of unknown customers, exalting communism and its advent in Italy'.<sup>7</sup>

These fraternities typified the subculture that captured police attention in these first two years of conflict: mostly male workers who discussed war news in shops and bars, and sometimes shared Marxist or anarchist literature, but without formal organisation.<sup>8</sup> Certainly, 'a long period of dispersion had spread fear, despair and mistrust in the old comrades' ranks',<sup>9</sup> dissuading them from contacting other *schedati* [police-registered 'subversives']. Future *Armata Rossa* commander Otello Terzani, a vintner in Rome after his 1935 return from *confino* [internal exile], recognised that while his bar 'was an ideal meeting-place for anti-fascists and

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<sup>5</sup> ACS/PS/1943/80/Ariccia, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> ACS/PS/1942/65/14.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. ACS/PS/1943/79/Bottiglieria del Gambero; ACS/PS/1943/79/Giuseppe Degni.

<sup>9</sup> From the biography of *Scintilla* co-founder Ezio Lombardi in MCd'I 1944c.

comrades old and new ... for the OVRA [secret police] it became like Dionysus's Ear'.<sup>10</sup> Yet for militants jailed or exiled for their beliefs, the war also offered hope of upheaval. Through the Great Depression and the invasion of Ethiopia, anti-fascists had longed for a crisis that could break Mussolini's grip over Italy. Military reverses in Greece and on the Eastern Front now struck a greater blow to the *Duce's* authority than anything that had gone before.

This led to a resurgence of communist propaganda, whose sources were rarely detected. In a November 1943 report a Lazio PCI organiser noted how despite the lack of Party organisation in 1941–42, isolated militants produced their own 'small-local propaganda ... with wall writings and the display of red flags on 1 May, 7 November and other revolutionary dates'.<sup>11</sup> Pro-Soviet sentiments dominated the 'subversive' propaganda recorded by Roman police. A bridge in Ariccia was emblazoned 'Death to Mussolini/We are hungry/Down with Germany/Long live Lenin and Communism';<sup>12</sup> a sign hung from the Colferro PNF headquarters declared 'Long live the workers - unite/Long live comrade Stalin and his allies/ Comrades, we oppressed poor shall soon be free/Death to the *Duce* and Fascism/Long live international Bolshevism'.<sup>13</sup> In Rome's city-centre, the quarter-century anniversary of the October Revolution saw Piazza Vittorio littered with black cards bearing the word 'Imminent!' under a hammer-and-sickle; a poem on the reverse read 'Hunger is raging/Our bones start to shake/Red flags will be flying/Not long to wait!'<sup>14</sup>

Strikingly evident in these slogans was the contrast between communists' exaltation of Soviet successes and their own lack of organisation. Epitomising such veneration of the 'workers' fatherland' was the injunction '*addavenì Baffone!*' ('Mr. Moustache has to come!'), implying that the forces commanded by Stalin could sweep across Europe and deliver socialism even in the absence of working-class rebellion.<sup>15</sup> Clearly expressing a surplus of messianism over measured prediction,

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<sup>10</sup> Terzani n.d., pp. 138–39. Dionysus's Ear was a mythical fourth-century-BC jail in a Sicilian cave, whose acoustics allowed for easy surveillance.

<sup>11</sup> PCI Federazione Laziale, Comitato direttivo federale, 'Rapporto politico', late November 1943: APC/7/2/14, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> ACS/PS/1942/65/Scritte sovversive/12.4.1942.

<sup>13</sup> ACS/PS/1942/65/Scritte sovversive/7.12.1942.

<sup>14</sup> ACS/PS/1942/65/Scritte sovversive/10.11.1942.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Pavone 1991, pp. 404–6.

this slogan was also symptomatic of subversives' reliance on outside powers undermining the Fascist régime on their behalf, translating the 'revolutionary defeatism' of old into blind faith in Red Army success. Tellingly, such wall writings appeared not only after the Soviets' February 1943 victory at Stalingrad indicated the likelihood of ultimate Allied victory, but even after much more partial victories like the January 1942 defence of Moscow – certainly a loss of face for Mussolini, but hardly reason to think that the Red Army was about to cross the Alps.

Such propaganda's 'defeatist' sentiments did not yet tally with efforts to organise collective action. A web of Fascist informants worked energetically to record all such signs of communist activity, but provided Rome police-chief Amadeo Palma with little cause for concern. His 30 June 1942 report to the Interior Ministry deemed the activity of 'subversives and anti-fascists ... absolutely minimal and irrelevant';<sup>16</sup> three months later it remained 'of little significance'.<sup>17</sup> Throughout his dossiers, Palma was rather more troubled by the 'threat to public order' created by bread riots in poorly-provisioned peripheral areas, with hundreds-strong crowds of women rowdily demanding their overdue rations<sup>18</sup> as well as the benefits due to conscripts' families. Although Palma's reports detailed substantial continuity in food supplies, the *questore* noted that a chaotic distribution system left Romans on fixed incomes, the poor and those in outlying districts particularly unable to purchase their daily bread.<sup>19</sup>

As Palma emphasised, these riots had no outwardly anti-fascist content. Yet the worsening food situation risked fuelling a wider breakdown of régime authority, driven by military defeats in North Africa and the Eastern Front. Entering the war in June 1940, Mussolini had promised swift successes. But as rations shrank and Italians grieved for ever-more dead sons, husbands and brothers, wartime sacrifice seemed like a permanent state of existence. The longer the struggle continued, the more Fascist leaders replaced talk of the fruits of conquest with demands for disciplined resilience. Interrogated by police in January 1942, Esquilino hat-shop conspirator Adriano Dolfini remarked that after the Battle of Moscow Hitler's initial boasts of easy successes over a 'feeble' USSR had given way to recognition

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<sup>16</sup> ACS/PS/1942/76/Roma/30.6.1942, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> ACS/PS/1942/76/Roma/30.9.1942, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> ACS/PS/1942/76/Roma/30.6.1942, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> ACS/PS/1942/76/Roma/30.9.1942, p. 5.



of 'the Soviet colossus's capacity to resist';<sup>20</sup> by September the police-chief worried that Romans had noticed the Führer 'asserting the invincibility of the Axis more energetically and categorically than the prospect of victory ... showing that the path to success is still long and wracked with grave difficulties'.<sup>21</sup>

While the women mounting these bread riots had not themselves needed formal political organisation, signs of régime turmoil did also fuel defeatist propaganda. In his December 1942 report, police-chief Palma could note 'a reawakening of anti-fascist activity in the capital, which can be explained by the fortunes of war operations and the persistent economic disruption resulting from the state of conflict'; there was 'even a consequential attempt to create an anti-fascist organisation among workers and intellectuals', leading to 27 arrests.<sup>22</sup> Yet the men who fell into police hands on 2 December 1942 did not merely define themselves as 'anti-fascists', out of mere opposition to the regime. As Palma explained in a personal memo to Mussolini, the arrestees were attempting to recreate the Communist Party banned since 1926. Indeed, 'deluded that the Régime will soon meet its end when, as they expect, the conflict results in Axis defeat', they were 'now organising and producing communist propaganda'.<sup>23</sup> These militants were not just waiting for Fascism's military defeat, but beginning to build a movement that could shape a new Italy.

Even as reverses on the Eastern Front and in North Africa undermined Mussolini's authority, 'subversive' circles still faced a powerful security apparatus. The Fascist effort to tear up the roots of communist organisation itself encouraged political divides. Not only did militants run the gauntlet of Fascist repression, but the disorder generated by police disruption of their communications also fuelled the emergence of competing centres of authority, each seeking to assert its own political leadership. The communists arrested in the final month of 1942 were members of two separate organisations, including both the 'workers' and intellectuals group' (linked to the *centro estero*, i.e. the exiled Communist Party leadership in Paris belonging to the Comintern) and the independent *Scintilla* circle. These groups' disagreements centred on such important questions as what

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<sup>20</sup> ACS/PS/1942/65/14.

<sup>21</sup> ACS/PS/1942/76/Roma/30.9.1942, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> ACS/PS/1942/76/Roma/31.12.1942, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> ACS/PS/F1/68/198/026198.

form revolutionary organisation should take, what the objectives of the anti-fascist struggle should be, and what communist strategy on Italian soil was most compatible with Soviet foreign policy.

The exchanges among these small Marxist fraternities did not initially translate into public activity, and were primarily conducted by way of face-to-face discussions rather than written documents. Yet the texts that they produced – some of which were seized by police, and thus preserved in state archives – have much to tell us about wartime communist culture and the political conditions in which the PCI now re-emerged. Though long ignored by a Resistance historiography short on analysis of wartime communists' political debates, these documents show us not only that these embryonic Marxist circles contemplated their long-term objectives right from the start of the conflict, but that even in autumn 1942 they anticipated the potential strategic consequences of clashes between the USSR and the Anglo-Americans. In the early war years these communists were not able to mobilise masses of Romans against the régime. But it was the clandestine political networks that they built in this period that provided them a platform to lead the armed struggle from September 1943 onward.

Reading these autodidacts' texts, we can see the lack of justification for Resistance historians' fixation on exiled anti-fascist leaders and silence over the activity of Roman communists who were not 'professional revolutionaries'. These militants' debates were crucial in laying the political basis for the Roman Resistance. They established the fundamental divide between those who believed in the immediate possibility of seizing power, and those who instead favoured a broad alliance strategy. As we shall see, militants' sense of strategic possibility was also shaped by differing views of the international context and the Allies' role in shaping the new Europe. This, in turn, reflected their connection to exile organisation and the militants who had spent the interwar period in contact with the Comintern. Seeking to contextualise the underground circles that emerged in the capital in 1939–42, we shall now briefly explain how the exiled Communist Party apparatus evolved across the Fascist period, leading up to its first clandestine cell in Rome during the Spanish Civil War.

## 2.2. The long journey through Fascism<sup>24</sup>

The Fascist régime's 1926 ban on the Communist Party of Italy (PCd'I) was highly effective, preventing it from maintaining clandestine structures on Italian soil. Since the Party's foundation in January 1921 its members were subject to deadly Blackshirt attacks, with an often-allied police repression only increasing as the King appointed Mussolini premier in October 1922. Liberals and conservatives in the new coalition hoped to 'domesticate' the Fascists within the establishment, but the 1924 crisis following the assassination of Socialist MP Giacomo Matteotti soon proved their naivety. The democratic parties' weak reaction to his murder emboldened PNF radicals, and the *Duce* soon proceeded to crush all opposition. The result was 1926's authoritarian 'Exceptional Security Law', forcing most communist cadres into prison or exile. With the PCd'I almost totally destroyed, a sharp separation emerged between exiled leaders – founding a Paris-based *centro estero* under the wing of the French Communist Party (PCF) – and thousands of communists remaining on home soil, cut off from these cadres and unable to engage in collective organisation.

The reduction of the PCd'I to a rootless exile apparatus facilitated its rapid subordination to Stalin's policy. This was most evident in the *svolta* ('turn') of 1930–32, as the *centro estero* attempted to send 'everyone back to Italy' to whip up rebellion. Taking little account of the régime's real strength, this policy earned no concrete results, with the average cadre crossing the Alps lasting just seventeen days before arrest.<sup>25</sup> The *centro estero*'s turn was motivated not by Italian underground initiative but the Comintern's 'Third-Period'<sup>26</sup> theory. This insisted that the Great Depression would 'inevitably' produce a revolutionary wave in the West to accompany the Soviet régime's own domestic consolidation. The PCd'I thus decried an imaginary united front of counter-revolutionaries stretching from

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<sup>24</sup> The title of Zangrandi 1962, on dissident-Fascist youth.

<sup>25</sup> Bertelli 1980, p. 41.

<sup>26</sup> In Stalin's schema, the 'First Period' was the revolutionary wave that coincided with the end of the First World War, with the creation of workers' councils across Russia, Germany and Hungary; meanwhile, the 'Second Period' of 1923–27 was a time of retreat for the European revolutionary movement and the consolidation of 'socialism in one country' in the USSR. Having defeated his domestic opponents, in 1928 Stalin announced the arrival of the 'Third Period' of renewed offensive, with the Communist Parties abroad now virulently attacking social democracy (or, in Third-Period argot, 'social fascism') as the main obstacles to revolution.

Fascists to the reformist socialists now labelled mere 'social-fascists'. This voluntarist stance ignored not only Mussolini's success in weathering the Wall Street Crash, but also their own earlier analysis of the divisions that had eased Fascism's road to power.<sup>27</sup>

In this sense, the *centro estero's* activity after 1927 was less important for its sporadic attempts to form clandestine structures in Italy as for its effect in galvanising a Stalinist leadership in the exile organisation. This was particularly evident in the conduct of Palmiro Togliatti, who used the *svolta* to justify the expulsion of dissidents. He insisted that for the Italians to have opposed Stalin's policy would simply have meant the Soviet 'brother party' 'imposing a [new Italian] leadership from the Left, with a few lads from [Moscow's] Lenin School'.<sup>28</sup> Yet this conformity with Stalin's positions was also the means by which Togliatti and his entourage entrenched their rule over the PCd'I, expelling all critics of Comintern policy in its remaining exile and prison organisations. Notably excluded were the Party's founder Amadeo Bordiga (as well as those who refused to join ritualised condemnations of his 'treachery'), and central-committee member Pietro Tresso,<sup>29</sup> who led a tiny Trotskyist opposition from Paris until his murder at the hands of French Communist partisans in 1943.<sup>30</sup>

Faithfully obeying Stalin's policy zigzags, the Third-Period *svolta* was followed by another sharp strategic turn. Far from the Depression-era attacks on 'social-fascist' reformists, the popular-front policy adopted in 1935 advocated united action with all forces willing to oppose Adolf Hitler. After the disastrous *svolta*, this new turn was doubtless a relief for the Togliattians. While all Communist Parties took a similar position faced with the rise of a belligerently anti-Soviet régime in Berlin, popular-frontism in many respects tallied with an analysis PCd'I leaders had already made of Fascism's rise in Italy. Ever since the 1926 *Lyon Theses*,<sup>31</sup> Gramsci, Togliatti and their co-thinkers had argued that the Party's 'sectarian' hostility

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<sup>27</sup> Notably the Lyon Theses of 1926, which tended to see the Party's failings in this earlier period precisely as a result of its sectarianism and rigid hostility toward 'infiltration' by other class forces.

<sup>28</sup> Cited in Agosti 2004, p. 97.

<sup>29</sup> On his murder, see Azzaroni 1962 and Broué and Vacheron 1997. See also his own cutting analysis of the about-turns of Stalinist anti-fascism, Tresso 1938.

<sup>30</sup> Francescangeli 2005 is the standard study on interwar Italian Trotskyism.

<sup>31</sup> Gramsci and Togliatti presented this document to the PCd'I's 1926 exile congress.

toward other democratic forces in 1921–22 had helped allow Mussolini to defeat a divided opposition. The new Comintern line was an extended version of this more gradualist outlook, through which the Party could seek to escape its isolation and lead wide layers of the population in a stage-by-stage process of social transformation.<sup>32</sup>

The Seventh Congress's call for broad anti-Nazi fronts allowed PCd'I cadres to renew ties with Paris-based socialist and liberal exiles, but attempts to build popular-front alliances within Italy were highly speculative.<sup>33</sup> Central to its strategic outlook was Palmiro Togliatti's understanding of the firmness of Fascism's social base among the working class and peasantry, and thus the need to try and produce fissures within the ruling élite itself.<sup>34</sup> *Centro estero* propaganda smuggled across the Alps into Italy thus not only pointed to the régime's failure to live up to the demagogic slogans of its 1919 programme, but also expressed a more nationalistic anti-Nazi sentiment, insisting that Italy's 'legitimate territorial interests'<sup>35</sup> were better served through alliance with Britain and France than by ties with Adolf Hitler, a rival to Rome's designs on the Balkans.<sup>36</sup> This abandonment of the Party's previously sharp anti-imperialism also reflected the collective-security and Russian foreign-policy dimension of 'popular-frontism', placing total priority on building an international bloc against Nazi Germany and its accomplices even if this meant silencing other aspects of communist policy.

The *svolta* introduced Stalinist discipline to PCd'I ranks. Popular-frontism brought a much sharper political break. The Party now arrived at forms of organisation far-removed from its initial class-war agenda. This was apparent in its search for intellectual fellow-travellers in the late 1930s,<sup>37</sup> as it sought to drive a wedge

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<sup>32</sup> Gramsci discussed these themes at length in his 1929–35 *Prison Notebooks*: however, none of these texts were published until 1949, and only a handful of exiled and imprisoned PCI leaders had any knowledge of their contents. Without doubt Togliatti's wartime policy represented a serious distortion of Gramsci's analysis, encrusting it with an uncritical approach to parliamentary democracy.

<sup>33</sup> See Tresso 1938 for a forensic (and sharply critical) analysis of PCd'I exile press in these years.

<sup>34</sup> Notably his lectures to the young PCI exiles in Moscow in the first third of 1935: Togliatti 2010.

<sup>35</sup> *Lo Stato Operaio*, 1936, April, 'Per una politica estera del popolo italiano'; 1936, August, 'Per una politica di pace'.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Spain was itself a key testing-ground for the Popular-Front strategy, with the official Soviet policy of 'non-intervention' in the Civil War, together with the Stalinist PCE/PSUC's

between Mussolini and the students organised in the *Gruppi Universitari Fascisti*.<sup>38</sup> The *littoriali* – régime-organised cultural, intellectual and sporting contests – were a particularly happy hunting-ground for this operation, not least as they provided an arena for open philosophical debates. It was through these *littoriali* that men in their early twenties like Mario Alicata, Antonio Giolitti, and Antonello Trombadori were first drawn into the Rome student circle cultivated by the *centro estero*. While a 1936 ‘Appeal to our Blackshirt Brothers’<sup>39</sup> signed by Communist Party leaders was unusual for its rhetorical embrace of the social reforms promised by Fascism’s original programme, this was but the extreme expression of a *centro estero* policy premised on producing splits within régime organisations.

In building a Roman cadre group the Party recruited contacts from non-communist backgrounds rather than older militants. Whereas new Party structures in the industrial North were piloted by exiles sent back across the Alps, the *centro estero*’s connection with Rome was more tenuous, and it seems it considered these intellectuals more receptive to its new approach than long-isolated militants. The Rome student circle was first linked to Paris via the thirty-year old Giorgio Amendola, son of a liberal MP murdered by Blackshirts in 1926. At first it was not avowedly Marxist, but instead started out from a Crocean-idealist outlook, while also reviving Fascist ideologue Giovanni Gentile’s onetime talk of a ‘Second *Risorgimento*’ to cohere an Italian nation left fragmented after the 1860s Wars of Unification.<sup>40</sup> Keen to use all possible means to reach disaffected intellectuals, the Amendola group continued to write for legal publications like

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efforts to restrain the more revolutionary aspects of the fight against Franco, reflecting the desire to weaken Western anti-communism by playing down the spectre of a ‘Red Spain’. The Stalinists’ alliance with liberal and reformist forces in the Negrin government and the concomitant repression of the Spanish revolutionary Left are well analysed in Broué 2005. This policy failed not only to defeat Franco but also in its aim of currying favour with British and French conservatives, who in their majority maintained a policy of appeasing Nazi Germany, rather than allying with the USSR against it.

<sup>38</sup> Theorised in *Lo Stato Operaio*, 1936, October, ‘Per un movimento giovanile italiano’; ‘A voi, uomini di cultura’.

<sup>39</sup> This document called for ‘national reconciliation’ under the Fascist programme of 1919: see ‘Per la salvezza dell’Italia riconciliazione del popolo italiano!’, *Lo Stato Operaio*, 1936, August. Probably written by Ruggero Grieco, its force was multiplied by the fact that it was signed by over a hundred named Communist Party leaders.

<sup>40</sup> This was a classic implementation of the Comintern Seventh Congress’s call for communists to ‘pick up the national flags dropped by the imperialist bourgeoisie’, and during the war the PCI press would often refer to the Resistance as a ‘Second *Risorgimento*’. On this formula, cf. Pavone 1959.

*Primato, Roma Fascista* and *La Ruota*, projecting a cultural-political outlook only subtly hinting at criticism of the régime and its Nazi ally.

This patient effort to nurture Rome's dissident student milieu was badly disrupted in August 1939 by news of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, which caught PCd'I leaders completely by surprise. While Italian exiles staged a 'national conference' in Paris just one week before the Pact, at which they had reaffirmed their loyalty to the strategy of broad anti-Nazi alliances, Stalin now forced them to abandon this line. For years the Communists had attacked London and Paris for appeasing Hitler, calling for rearmament and alliance with the USSR. Moscow and its satellites now stood for peace with the Führer, one-sidedly blaming 'the City of London' for starting the war, and denouncing as imperialist the very states who now resisted German expansionism. The Italian leadership like its sister parties struggled to mount such an abject U-turn. Not only did Stalin's deal with Hitler trash previous efforts to stir dissent among Italian intellectuals, but it also prompted French government repression against the *centro estero*. The PCF was banned and the Italian exiles under its protection arrested, including Togliatti.

It was amidst this atmosphere of embattled Soviet loyalism that the schoolteacher Ferdinando Amiconi and young doctor Aldo Natoli produced five typewritten bulletins over autumn 1939. This pair, from Avezzano one hundred kilometres east of Rome, were the only Italian-based militants to travel to France for the 'national conference'. Thus having met leading cadres just days before the Pact was announced, they bore considerable authority during their early exchanges with the Rome student group. However, while this bulletin was the sole PCd'I publication to reach the capital in the immediate aftermath of the Pact, they produced these texts independently of the cadres who had been arrested by French police at the end of August. Not until April 1940 would the Paris-based leadership produce any clandestine press of its own, with the *Lettere di Spartaco* written by Togliatti after his release from jail.<sup>41</sup> Reflecting the pair's own thinking as well as what they gleaned from the French press (including as concerned the PCF's positions), these

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<sup>41</sup> For a discussion of the circumstances surrounding Togliatti's release see Agosti 2008, pp. 150–58.

bulletins combined the Comintern's latest arguments with these young men's own more *ad hoc* rationalisations.

In justifying the Pact, Amiconi and Natoli drastically contradicted the Party's earlier popular-front strategy.<sup>42</sup> While imitating Comintern emphasis on Moscow's 'peaceful instincts', they idiosyncratically suggested that Stalin's deal with Hitler was a 'ploy' to destabilise Europe's political order.<sup>43</sup> Citing Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov's argument that a British-French victory would 'lay the groundwork for the capitalist countries to reach an agreement to fight their great common enemy, the proletariat, and thus the USSR',<sup>44</sup> the Avezzano pair explained that 'to avert this threat the Soviet Union is using German capitalism, helping it diplomatically and economically'.<sup>45</sup> Although referring to less bellicose Comintern watchwords such as Stalin's success in 'liberating Poland's national minorities' by destroying Warsaw's 'fascist' régime (in partnership with Hitler...) Amiconi and Natoli attached their own millenarian hopes to his strategy. They deemed it 'wholly aimed at ... bringing the proletarian revolution to all capitalist countries, everywhere establishing the Soviet system',<sup>46</sup> while gleefully citing French press scaremongering that 'Stalin's goal is world revolution, the immediate Bolshevisation of all the countries where he exercises authority!'<sup>47</sup>

These hosannahs for Stalinist strategising met with an icy response among the Roman students, who were little-interested in fantasies of Red Army-imposed 'Bolshevisation'. Giorgio Amendola's brother Pietro was alarmed that 'with the blindest and most absolute faith in the Soviet comrades', Amiconi and Natoli 'presented the German-Russian pact not only as a sort of *force majeure* imposed on the USSR ... but as Stalin's cunning move to play the imperialist powers off against one another ... and thus to prepare the Europe-wide advent of communism on their ashes'.<sup>48</sup> Some disillusioned members of the Amendola group now left to join a rival liberal-socialist current (linked to *Giustizia e Libertà*; later *Partito d'Azione*)<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See Amiconi 1977, pp. 316 et sqq.

<sup>43</sup> *Bollettino*, 5, 4.11.1939, 'Situazione estera' (in ACS/PS/1942/65).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Bollettino* no. 1, 4.9.1939, p. 1, 'Situazione estera'.

<sup>47</sup> *Bollettino* no. 5, 4.11.1939, p. 2, 'Francia'.

<sup>48</sup> Vittoria 1985, p. 83.

<sup>49</sup> Vittoria 1985, p. 84.



whereas those who remained rallied around a 'middle position' proposed by Amendola's other brother Antonio, emphasising Britain and France's perfidy in refusing to ally with the USSR against Hitler, but holding that Stalin's 'tactical' decision had no bearing on Italian militants' continued anti-fascism.<sup>50</sup> This compromise, hammered out in a meeting at Mario Fiorentino's home in May 1940,<sup>51</sup> largely succeeded in holding the Rome student circle together, despite the arrests that soon followed its contacts with the Avezzano group.<sup>52</sup>

The shifting patterns of war soon rendered these divides obsolete, as the invasion of the USSR returned the Party to a straightforwardly anti-fascist position. Like their counterparts abroad it now sought to build a broad anti-Nazi front analogous to the London-Moscow alliance. This ended the split between the Amendola circle and its smattering of working-class contacts like mechanic Pompilio Molinari and decorator Roberto Forti, whom it had during the Pact era accused of taking 'Trotskyist', anti-Soviet position.<sup>53</sup> It moreover sealed its alliance with another circle it had previously stigmatised as 'Trotskyist', the *Gruppo d'Unificazione Marxista* founded by students Corrado Nouliau and Rosario Bentivegna.<sup>54</sup> Given these alleged Trotskyists' rapid merger into the PCd'I's new 'workers' and intellectuals' group', it seems that despite their rejection of the Pact-era line they shared little of Trotsky's deeper critique of the Communist Parties. For these young men of little political training but attracted to the PCd'I by its anti-fascist record, the Hitler-Mussolini attack on the USSR instead provided the moment to close ranks and organise a broad anti-fascist opposition.

Responding to a renewed anti-fascist pact between Communist, Socialist and liberal exiles, Rome's 'workers' and intellectuals' group' also cast its net wide in search of allies. As with the *centro estero's* late-1930s efforts to infiltrate Fascist student milieux, these young men's implementation of the popular-front strategy focused on exploiting divisions within Italy's existing élites rather than any kind of anti-capitalist or working-class agitation, and in this sense also reflected their social proximity to bourgeois and even aristocratic circles. A report by Marco

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<sup>50</sup> According to Franco Rodano, quoted in Vittoria 1985, p. 85.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Cf. interrogations in ACS/PS/1943/79/19/21.

<sup>53</sup> Vittoria 1985, p. 90.

<sup>54</sup> Bentivegna 2011, pp. 82–85.

Cesarini Sforza and Mario Alicata written for the Party's *centro interno* (founded by Umberto Massola in Milan at the end of 1941) thus carried rumours that the liberal-socialists had 'won the sympathy of [Marshal] Badoglio, now detached from the monarchy', and also referred to 'vaguer talk of an accord with the Vatican'.<sup>55</sup> Describing the liberal-socialists as 'substantially a wait-and-see party ... principally concerned with discussing what will happen after the conflict', they proposed that the communists reach a political accord with this current based on mobilising for 'wide democratisation' as well as 'defending the independence of Italy and Europe from any eventual Anglo-American oppression'.<sup>56</sup>

Moreover identifying the emergence of anti-fascist currents within the religious hierarchy and the *Azione Cattolica* ecclesiastical movement<sup>57</sup> – soon to become important allies in the PCI's efforts to attract Christian Left support<sup>58</sup> – Cesarini Sforza and Alicata nonetheless lamented the fact that this dissent was a 'cadre' and not 'mass' phenomenon.<sup>59</sup> Such rhetorical emphasis on popular mobilisation reflected the political ambition of a 'Second *Risorgimento*', with the mass of the nation combining to refound the Italian state, independent of either German or Anglo-American influence. However, it was little-expressed in these young intellectuals' own activity in this period, limited as it was to seeking individual contacts in a cloistered philosophical and literary milieu. Indeed, for security as well as political reasons, the group attached to the *centro estero* via Amendola was positively distrustful of veteran working-class militants in the capital; an attitude further reinforced in December 1942, as police arrested a dozen of its members together with leading exponents of the *Scintilla* circle.<sup>60</sup>

### 2.3. *Scintilla*

In the characteristically lusty tones of its programme *The Higher Path*, the MCd'I boasted of having 'arisen Marxistically [sic!] from the revolutionary wave begun by the Lyon riots of 1831'.<sup>61</sup> Its autodidact leaders took pride in their continuity

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<sup>55</sup> ACS/PS/F1/68/198/027752, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. ACS/PS/F1/68/198/0295.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Casula 1976, Malgeri 1982.

<sup>59</sup> ACS/PS/F1/68/198/027752, p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> Vittoria 1985, p. 99.

<sup>61</sup> MCd'I 1944b, p. 6.

with a century-old, international communist movement. The name of its first nucleus, the *Scintilla* group formed in 1940,<sup>62</sup> was the Italian translation of *Iskra* ['Spark'], title of the newspaper founded by Lenin in 1900. In an atmosphere of Tsarist repression and the mass imprisonment and exile of Russian socialists, *Iskra* had worked to galvanise isolated study groups into a revolutionary party with a common programme;<sup>63</sup> as Italy entered the fray in World War II, *Scintilla* similarly sought to rally scattered underground militants in a re-established Communist Party.<sup>64</sup> Quickly establishing groups among railworkers, the state statistics agency, and the postal service, *Scintilla* was centred on a handwritten and copied newspaper, the only communist publication in the capital in 1942. It was a key expression of the Roman underground, and a focal point for discussions among anti-fascist circles who now began to regroup their efforts.

Despite *Scintilla's* focus on timeless acquired truths of Marxism, its members were mostly workers and artisans rather than intellectuals. Key figures included tram engineer Tigrino Sabatini, a veteran of the PCd'I and the anti-fascist *Arditi del Popolo* militia;<sup>65</sup> young San Lorenzo carpenter Orfeo Mucci, son of an anarchist bakers' organiser;<sup>66</sup> cobbler Ezio Lombardi, a Rome PCd'I leader expelled from a *confino* organisation on 'security grounds' in 1930;<sup>67</sup> septuagenarian lawyer Raffaele de Luca, a former anarchist who served as Socialist mayor of Paola in 1921;<sup>68</sup> postman Ernesto Sansone; Christian-socialist graphic designer Francesco Cretara, later co-editor of *Bandiera Rossa*;<sup>69</sup> florist Agostino Raponi, a veteran communist from the Abruzzo region who joined the PCI prison organisation after his arrest;<sup>70</sup> Socialist statistician Pietro Bättara;<sup>71</sup> grenadier captain Aladino Govoni, son of a futurist poet;<sup>72</sup> and Socialist journalist Ezio Villani.<sup>73</sup> The only female

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<sup>62</sup> *L'Idea Comunista*, 2.12.1945, p. 2, 'Come vidi "Scintilla"'; CGB/FAP/Mucci/26.

<sup>63</sup> Lenin 1900.

<sup>64</sup> *L'Idea Comunista*, 2.12.1945, p. 2, 'Come vidi "Scintilla"'.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Guzzo 1945, p. 56; Chilanti 1969, p. 49; 1971, p. 210. On this formation see Francescangeli 2000; Behan 2002.

<sup>66</sup> CGB/FAP/Mucci/17-24.

<sup>67</sup> ACS/CPC/2817/2835.

<sup>68</sup> ACS/CPC/1711.

<sup>69</sup> ACS/CPC/1532; see obituary in 'Un lutto dei comunisti rivoluzionari', *Bandiera Rossa* (newspaper of the Trotskyist *Gruppi comunisti rivoluzionari*), May 1964.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Raponi 2012.

<sup>71</sup> ACS/PS/F1/68/198/077849.

<sup>72</sup> CGB/FAP/Govoni.

<sup>73</sup> ACS/CPC/5423.

member, Anna-Maria Enriques, was a Christian-socialist sacked from her job at the Tuscan capital's state archives in 1938 because her father was a Jew.<sup>74</sup> Of these ten just six would survive the war.

The conspiracy that formed in 1940 did not immediately turn to public agitation, but began by establishing the political basis of its clandestine organisation. *Scintilla* members met at Cretara's studio to discuss reading materials typical of Rome's communist circles in the early war years,<sup>75</sup> including pre-Fascist-era issues of the Communist *l'Unità* and the Socialist *Avanti!*, the Vatican's *Osservatore Romano*,<sup>76</sup> John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook The World*, as well as politically-themed novels like Jack London's *Iron Heel* and Maxim Gorky's *Mother*.<sup>77</sup> The group was unaware of Gramsci's prison writings (only published in 1949) and seems not to have had access to texts detailing the clashes between Stalin and Trotsky, though each of the Russian rivals' works had legally appeared in Italy at different points in the 1930s.<sup>78</sup> According to Orfeo Mucci – a stalwart defender of the MCd'I's legacy in the decades after its collapse<sup>79</sup> – *Scintilla* however sharply distinguished itself from the Amendola circle: 'We were communists on the side of [Amadeo] Bordiga's integral, Leninist Marxism, unlike those communists who tended toward social democracy ... and who tried to break up the Fascist Party from within'.<sup>80</sup>

Mucci's invocation of the Party's original tradition reflects a trope widely present in dissident-communist thought, invoking one's loyalty to an abandoned, original tradition.<sup>81</sup> Yet the underground's communist culture was more governed by its

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. ANPI/Anna-Maria Enriques.

<sup>75</sup> Note the near-identical set of novels and newspapers found by police at Aleandro Casadio's house in January 1940: ACS/PS/1942/65/00185/18.1.1940. Mario Fiorentini (interview with DB, 10.4.2013) recalled young PCI members' discussion of *Iron Heel* and *Mother*, as did Mario di Berto in his interview with Lidia Piccioni (1984, p. 116).

<sup>76</sup> Among the legal press, the *Osservatore Romano* most commonly reproduced articles from foreign press agencies, and its moral pronouncements often implied a certain political critique of the régime.

<sup>77</sup> CGB/FAP/Mucci/26; MCd'I, unnumbered, 1945, MSdL/FSC/26/89.

<sup>78</sup> The texts were authorised or banned at different points in tandem with the regime's attempts to antagonise or show openness to the Soviet leadership. Hence even such a major publisher as Mondadori could distribute a translation of Trotsky's *My Life* in Fascist Italy.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. e.g. 'Orfeo, scampato al massacro grazie al coraggio della moglie', *Il Messaggero*, 3.8.1996; his interview in the 14.9.1996 edition of *Rifondazione Comunista's* newspaper *Liberazione*, 'Una Bandiera Rossa a Roma' and his letter in its 4.7.1997 issue, 'Partigiano di Bandiera Rossa, mi autodenuncio'; or his comments in Bermani et al. 1998.

<sup>80</sup> CGB/FAP/Mucci/26.

<sup>81</sup> In Broué 1995, this French Trotskyist historian counterposes the PCI's exiled Stalinist leaders to 'the true party, the party that had survived Fascism and continued to live on in

continued identification with the revolutionary end goal than any kind of political or organisational continuity. In the absence of clandestine structures, the Roman underground was unable to follow the political journey of the Togliattian cadres based in Paris and Moscow, and in this sense, an Italian 'periphery' did indeed grow apart from the Comintern 'centre'. But the two clandestine newsheets produced under Mucci's direction in June and October 1942<sup>82</sup> also show the changes that the Fascist experience produced within this underground. Their view of international politics and anti-fascism diverged considerably not only from exiled cadres' policy, but also from the assumptions of the early Communist Party. Cut off from both the Comintern and mass political activity, they created an idiosyncratic Stalinism of their own.

The first of these handwritten and copied bulletins sought to rationalise Stalin's foreign policy, deemed part of a revolutionary strategy despite its concessions to *Realpolitik*. Appearing once the invasion of Russia was already well-underway, this June 1942 publication was sharply critical of communists who had 'mechanically' abandoned their principles in response to the Hitler-Stalin pact. There had been no need 'to bow to the swastika';<sup>83</sup> even if 'the USSR had no choice but to adopt a position contrary to the principles of communism', this ought not make communists abroad 'lose their bearings, confusing Soviet *raison d'état* for the interests of the Communist International'.<sup>84</sup> Its author 'Sator'<sup>85</sup> insisted that Italian communists were not 'Moscow's agents', but also justified Soviet compromises in sympathetic terms. *Scintilla* explained that while 'in no way do we disavow the efforts of the Russian communists, who have acted within circumstances imposed upon them ... the relations between Russian Bolshevism and Italian communism must be understood not as a matter of subordination, but simply of international collaboration among proletarian movements'.<sup>86</sup>

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the workers' districts and the villages'. At most this can be meant in terms of mythology, for the party itself clearly did not survive in any organised way; it would, indeed, be more accurate to say that it repeatedly 'resurfaced' than that it 'continued to live on'.

<sup>82</sup> 'Primo incontro con Chilanti 3.6.1966': MSdL/FSC/26/22.

<sup>83</sup> *Scintilla*, 1, p. 8, 'Il comunismo in stato d'accusa'..

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Corvisieri asserts that 'Sator' was Pietro Báltara's pseudonym. 'Sator' was the sole name in this issue, but one of four appearing in the second.

<sup>86</sup> *Scintilla*, 1, p. 7, 'Il comunismo in stato d'accusa'.

*Scintilla's* view of the International thus little resembled that developed by Bordiga at the beginning of the Comintern's activity. Even as general secretary, Bordiga strongly opposed the autonomy of national Communist Parties, and instead insisted that the Comintern should impose a common discipline over all its sections. Haunted by the nationalist fragmentation of European socialism upon the outbreak of World War I, Bordiga argued that only the formation of a worldwide party could prevent the International's sections from 'opportunistically' embracing their own states' particular interests. He was thus quick to note Russian *raison d'état* taking over the Comintern, and predicted that Moscow's wish for peace with capitalist countries would drive it to curtail the other parties' revolutionary militancy. At the 1926 Comintern Enlarged Executive he denounced this 'involution' to Stalin's face, and proposed that the world's communists should take collective control of the USSR in order to subordinate its policies to the interests of the International. This argument naturally cut no ice among the Comintern's Stalin-loyalist leaders. But it remained central to Left-Communist readings of the link between Soviet 'socialism in one country' and Western Communist Parties' 'reformism'.

Conversely, while *Scintilla* pointed to the *Realpolitik* behind Kremlin foreign policy, it saw no contradiction between recognising this and pursuing its own 'intransigent' agenda in Italy. It was in fact at pains to justify Stalin's policy. This was evident in its October 1942 issue's attempt to square its revolutionary goals with the Anglo-Soviet treaty sealed in May. It noted that Stalin and Churchill's agreement 'not to interfere in other states' internal affairs might make some think' that the Soviet leadership was 'giving up the very basis for Comintern policy'. Stalin did indeed dissolve the Comintern just seven months later, as an overture to the Western Allies. But for *Scintilla*, this proved that 'the Comintern's Russian leaders trust in the maturity of the communist movements in each country, who must rely above all on their own forces to carry out the revolution'.<sup>87</sup> This reading collapsed Stalin's *Realpolitik* into Marx's emphasis on working-class self-emancipation: 'The ideal links between the Russian workers and the world

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<sup>87</sup> *Scintilla*, 2, p. 1, 'Il patto URSS Inghilterra e USA'.

proletariat are indissoluble, but in each country ... the revolution must be the conscious, voluntary act of the workers themselves'.<sup>88</sup>

*Scintilla* adopted a timeless tone, with each of its two issues<sup>89</sup> framed in terms of Marxism's basic precepts rather than the immediate political situation in Fascist Italy. This second edition however also insisted on the need for concrete organisation. This allowed it to distinguish itself from certain subversives' messianic conceptions of the Red Army bringing socialism to Italy from the outside. A whimsical article entitled 'When *Baffone* ['Mr. Moustache' - Stalin] gets here...' mocked those who hoped for liberation from afar. The piece began by invoking 'how many times we've all heard our workmates talking about: When *Baffone* gets here...! Whereas the middling capitalists and the small ones, too, are waiting... Till the English get here!'<sup>90</sup> It criticised the passivity of such 'waiting for the Redeemer, without lifting a finger', when workers must instead think and organise for themselves. This apparently libertarian focus on self-activity was nonetheless immediately rerouted into veneration of Stalin: 'If these people realised that *Baffone* himself has always desired and preached that each people find within itself the capacity to rally to the socialist Association, then they would be ashamed to expect manna from Heaven'.<sup>91</sup>

For *Scintilla*, true internationalism lay in Italian communists working to build a revolutionary movement in their own country, rather than relying on the Soviet leadership for 'fraternal assistance'. Italy's fate after its 'inevitable' military defeat would be defined not by the question of whether 'the English' or the Red Army arrived first, but rather the masses' fight for their own interests; the author 'Martello' ['Hammer'], thus begged 'pardon from [his] Abyssinian friends for

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Mucci claimed in a postwar interview with Alessandro Portelli that *Scintilla* was a weekly, a claim disproven by the numbering of the only two issues apparently published before the police crackdown: namely, one in June and one in October 1942. Even if there is some possibility that it produced other materials (and its Perugia branch did issue a separate leaflet in October), it is scarcely conceivable that such a small clandestine group could have produced publications at such a rate; in fact, even to produce two clandestine papers, laboriously handwritten and cyclostyled, was some achievement in a period where there was no other such anti-fascist press in Rome. This is quite probably a simple conflation of *Scintilla* with *Bandiera Rossa*, whose paper did appear weekly in October and November 1943.

<sup>90</sup> *Scintilla*, 2, p. 2, 'Quando verrà Baffone...'

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

saying that to wait for liberation on others' initiative is a nigger attitude',<sup>92</sup> albeit one with precedents in Italian history dating back to 'the crowds under Nero's balcony clamouring for bread and circuses'.<sup>93</sup> Nonetheless, far from pouring cold water on the idea that Red Army forces might indeed reach Italy, *Scintilla* insisted that Mr. Moustache's intervention would not alone guarantee the advent of communism. Rather, the organised proletariat had to prepare to welcome him: 'When *Baffone* gets here, will he find a people inferior to those of the Kazakh steppes and the Yakutian tundra, or a mature people capable of realising the idea that he represents ... a people that sought and defends its own redemption?'<sup>94</sup>

Again written by hand and then cyclostyled, albeit resembling a newspaper format more than did the previous issue, the October 1942 *Scintilla's* stated intention was to lay the basis a restored Communist Party in Rome. At the same time as defending 'intransigent' positions, *Scintilla* also appealed for other groups of subversives to join its ranks, on the basis of a common commitment to working-class solidarity and anti-capitalism. The article 'We're talking to you'<sup>95</sup> thus addressed a series of other dissident milieux, arguing that the old divisions on the Left were now senseless. With 'parliamentarism now obsolete', Socialists had to recognise their 'unity of purpose' with communists; Catholics, much like those misguided souls expecting the advent of *Baffone*, had to 'fight and conquer good on Earth' rather than await the Redeemer; and if anarchists were right to 'fear that any type of authority is a mask of tyranny', they had to 'come to terms with the reality' that only 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' could 'shape today's mankind into the free mankind of tomorrow'.<sup>96</sup>

While *Scintilla's* veneration of Stalin and insistence on its Marxist 'science' might seem likely to alienate anarchists, libertarians like San Lorenzo watchmaker Renato Gentilezza and Sicilian tailor Gabriele Pappalardo did in fact join together with its militants in August 1943. They became two among the MCd'I's most prominent organisers. There was no specifically anarchist formation in the Roman

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<sup>92</sup> Thus curiously implying that Abyssinia (Ethiopia) had indeed been 'liberated' thanks to Mussolini's invasion and overthrow of its indigenous-slaveowner régime.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> *Scintilla*, 2, p. 2, 'Parliamo a voi'.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, pp. 2-3.



Resistance, but the movement's relative openness allowed each of these militants to re-establish alliances they had forged with grassroots communists in the *Arditi del Popolo* militias of 1921–22.<sup>97</sup> So, too, did numerous socialists and Catholic-Left militants join the movement, as the appeal in 'We're talking to you' had intended. As in the case of the anarchists, it seems that they represented an alternative sensibility committed to the MCd'I's immediate practical agenda, rather than assimilating the Stalinist politics that dominated every page of both *Scintilla* and *Bandiera Rossa*.<sup>98</sup> From the outset, the movement was thus marked by a contradiction between the positive attitude to Stalin so characteristic of the war period, and its militants' roots in the various different historic currents of the Italian Left.

*Scintilla*'s bombastic references to an 'integral', 'scientific socialism' reflected a both generational and political clash with the Amendola group. As Francesco Cretara recalled in 1945, the circle's early contacts with these students 'determined a sharp opposition between us, principally because it was clear that the latest Party directives did not correspond to the fundamental traditional conceptions of the communist movement'.<sup>99</sup> This same appeal to historic traditions informed a October 1942 *Scintilla* article on the rigours of clandestine organisation, insisting that communists must be able to carry out 'the Party's perennial directives' without having to ask leaders for direction.<sup>100</sup> The idea that such timeless instructions had already been received served to discredit the new stance taken by the Amendola group. *Scintilla* did not only consist of veteran worker-militants: with issue two it also made contacts beyond Rome, creating a satellite circle in Perugia around student Riccardo Tenerini. This latter's propaganda however similarly combined laudatory references to Stalin's USSR with an invocation of Italian communism's class-war legacy.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> On Pappalardo's activity, see 'Un direttore irresponsabile', *Sicilia libertaria*, 1.6.2005; and the newspaper he edited, *Il Vespro Anarchico*.

<sup>98</sup> Only sporadically, and in hesitating terms, did the movement's press reject 'blind' adherence to the Stalinist model; the only open criticism came after the war in a 'discussion article' by a militant in disagreement with the leadership. See section 9.5.

<sup>99</sup> Unnumbered 1945 typescript, MSdL/FSC/29/87, p. 1.

<sup>100</sup> *Scintilla*, 2, p. 4, 'Manuale del comunista'.

<sup>101</sup> A clandestine tract distributed by Tenerini proclaimed 'Now the second war is coming: the revolutionary war, where the proletariat must defeat the capitalist world. ... The hour of the liberating revolution is near... Long live Stalin, long live the workers' fatherland, the

In a sharp culture clash, the militants of *Scintilla* vehemently rejected the authority of the Amendola students, whom they dismissed as ‘tied to aristocratic circles and the Savoy monarchy’.<sup>102</sup> Cretara recalled his comrades’ shock at these novices’ imperious claim that ‘their Party line was directed by Moscow and thus could be neither discussed nor critically adapted’,<sup>103</sup> as well as the language of heresy-hunting to which they resorted. In his account, with ‘the negotiations broken off ... the PCI hierarchs, displeased with us ... subjected us to vicious attacks and accusations of “Trotskyism”’.<sup>104</sup> Stunned at being treated so high-handedly by these ‘aristocratic intellectuals’,<sup>105</sup> the *Scintilla* co-founder lamented that ‘in response to our reservations and protests over their statements we were told that we had no right to discuss the supreme directives but only to accept and implement them’.<sup>106</sup> Throughout the Resistance worker-militants resisting the control of new Party cadres made similar expressions of political dissent, using this same combination of both class and generational terms: Turin organiser Arturo Colombi equally bemoaned ‘the old comrades’ unwillingness to take orders from kids’, ‘having stuck firm to extremist positions across these long years of repression’.<sup>107</sup>

The *centro estero*’s recruitment efforts among student circles conformed to the Comintern’s popular-front strategy, but also isolated the Roman PCI from its historic social base.<sup>108</sup> Accounts by both dissidents and the Roman students speak of a sharp culture clash: figures like Mario Alicata, Aldo Natoli and Rosario Bentivegna each recount spending their cloistered formative years in almost total

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Soviet Union. Long live the *Partito Comunista d’Italia*, long live the Communist International’. Quoted in Spriano 1973, p. 146

<sup>102</sup> Unnumbered 1945 typescript, MSdL/FSC/29/87, p. 1.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Described in ‘Primo incontro con Chilanti 3.6.1966’, MSdL/FSC/26/22.

<sup>106</sup> Unnumbered 1945 typescript, MSdL/FSC/29/87, p. 1.

<sup>107</sup> ‘Lettera di Luca alla direzione’, 25.1.1944, IPR/AC/3.

<sup>108</sup> Secchia (ed.) 1974, p. 437 notes: that ‘the effectiveness of the action carried out by the PCI in Rome was undermined by the weakness of its organisation’. As well as having to face the capital’s ‘particular social and economic conditions’ (see Chapter Four), the Party grew ‘suddenly, and in a disorderly fashion, only after 25 July. Before 25 July only a few groups of students and intellectuals were connected to the Party’s *centro interno* operating in Milan, and they had few contacts with the working-class base. Numerous groups of communists formed in the various neighbourhoods, but often closed in a sectarian and restricted vision like the very numerous ones gathering around [Raffaello] de Luca’.

ignorance of working-class Romans' lives.<sup>109</sup> This picture comes into yet sharper relief when we note the family connections linking new Party leaders like Giorgio Amendola and Antonio Giolitti to Italy's traditional élites: this latter's grandfather Giovanni was Italy's dominant parliamentarian from the 1890s to World War I, his name becoming a byword for the corrupt horse-trading of the 'Giolittian' era.<sup>110</sup> Most of the members of this 'workers' and intellectuals group' came from two grammar schools. While many hundreds of longstanding worker-militants did ultimately join the Roman PCI during the Resistance, this circle's social narrowness clearly compounded the Party's difficulties appealing to militants like the members of *Scintilla*.

*Scintilla* sought to prove its importance to the Party by displaying the strength of feeling among the Roman underground. To this end it attempted a survey of this underground, showing a spirit of openness bordering on recklessness. Issue 2 was accompanied by a ten-point questionnaire for its readers to reflect on, posing such questions as whether they should collaborate with 'non-communist currents in the struggle against Fascism'; if it was better to produce 'propaganda for the masses unaware of our ideas' or focus on educating themselves; and what practical advice 'experienced communists' could offer.<sup>111</sup> Posing as an intermediary between 'the Party' and the 'comrades insistently asking what its programme is', *Scintilla* claimed that 'communist groups' answering these questions would 'allow us to solidify and intensify our relations with groups of comrades and allow the Party to know our movement's real situation'.<sup>112</sup> In truth it had no direct contacts with the Party leadership, beyond the Amendola group.

Arresting the *Scintilla* militants at the beginning of December, police informed Mussolini of an attempt to reconstitute the Communist Party. In publishing a newspaper that proclaimed itself the organ of the long-suppressed PCd'I, the militants behind *Scintilla* had taken an organisational step beyond all other Roman communist circles, few of whom had done more than meet to discuss war news or

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<sup>109</sup> Lombardo-Radice 2005; Alicata 1976; Bentivegna 2011.

<sup>110</sup> Giovanni Giolitti, prime minister 1892-93, 1903-5, 1906-9, 1911-14, 1920-21. In 1922 he voted for full powers to Mussolini. Amendola's father Giovanni was also a liberal but took a firmer anti-fascist stance, and was murdered by Blackshirts in Cannes in 1926.

<sup>111</sup> ACS/PS/F1/68/198/026463

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

paint slogans on walls and bridges. Nonetheless, the police responsible for monitoring these militants overestimated its contacts and ability to cause trouble, with the worsening military and economic situation putting the régime on alert against all those who might try to exploit its crisis. *Scintilla* as yet remained a tiny propaganda group, and its opposition to the official Party line would soon condemn its militants instead to embark on the difficult route of building a dissident movement. *Scintilla* believed itself nucleus of a Communist Party that was yet to be rebuilt. Its first contacts with the Amendola group showed the opposition this would face.

#### **2.4. The British ‘bulldog’ spurned**

Limited to the Roman underground and not yet engaged in mass mobilisation, these autodidact Marxists saw their activity in terms of a global political drama. *Scintilla* idolised Stalin’s Soviet Union, but emphasised the need for Italian workers to organise their own communist movement rather than simply wait ‘till Stalin gets here’. This posed the question, unanswered in either issue, of what would happen if and when the Western Allies occupied Italy. In November 1942, with Mussolini still clinging on to power and few hints of popular rebellion against the régime, some *Scintilla* members were already considering what effect Anglo-American landings might have for Italian communists’ strategy. This was an issue of decisive importance for all those who sought to turn the crisis within the Fascist régime into a further-reaching social revolution. This was discussed in a remarkable polemic entitled ‘Bulldog’ (sic), written in the wake of *Scintilla*’s second issue. Police discovered the anonymous typescript in Ezio Villani’s home during the crackdown on the group.<sup>113</sup>

Offering sharp insights into the key strategic problems that the Roman communists would face in 1943–45, this polemic was written in reaction not only to the second issue of *Scintilla* but also news of recent political upheavals across the Mediterranean. Speculation on Allied plans was concentrated by events in Algiers. As the Anglo-Americans occupied Algiers, former Vichyite prime minister François Darlan defected to their side, and London and Washington then recognised him as governor of French North Africa. These events across the water

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<sup>113</sup> ACS/PS/F1/68/198/026730.

demonstrated not only Italy's vulnerability to invasion, but also the means by which former Nazi-collaborationists disillusioned by Axis setbacks might attempt to hold on to power. As such, the Allied landings in Algeria brought closer both the end of the Mussolini régime, and the prospect of the Great Powers imposing a new order in the Mediterranean. 'Bulldog' sought to determine 'What advantages will world communism in general, and Italian communism in particular, draw from the Anglo-Americans' and Russia's victory?'<sup>114</sup>

'Bulldog' characterised World War II as a 'struggle among the imperialist powers for world domination' with 'the USSR alone dragged in by foreign aggression'.<sup>115</sup> It warned of the Allies' malign intentions. '[T]oday's promises may soon be forgotten after victory', just like the English 'perfidy' after World War I, when 'Mr. Balfour said it was the war of heaven against hell, and his colleague Bonar Law added that ... "We won't increase our territory by a thumb's width"', and yet 'England took over three million square kilometres of territory and hegemony over the seas'.<sup>116</sup> This document thus represented a counterpoint to *Scintilla* issue 2's uncritical celebration of the Anglo-Soviet agreement not to interfere in defeated states' domestic politics.<sup>117</sup> It instead predicted a cold war among the victorious powers: 'Will the USSR's alliance with the Anglo-Americans last? We mustn't kid ourselves! The USSR's alliance with the two peoples who own most [sic] of the world's territory and wealth is a fleeting illusion. When the armed conflict is finished, there will begin an economic, political and propaganda war between the Anglo-Americans and the USSR'.<sup>118</sup>

In its emphasis on Western duplicity, this 1942 document often reads like a precursor to postwar Communist critiques of the Marshall Aid reconstruction programme offered by the USA to European nations. 'Bulldog' reasoned that 'The Anglo-Americans' first act of peace will be to offer loans and goods on credit to all the countries impoverished by war ... The nations who accept financial aid ... will fall under the imperialists' economic influence, and it is proven that economic

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<sup>114</sup> ACS/PS/F1/68/198/026745.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> *Scintilla*, 2, p. 1, 'Il patto URSS Inghilterra e USA'.

<sup>118</sup> ACS/PS/F1/68/198/026745.

influence generates political influence'.<sup>119</sup> But despite implicitly recognising that the Western Allies would likely shape Italy's postwar reconstruction, 'Buldog' stopped short of admitting that this doomed its hopes of socialist revolution. If 'on 26 May [1942], the USSR and Britain sealed a treaty of alliance' stating that they agreed 'not to aspire for territorial conquests for themselves, and not to interfere in other states' internal affairs'" then the authors expressed their 'hope that this will be respected for Italy, too. *We have to hope so. If not, our possibilities of revolution will be compromised for a long time*'.<sup>120</sup>

A section entitled 'Who will help us make the revolution?'<sup>121</sup> warned of the dangers the Western Allies posed. It emphasised these states' support for the White forces in the Russian Civil War of 1918–21, and warned that 'those who attempt a transition to a socialist economy will inevitably provoke the hostility of the Anglo-American bourgeoisie' against its 'mortal enemy, communism'. Even in the face of this threat, it was mistaken to expect 'material aid' from the USSR: 'having borne the greater burden of the war' it would 'not be able to oppose anything to the imperialists' economic policy, other than communist propaganda'.<sup>122</sup> Hence 'Italian proletarians waiting on Russian help to make the world revolution are living with the fairies. For our revolution we cannot count on the USSR's help and must beware Anglo-American political and economic opposition. Who'll help us make the revolution? Nobody'.<sup>123</sup> For 'Buldog', the 'only hope' that the Western Allies would not attack the 'countries attempting communism' after the predicted 'fall of Germany' was the possibility 'that having won the war the English and American bourgeoisies will be so tired of blood and destruction that they'll decide to lay down their arms'.<sup>124</sup>

As well as invoking the Russian Civil War as evidence of the dangers of foreign intervention, these militants framed their own immediate situation within the terms of 1917. In this perspective, in Italy in 1942 as in Russia a quarter-century previously, a 'February' breaking with the old régime would have to be followed

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., my italics.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

by an 'October' of socialist revolution. 'Buldog' highlighted the imminence of this first turning point, as the royalist and military establishment prepared their own break with Fascism's core leaders: 'it is probable that with the war lost there will be a first revolution (headed by democrats or army officers) that though crushing fascism will conserve intact the bourgeois system that rules our nation'.<sup>125</sup> This conservative plan would, however, pose wider questions of state power: 'It is probable that the [House of Savoy] will make common cause with revolutionaries of whatever tendency. The royals and their successors will be ever-ready to make deals to save the crown. We must do everything possible so that this barbarous medieval invention called monarchy is eliminated ... one less obstacle for the second revolution, a step toward socialism'.<sup>126</sup>

Buldog thus read the realities of the Italian situation through the taxonomy of Russia's two revolutions. As in 1917, the war was lost and the regime's downfall inevitable: the question was what change could now follow. It was clear that ruling-class forces breaking with Mussolini's leadership would try to limit the fallout of the crisis, and attempt to place themselves at the head of an anti-fascist alliance. For Buldog, communists must use this 'February' as a stepping stone to their 'October': while it was now 'wasted breath to speak ill of Fascism, and for us communists it will be a tiresome effort to have to fight the Fascists', the 'goal in the first revolution [would be] to try and bring down the monarchy'. This intermediate goal was conceived as a step toward the 'October' that would follow; for the ultimate enemy was not Fascism, but the entire social system that supported it. As the authors concluded, 'We can summarise in two words our faith, which must serve as our guide in the coming struggles: ABOLISH CAPITAL'.<sup>127</sup>

## 2.5. 'From the clandestine grouplet to mass work'

The *centro estero* warned against such 'blathering' about the postwar scenario, and insisted on the priority of mobilising all possible forces against Fascism. This was itself a strategic decision, born of the Popular Front period. The party would join a broad democratic front and support the pro-Allied and 'patriotic' cause, while refraining from the radicalism that might give other parties a pretext to exclude it

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

from the anti-fascist coalition. During the Resistance the need for harmonious relations with bourgeois allies would prevent the Party from aggressively asserting its own particular goals. In service of this strategy, it also had to combat those communists who sought to heighten an anti-capitalist as well as anti-fascist antagonism. As part of its effort to discredit its leftist opponents, the PCI accused these other communists of being *attesisti*, the partisans of 'all talk and no action' who discussed the 'right moment' to act while refraining from the practical efforts that might bring it closer. In ironic deference to this argument, Buldog's treatise on the possibility of socialist revolution in Italy was subtitled 'Chatter'.

Defending the *centro estero's* line against such dissidents, in November 1942 Mario Alicata and Franco Rodano authored the polemic 'From the clandestine grouplet to mass work'. It bore a classic theme of Togliatti's own approach, prioritising mass mobilisation rather than the assertion of a specifically class-war programme. The Communist Party of the early 1920s had been intransigent in its 'spirit of separation', even at the cost of isolating itself from other anti-fascists. These young intellectuals were instead critical of any dogmatic 'purism' that denied revolutionaries an influence on immediate events. Alicata and Rodano thus lambasted 'doctrinaires', for whom 'all that matters is explaining their own doctrine - the correct idea - to people with wrong ideas. Their principal activity is putting out "manifestos" - in this crisis of Fascism, Italy is brimming with manifestos! - each of which founds a new party or restores the "real party" ... resolving down to the last detail the problems of "tomorrow"'.<sup>128</sup> 'Once the manifesto is written, it's not hard for the doctrinaire to find ten, twenty, a hundred people who think the same: hence, a clandestine group. But then what?'<sup>129</sup>

Alicata and Rodano's circle itself had only around thirty members, and was not yet involved in mass agitation. But they sought to convince their contacts that this should be their central priority. 'Rousing classes to action' was a different matter to recruiting individual communists with 'doctrinaires' manifestos'.<sup>130</sup> These latter 'shed no light on these classes' experiences or needs, no help overcoming their weakness, no concrete weapons for struggle: therefore, they do nothing, carrying

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<sup>128</sup>ACS/PS/F1/68/198/0704, pp. 3-4.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.



on as they were'.<sup>131</sup> They portrayed 'self-referential' clandestine activity – preparing 'webs of contacts in this or that city' for action 'when the benevolent God called England or the USSR or Badoglio comes and strikes the "deadly blow" that prepares the terrain for the Redemption of the masses'<sup>132</sup> – as a passive, wait-and-see approach, reflecting not the 'great, national parties' of the future, but the impotent isolation to which repression condemned anti-fascists. Talk of organising veteran militants to exploit an 'opportunity' provided by outside intervention was 'the vocabulary with which thousands of Italian anti-fascists "doing" politics ...

with their sterile game of encounters and contacts, have studied how best to imitate the snake that devours its own tail'.<sup>133</sup>

This polemic was directed not just against *Scintilla*. It also targeted circles such as the liberal-socialists, whom it also accused of designing blueprints for the future rather than working to stir masses of Italians against the régime. Later recounting this episode, *Scintilla's* Francesco Cretara claimed that the intellectuals' real interest was to close down the space for critical reflection, thus asserting their own unchallenged leadership.<sup>134</sup> In his view, while the PCI did indeed wish to 'mobilise' the masses, these latter would only serve as foot-soldiers for a Party that had already decided the purpose and strategy of their activity on their behalf. As such, the working-class Italians the PCI organised would not be the conscious defenders of their own interests, but merely a kind of social ballast helping Party leaders to build their influence. In this sense, these intellectuals' pointedly anti-intellectual focus on agitation – prioritising 'rousing the masses to action' over 'discussing the problems of tomorrow' – clearly marked a significant break with

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Unnumbered 1945 typescript, MSdL/FSC/29/87, p. 1. Cretara idiosyncratically termed their approach 'organic centralism'. This term in fact derives from the organisational outlook of PCd'I expellee Amadeo Bordiga, insisting on tight adherence to a predefined revolutionary programme, whereas the Togliattians like other 'Bolshevised' parties referred to their approach as 'democratic centralism', meaning the responsibility on all communists to implement majority decisions as a single collective. In practice 'democratic' centralism rarely involved meaningful democratic procedure, but in theory was more open to debate and dissent than the 'invariant' programme underpinning 'organic centralism'. Cretara's reading can thus be taken as an ironic jibe, written in a speech he prepared for a post-Liberation MCd'I congress.

the Party's original emphasis on schooling working-class cadres in a communist programme.<sup>135</sup>

Already at this early stage of reorganisation, Alicata and Rodano's critique of 'doctrinaires' 'revolutionary in words alone' contained *in nuce* the ideology of the Togliattian 'new party'. In this perspective, the Communists would not organise around an immediately revolutionary programme as in the 1920s, but rather help to build a democratic Italy allowing the Party freedom of organisation. This polemic therefore foreshadowed the basic strategic divide of the Resistance period. In this view, the arguments posed in *Scintilla* reflected the same 'doctrinarism' and 'particularism' that had hobbled the opposition to Fascism after World War I. The working class instead had to assert its role in a 'national' coalition, a protagonist of a 'Second *Risorgimento*' that would secure independence and democracy. For their leftist rivals, conversely, alliance with the liberals who had ruled Italy before Mussolini could only mean preserving Italian capitalism at its moment of greatest crisis. This would mean giving up the 'opportunity' to fight for power on the model of October 1917.

## 2.6. From Mussolini to Stalin

While these two communist tendencies both sought to overcome the political inheritance of 1920s Italy, they also recruited intellectuals from a very different movement who also rejected the old liberal order: namely, Fascists. For the most part the individuals concerned were young men born around the time of World War I, who thus came to consciousness deep into the Mussolinian *ventennio*, and first engaged politically in régime-promoted philosophical and cultural forums. The *littoriali* and the welter of journals published in the Fascist period were not simply instruments of 'totalitarian' indoctrination; for their debates also partly expressed the régime's internal contradictions, and indeed the gap between its stated modernising objectives and the conservative realities of 1930s Italy. It was this that allowed the Communist Party to fish for its new 'ruling class' of leaders like Trombadori, Alicata and Ingrao among Fascist student organisations; a switch

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<sup>135</sup> ACS/PS/F1/68/198/0704, p. 8.

of intellectuals' allegiances that became both more clear-cut and more widespread as the régime entered its war-crisis.<sup>136</sup>

For *Scintilla's* Orfeo Mucci, it was a point of honour that his comrades rebuffed such tainted 'opportunists'.<sup>137</sup> The reality was rather more complex. The Amendola circle was dominated by young men drawn from the Fascist student milieu, and the more proletarian *Scintilla* group refused to accept these precocious 'aristocratic' intellectuals' leadership. Yet after twenty years of Fascism no mass political project could simply reject all who had participated in régime organisations. Mucci's comrade Felice Chilanti (from October 1943 co-editor of *Bandiera Rossa*), had from 1934 to 1942 been an enthusiastic exponent of 'Left-Fascist' theories, and like the Rome PCI's new intellectual élite had written for journals edited by Mussolini's key lieutenants. Certainly, Chilanti was exceptional insofar as the MCd'I recruited only a handful of former Fascist intellectuals.<sup>138</sup> Yet each of his political affiliations from 1930s Left-Fascism to his 1960s Maoism bears considerable analogy with *Bandiera Rossa's* idolisation of Soviet socialism, providing a striking example of how enthusiasts for 'revolutionary' régimes could project their own ideals onto such states rather than merely passively accept their ideologues' catechisms.

Born to a peasant family in Rovigo five months before Italy entered the Great War, Chilanti came to Rome as a teenager to study agronomy, and from 1934 worked as a writer for the farming union's in-house journal. He was soon drawn to Giuseppe Bottai and Edmondo Rossoni, syndicalists who viewed Fascism as a social revolution and systemic alternative to capitalism. With no socialist relatives or ties of friendship, the young Fascist journalist was instead educated in a politics that criticised régime policy only abstractly and which was based on elaborate reinterpretations of the *Duce's* 'myth'. For example, after Mussolini's 14 November 1933 speech on corporatism attacked 'bourgeois' values – here referring to the 'conservative spirit' of middle-class Italians who balked at hard work and wartime sacrifices – the Fascist Left took the *Duce's* comments as a cue to discuss how to dissolve economic class divisions in general.<sup>139</sup> The impossibility of criticising the specifics of Mussolini's day-to-day policy favoured such an exchange of 'grand plans' for Fascism, with a

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<sup>136</sup> Zangrandi 1962; Chilanti 1969; Serri 2005; Buchignani 1998.

<sup>137</sup> CGB/FAP/Mucci/26.

<sup>138</sup> The other key example is Guido Piovene, a novelist: cf. Gerbi 2012, and Chilanti 1996.

<sup>139</sup> E.g. Chilanti and Soave 1938.

régime intolerant of organised opposition instead becoming the focus of a range of competing and irreconcilable social agendas.

These tensions also expressed the discrepancy between what Mussolini's biographer Renzo de Felice termed 'régime-Fascism' and 'movement-Fascism': the gap separating the *Duce's* pragmatic *raison d'état* from the panoply of hopes placed in Fascism by its grassroots supporters, often favouring a fuller 'totalitarian' assault on the royal, military and Church establishment. Chilanti's syndicalist comrades were themselves impatient at Fascism's failure to realise the ambitious social objectives of its 1919 programme, known as *Sansepolcristo*: a 'Left' current of Italian Fascism, never suppressed outright in the manner of 'Strasserite' Nazism. While their publications like *Lavoro Fascista*, *L'Ordine Corporativo* or *Primato* did little to shape régime policy, being read only by a narrow intellectual élite, they did pose major philosophical questions over Fascism's long-term goals: did it have universal values? Were Fascists in favour of the abolition of money and the state? Could colonised Ethiopia be a sandbox for trialling a 'proletarian cooperativist' economy?<sup>140</sup> If these circles were infiltrated by an anti-fascist *fronda* [internal opposition] and also involved *afascisti* [non-fascists] of little definite political conviction, they were broadly hegemonised by sincere Fascists seeking to expand the régime's socially reforming character.

This 'modernism' affected even Mussolinian intellectuals' view of the 'great experiment' in Russia, from Curzio Malaparte's 1929 visit to Moscow to ex-communist Nicola Bombacci's review *La Verità*, published with Mussolini's backing from 1936 onward.<sup>141</sup> Chilanti even wrote an October 1939 piece for *Gerarchia*<sup>142</sup> – the most 'official' Fascist journal, nominally edited by Il Duce himself – with a glowing review of the 1934 book *The Triumph of Fascism in the USSR*,<sup>143</sup> which argued that Stalin had abandoned 'internationalist Marxism' in favour of 'Mussolini's black Bolshevism'. Published just five weeks after the Hitler-Stalin Pact, this article echoed James Burnham<sup>144</sup> and Bruno Rizzi's<sup>145</sup> analyses of the worldwide

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<sup>140</sup> On Ethiopia, cf. *Il Bò*, III/19, 15.11.1937, p. 1, 'Giustizia sociale'; for wider discussion, cf. Zangrandi 1962; Parlato 2008; Serri 2005.

<sup>141</sup> Named after the Soviet *Pravda*.

<sup>142</sup> *Gerarchia*, October 1939, pp. 692–93, 'Stalin contro la democrazia'.

<sup>143</sup> Bertoni 1934.

<sup>144</sup> Burnham 1941.

<sup>145</sup> Rizzi 1939.

tendency toward 'total' plannerism, although Chilanti interpreted this change favourably as the path to social justice and the end of alienated labour.<sup>146</sup> While his associates included former communists like Bombacci and *Lo Stato Corporativo* editor Vittorio Ambrosino,<sup>147</sup> this syncretic politics was far from inherently anti-fascist: Bombacci was executed in 1945 for his role as the Salò Republic's Labour Minister, while Ambrosini was a fascist parliamentary candidate in 1958.

The quixotic Ambrosini was Chilanti's partner in perhaps the most radical of all Left-Fascist projects, a revolutionary circle founded in January 1941 revolving around the newspaper *Domani* ['Tomorrow']. Appearing every three weeks, *Domani* characterised Italy's mobilisation against the Western democracies as the opportunity for Fascism both to destroy these 'capitalist imperialisms' and accelerate its domestic social revolution. The editorial staff, which also included future novelist Vasco Pratolini, however grew increasingly despondent at the progress of the war; himself sent to the front in Albania, Chilanti was alarmed by conscripts' total apathy toward the social radicalism that he identified with the Fascist war effort.<sup>148</sup> Nonetheless, *Domani* did soon attract the attentions of the philo-Nazi poet Ezra Pound, who became a frequent participant in discussions of Fascist economic and cultural policy at Chilanti's Via Frattini residence. Chilanti later recalled Pound's bemusement at the ideas of his 'anarcho-fascist' friends, whose noisy criticisms of bourgeois elements of the régime saw *Domani's* right to publish suspended in October 1941, after its ninth issue.<sup>149</sup>

*Domani's* ultimate undoing was its botched conspiracy to assassinate Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano, in its attempt to eliminate a régime 'conservative' and thus 'impose an energetic socialist policy on Il Duce'.<sup>150</sup> Betrayed by an informant, the plot quickly collapsed, with the conspirators each arrested on 22 March 1942. 'Is this the onset of anti-fascism?' Ciano asked in his diary entry on the failed attack.<sup>151</sup> Not quite: Chilanti had long nurtured hopes in a socially-revolutionary

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<sup>146</sup> Chilanti and Soave 1938.

<sup>147</sup> A former commander of the *Arditi del Popolo*.

<sup>148</sup> Chilanti 1972a

<sup>149</sup> Chilanti 1972b.

<sup>150</sup> Ciano 1980, p. 602

<sup>151</sup> Ibid. Also mentioned in Pound's *Pisan Cantos*, LXXVII/177-82.

Fascism, and only after his arrest did he repudiate the régime and its record. Where numerous intellectuals including the members of the Amendola circle had started playing a *doppio gioco* [hedging their bets] in the late 1930s, and in postwar years insisted that they had broken early and decisively with Mussolini, Chilanti (much like Ruggero Zangrandi)<sup>152</sup> resisted the temptation to deny his sincere youthful Fascism.<sup>153</sup> Nonetheless, the self-described ‘anarcho-fascist’s’ 1942 arrest and the collapse of *Domani* did mark his final estrangement from régime circles, forcing him into *confino* on the island of Lipari. The exiled journalist now came to project his utopian ideals onto the Red Army resistance at Stalingrad, falling into line with his Croatian cellmates.<sup>154</sup>

This was but the start of Chilanti’s long journey through the Left, in a career marked by a continuing inability to fold to organisational discipline. Rejected for PCI membership in Lipari, upon reaching Rome in August 1943 he instead approached *Bandiera Rossa*, and on account of his journalistic skills<sup>155</sup> soon became co-editor of its newspaper. After the war he departed for the PCI, before becoming a Maoist, and then entering the New Left *Avanguardia Operaia* in 1971. In a memoir appearing that same year, he lamented having backed quite so many failed revolutionary projects: ‘I sat at the bar and wondered – so who was I? I never did capture Mussolini in 1942, I never did stick a gun to his back... and nor did I get to wipe out Rome’s big capitalists in Rome on the morning of Liberation with my *Bandiera Rossa* comrades’.<sup>156</sup> In this sense, Chilanti’s Stalinist epiphany at Lipari<sup>157</sup> was barely less ill-fated than his earlier Fascist utopianism. Nonetheless, if Chilanti was in many senses an unusual figure, his idolisation of a series of ‘revolutionary’ régimes points to important broader traits of wartime Italian political culture.

While the Stalinist or Fascist ‘leader cult’ is widely identified with totalising authoritarian power, its contradiction lay in the fact that the idolisation of Stalin or

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<sup>152</sup> Zangrandi 1962.

<sup>153</sup> Chilanti 1969; Chilanti 1972b.

<sup>154</sup> ‘I knew nothing about Bordiga, but during the battle of Stalingrad my fellow Croat *confinati* and I greeted each other by quietly chanting *Volga, Volga*. Stalin was the hero of our divided lives’: Chilanti 2004, p. 68.

<sup>155</sup> Primo incontro con Chilanti 3.6.1966’: MSdL/FSC/26/22.

<sup>156</sup> Chilanti 1971, p. 29.

<sup>157</sup> Chilanti 2004, p. 68.

Mussolini<sup>158</sup> meant millions of people projecting their own aspirations onto a single figure. The cult thus embodied myriad interests the leader could never reconcile, being at once the source of authority and the cipher for the competing myths created by those vesting their faith in him.<sup>159</sup> This was partly resolved by the various psychological means of rationalising the idol's failings, from the 'movement-Fascists' who believed that the King and Church were obstructing Mussolini's social revolution, to the outcast communists who wrote to Stalin from the Gulag pleading for him to intervene against the lowly officials they blamed for their supposedly 'mistaken' punishment. A similar logic governed *Scintilla* militants' rejection of Togliattian authority, for they refused to believe the Amendola group's claims to be following 'orders from Moscow' precisely because its positions so sharply contradicted their own Soviet mythology. For these militants, the USSR was not just a 'beacon of socialism' irradiating outward, but a screen onto which they projected ideals of their own creation.

Such idolisation of the 'workers' fatherland' was especially boundless on the Italian underground, isolated from the Comintern across two decades of repression. Where exiled Party leaders loyally followed Stalin's policy zigzags, the Italian subculture developed its folk mythology of the USSR free of the political constraints that Moscow imposed on its satellites. If, as Cortesi explains, most underground communists saw recent Soviet history 'only through the prism of Fascist propaganda, which they simply turned on its head'<sup>160</sup> they venerated not Soviet society such as it really was, but as a 'site for the projection of class feelings and aspirations' opposite to Fascist Italy.<sup>161</sup> Mussolini's anti-communism itself fed their cult of the USSR, allowing them not only to dismiss even accurate press reports of Stalinist atrocities as mere Fascist propaganda, but also to interpret Il Duce's attempts to paint all opposition as 'communist' as evidence of rising Soviet power. *Scintilla* issue 1's headline spoke of 'Communism stand[ing] accused'. Its 'defence' case answered a

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<sup>158</sup> Indeed, given that religious idols are not a power unto themselves, but human artefacts that men invest with the authority to rule over them, we might say that Mussolini or Stalin were 'idols' precisely insofar as the cult was outside of their own control.

<sup>159</sup> The Latin root of 'cult', *colere*, means both 'to cultivate' and 'to worship'; it can be taken to mean an active, creative process as well as mere obedience.

<sup>160</sup> Cortesi 1999, pp. 418–19.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

‘prosecution’ that posed the alternative: fascist New Order or ‘the Bolshevisation of Europe’?<sup>162</sup>

As the Red Army began reversing the Axis onslaught, long-defeated militants imagining that the ‘time to settle accounts’ was finally at hand voiced a Soviet-inspired maximalism exceeding even the intentions of PCI leaders. To refashion De Felice’s terms, just as cadres’ ‘régime-Stalinist’ defence of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in August 1939 had shocked students previously attracted by Soviet anti-fascism, the Togliattian ‘national front’ with liberals and conservatives after June 1941 contradicted the ‘movement-Stalinist’ faith in the immediate ‘advent’ of socialism. The strategic duplicity that came naturally to exiles trained in defending Kremlin foreign-policy was still effectively unknown to an Italian underground who had always abstractly idolised Stalin more than they actually conformed to his policy turns. In this sense, we can distinguish underground militants’ ‘untarnished philo-Sovietism’ from the more cynical view of Party officials who knew Stalinist duplicity first-hand.<sup>163</sup> Already by the start of the war this contradiction had begun producing ‘movement-Stalinist’ tendencies outside of Party cadres’ control.

As we have seen, such tensions in wartime communist culture were evident already in Rome’s very first clandestine circles. A Soviet-inspired triumphalism widespread even among those communists who criticised merely messianic hopes of Red Army intervention. We have seen the paradox that while these conspiratorial networks each idolised Stalin’s USSR, they were riven by sharp political divisions as well as numerous militants’ refusal to accept official Party cadres’ authority. *Scintilla* and the Amendola group were not yet mass organisations, and after the December 1942 police crackdown their activity was much reduced. But if, as they both agreed, communists could not just passively await the Allies’ arrival, then their competing strategies could have a real impact on shaping the new Italy. As we shall see in Chapter Three, the German invasion brought a social crisis in which their organisations could prosper.

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<sup>162</sup> *Scintilla*, 1, ‘Il comunismo in stato d’accusa’.

<sup>163</sup> Barth Urban 1986.



## Chapter Three

### Out of clandestinity - and back again

*25 July and the fall of Fascism came. The monarchy thought it could get rid of Mussolini and happily continue as before, with Vittorio Emanuele handing control of the government to his ally Badoglio. The parties now felt liberated from the grip of Fascism. We, conversely, turned our cells into combat cells, ready for when ... the war would officially be over, in order to fight against the Germans and the residues of Fascism, and above all against capitalism.*

San Lorenzo MCd'I commander Orfeo Mucci, 1995 interview<sup>1</sup>

On 25 July 1943 Vittorio Emanuele III sacked Benito Mussolini, completing a decisive split in the Italian ruling class. Previous months had seen both revolutionary conspiracies and dissident élites preparing for the *Duce's* downfall, as competing oppositions prepared to exploit the crisis of régime authority. Yet only in summer 1943 did a breach finally open up in the self-proclaimed 'totalitarian' state, as Italy's royalist-military establishment moved to free itself of Mussolini's disastrous leadership. Starting with the US landings in Sicily on 10 July, the two months concluding with the Wehrmacht invasion were indeed 'weeks when decades happened',<sup>2</sup> as the fallout of a two-decade régime pitched the country's traditional institutions into chaos. With Italy rapidly divided between not only Allied and Axis invaders but also two warring national governments, anti-fascists now began to build a counter-power of their own.

In Chapter Three we shall see how the Roman Left developed from small conspiratorial circles into movements able to mobilise thousands in armed struggle. Again we shall highlight the connections between the international context, domestic Italian politics and communists' view of their own activity. After surveying the proximate causes of the 25 July coup, we shall explore ruling-class efforts to stabilise the Italian political situation, and the cautious sympathy they

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<sup>1</sup> Orfeo Mucci, interview for Regione Lazio, Banca della Memoria, 1995, available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OISyH9tiFZY>

<sup>2</sup> An apocryphal Lenin quote, originating in György Lukács's *Lenin: A Study in the Unity of his Thought*.

earned among the Allied leaderships. Noting that Badoglio's government was slow to introduce liberalising measures, this chapter shows that the new régime effectively allowed the anti-fascist parties greater freedom of organisation while failing to consolidate its own legitimacy with any decisive change of political direction. This ambivalence set the political tone for the Resistance movements that followed the 8 September Wehrmacht invasion.

The events of summer 1943 not only encouraged the formation of the MCd'I, but created the political vacuum in which its ideas could take root. While March-April saw major strike waves in the great factories of Turin and Milan, largely initiated by these cities' re nascent PCI cells,<sup>3</sup> there had been no such social revolt in Rome, where communist organisation was yet to recover from the December 1942 régime crackdown, and workplace agitation absent. Only after the palace coup against Mussolini, leading to the gradual release of most political prisoners, could *Scintilla* and the 'workers' and intellectuals' group' return to building their clandestine networks. Yet this did not mean that working-class Romans watched the unfolding crisis merely passively, or that their responses were conditioned only by hatred of the Fascist dictator. As a look at the city's San Lorenzo district indicates, even the Roman proletariat's less formally-organised 'class politics' left it distrustful of many now claiming to be its liberators.

### 3.1. The war comes home

The US Air Force's bombing of San Lorenzo on 19 July 1943 was the first aerial assault on the capital. Already nine days earlier Anglo-American forces had established a toehold in Sicily, threatening to invade the Italian mainland; on 14 May Flying Fortresses had wreaked havoc at the port of Civitavecchia, 80km west of the capital. Many observers nonetheless assumed that Rome was to be spared such destruction. Just as other bombed-out populations resented the city's seeming immunity,<sup>4</sup> Father Libero Raganella recounted San Lorenzo residents' sceptical view of the drill exercises organised by the district's septuagenarian UNPA air-raid wardens.<sup>5</sup> 19 July would tragically explode such complacency. Raganella's diary describes 'a deafening roar, the ground shaking like an earthquake even as the first

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<sup>3</sup> See Mason's (2008) essay on the March 1943 strikes.

<sup>4</sup> Discussed in Petrella 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Raganella 2000, p. 91.

note of the siren was still sounding'.<sup>6</sup> A thousand tonnes of American bombs claimed 1,600 lives in San Lorenzo alone: the priest witnessed 'a scene like the end of the world, nothing to be seen but rubble and collapsed buildings, and the human lives buried underneath'.<sup>7</sup>

This San Lorenzo cleric would later publish his diary under the title *Without asking what side they're on*,<sup>8</sup> expressing his pastoral vocation to assist those in distress regardless of their ideological or military allegiances. Yet few could fail to see the political significance of this human tragedy. The night after the Allied attack, Blackshirts painted the ironic words 'THE LIBERATORS' WORK' on buildings around the district, attempting to whip up animosity against the Anglo-Americans; police-intelligence sources report the spread of rumours that the 'plutocratic democracies'<sup>9</sup> had targeted San Lorenzo precisely because it had a reputation as a 'Red' district.<sup>10</sup> Many *sanlorenzini* saw further evidence for this conspiracy theory in the fact that President Roosevelt had publically committed to keep USAF planes away from the Holy See: why could he not extend the same concern to ordinary Romans?<sup>11</sup>

This idea of a neighbourhood unjustly punished for Mussolini's actions gained such currency locally that some seven decades later *Scintilla* co-founder Agostino Raponi's daughter Franca could write 'It's worth remembering that the bombing of San Lorenzo struck against a neighbourhood and a community that had strenuously resisted Fascism, with the Allied incursions claiming some 1,600 victims. This was no normal military occurrence - the Red Army victory at Stalingrad and the Anglo-American landings in Sicily had already shown that the war was won'.<sup>12</sup> We might doubt that American commanders were aware of this population's radical past; the bombers in any case targeted not San Lorenzo but a series of nearby rail yards, claiming 1,400 lives outside of the district. However, the popular myth that the Americans deliberately attacked a 'Red area' that had

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<sup>6</sup> Raganella 2000, p. 93.

<sup>7</sup> Raganella 2000, p. 95.

<sup>8</sup> Raganella 2000: *Senza sapere di che parte stanno*.

<sup>9</sup> Though this term for the USA and Britain was initially drawn from Fascist propaganda, it soon became part of leftist discourse and popular parlance in general.

<sup>10</sup> Discussed in Piccioni 1984, pp. 142-3.

<sup>11</sup> Of course, this was not simply a matter of preferring churches to people as an attempt to avoid gifting a propaganda coup to the Axis powers and antagonising Catholics.

<sup>12</sup> Raponi 2011.

‘never given in’ to Mussolini certainly does tell us of *sanlorenzini*’s pride in their neighbourhood’s ‘subversive’ traditions, upholding a locally-rooted class identity connected to great questions of international politics.

The notion of a ‘Red’ San Lorenzo was built around a mythologised ‘long resistance’, rooting class identity less in the world of labour than in the district’s alienness from the Fascist ‘national community’. After actively opposing Mussolini’s coup, a stubborn minority of *sanlorenzini* continued in passive resistance such as removing their children from Fascist mass organisations, failing to contribute to the ‘wedding rings for Ethiopia’ initiative,<sup>13</sup> or perhaps ‘raising a glass for the jailed comrades’ on May Day.<sup>14</sup> While many jobs required *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (PNF) membership – for instance at the ATAG public-transport authority, a major employer in a district standing between Rome’s two largest railway stations – some refused to join.<sup>15</sup> In 1939 San Lorenzo operatic tenor Nicola Stame was arrested on-stage during his rehearsals for Puccini’s *Turandot* because he would not take a PNF card.<sup>16</sup> He would later become a local MCD’I commander. Though such resistance was far from unanimously or consistently observed,<sup>17</sup> the defiance shown by some *sanlorenzini* concentrated a collective sense of class pride and local belonging, hardening as war conditions worsened.

We can see the political importance of these myths when we consider the widely-asserted claim that San Lorenzo was the only neighbourhood in Italy to resist the ‘March on Rome’. The details of this story as commonly retold – with women throwing pans of boiling water over the invading Blackshirts from rooftops on the Via Tiburtina, before *Arditi del Popolo* militants opened fire to force the *squadristi*’s retreat – in fact referred to disruption of a Fascist-stewarded funeral procession five months earlier, the last time locals had routed the PNF streetfighters.<sup>18</sup> Yet this conflation of local history with events of grander political significance reinforced the idea of San Lorenzo as a constant source of insubordination; a community that resisted Fascism even as other Italians bowed to its authority. This oppositional

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<sup>13</sup> A bid by the regime to extract precious metals by popular contribution.

<sup>14</sup> Discussed at length in Piccioni 1984.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> See Alessandro Portelli’s interview with Stame’s daughter Rosetta: CGB/FAP/Stame.

<sup>17</sup> In fact far from consistently opposing all aspects of régime policy, Stame had fought on the Fascist side in both Ethiopia and Spain.

<sup>18</sup> Piccioni 1984.

identity took on fresh meaning after the 19 July 1943 bombings, sealing the population's definitive rejection of a hopeless war. Implicitly identifying all true *sanlorenzini* as anti-fascists,<sup>19</sup> the collective alibi of the 'long resistance' not only highlighted the injustice of the US Air Force's attack, but also burnished worker-radicals' credentials as representatives of the community as a whole.

Politically-engaged militants were only ever a small minority of San Lorenzo residents, but their concerted activism heavily shaped the culture of a neighbourhood only first built in the 1880s. A local working-class movement first took shape with the anarchist and socialist meeting-halls, clubs and co-operatives of the late nineteenth century, in which independent artisans and small shopkeepers came together with Southern migrant labourers seeking employment in Rome's booming construction trade. Mainly led by autodidacts and populated by the semi-literate, this emerging movement was not simply a local emanation of the Left parties organising nationally; rather, it was strongly coloured by a kind of folk *sovversivismo*, a quasi-religious utopianism, and an instinctive hostility toward institutional power.<sup>20</sup> This did not mean a total rejection of party organisation: most of the San Lorenzo workers' circles did affiliate to the *Partito Socialista Italiano* upon its 1892 creation, with some then voting (largely *en bloc*) to join the Communists in 1921. But if the PCd'I focused its efforts on giving a lead to the unionised factory workers of Italy's Northern cities, San Lorenzo's 'subversives' were far less easily disciplined in a cadre party.

This autonomous *sovversivismo* was most apparent in the *Arditi del Popolo* movement of 1921–22, with the PCd'I office on the Via dei Sardi – inherited from older anarchist circles – serving as a key mobilising hub, despite Party leaders' ban on members' involvement. Defying prime minister Ivanoe Bonomi's attempts to suppress the AdP as well as national PCd'I and Socialist officials' deprecation of this anarchist-hued movement, hundreds of *sanlorenzini* took up arms to defend their area from Blackshirt streetfighters. This militancy was remembered long after Mussolini's coming-to-power, thanks not only to popular legend but also the individuals connecting different generations of armed struggle. San Lorenzo AdP

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<sup>19</sup> In conversations with elderly San Lorenzo residents during my research I was repeatedly told that any local Fascists 'must have' come from outside the neighbourhood.

<sup>20</sup> Only in 1912 was 'universal suffrage' introduced for the one-quarter of Italians who were male and aged over 30.

leader Renato Gentilezza, a watchmaker who led a 1924 armed assault on the district's Fascist headquarters,<sup>21</sup> was central to its MCd'I cell from August 1943 onward; his fellow anarchist Celestino Avico, owner of a gravestone workshop bordering the Verano cemetery, fashioned explosives for the Resistance-era *Armata Rossa* as for the anti-fascists of 1921.<sup>22</sup> Orfeo Mucci, son of a turn-of-the-century anarchist bakers' leader and himself a child witness to the *Arditi del Popolo*,<sup>23</sup> remained an iconic figure of the *sanlorenzino* Left from the 1930s to the 1990s.

This idea of a 'long resistance' provided the political underpinning for two enduring popular myths about the bombing of San Lorenzo. Firstly, it fed the notion that given *sanlorenzini*'s historic opposition to Mussolini, 19 July 1943 marks part of the neighbourhood's anti-fascist tradition rather than a mere tragedy resulting from the war. Telling in this regard is the paradoxical remembrance of the US Air Force's victims as 'martyrs of the Italian Resistance', with the local branch of partisan veterans' association ANPI still today holding its annual commemorations on this anniversary. Secondly, already in July 1943, the notion that in punishing an 'anti-fascist community' for the *Duce*'s war, the Allies had made clear their indifference or even hostility toward this population: that as in 1922, *sanlorenzini* would themselves have to fight for their freedom. In claiming that the USAF deliberately targeted a 'Red area', *soversivi* emphasised working-class Romans and the Anglo-Americans ultimately had opposing interests, even as the Allies brought Fascism to near-collapse. Such was the terrain in which *Bandiera Rossa*'s anti-establishment ideas now began to take root.

### 3.2. The overthrow of Mussolini, and the '45 Days'

The 19 July Allied bombing of Rome not only brought calamity for the people of San Lorenzo, but also marked the end of Italian élites' tolerance of the Mussolini régime. Relations between the royalist-military establishment and the *Duce* had worsened across three years of setbacks in North Africa and the Balkans, and by the time of the 24 July Fascist Grand Council tensions had reached breaking-point. Although the *Duce* began this leadership summit with an address insisting that he

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<sup>21</sup> Piccioni 1984.

<sup>22</sup> Bentivegna 1983, pp. 64–8, describes this *Armata Rossa* commander also supplying explosives to the GAP.

<sup>23</sup> Described in his interview with Alessandro Portelli in CGB/FAP.

could still achieve an honourable outcome to the war, it soon became apparent that his lieutenants had called the meeting precisely because they were now hell-bent on ousting the failed imperial adventurer. Passing a motion of no-confidence in the *Duce* at 2 a.m. on 25 July, the Council voted 19 to 8 to hand control of the war effort to the King; when Mussolini headed to the palace later that morning, Vittorio Emanuele III had him arrested and taken to prison in an ambulance. The septuagenarian monarch now appointed Marshal Pietro Badoglio, conqueror of Ethiopia in 1935–36, as his new prime minister.

Both the international situation and mounting turmoil on the home front encouraged Italian élites' final break with the *Duce*. One key flashpoint was the March–April 1943 strike wave in Turin and Milan, clearly indicating the potential for social unrest. Adolf Hitler himself criticised Mussolini's failure to clamp down harder on this revolt in the Northern factories, noting that he had 'always said that in these cases those who show any weakness are lost'.<sup>24</sup> Yet the 'intransigence' the Führer recommended was exactly the approach that conservatives like the King and Marshal Badoglio repudiated on 25 July. While Mussolini advocated a fight to the last man against the Allied armies now overrunning Sicily, his erstwhile ruling-class supporters also understood that this was not the only path open to them. Military retreat on all fronts, chronic power shortages, and a mounting food crisis all posed an immediate danger to social stability, with the régime unable even to deliver Italians' 890 calories of daily rations.<sup>25</sup> To save the state itself, it was imperative to reach a deal with the invading powers.

At January 1943's Casablanca Conference the UK and US leaderships had apparently ruled out any prospect of a truce with Italy, demanding that the Axis states offer their unconditional surrender. Yet the defection of Algeria's Vichyite governors the previous month had also shown a willingness to deal with even authoritarian élites who broke with Hitler. Seeking to save themselves from Fascism's crisis, Italian royalist circles grasped at this apparent opportunity. Just as the November 1942 landings in North Africa led local Vichyite bosses to abandon Marshal Pétain, it was the Allied incursions in Sicily that forced the hand

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Behan 2009, p. 43.

<sup>25</sup> Massola 1973 usefully reconstructs the rations situation, including in the Northern cities in the months before the 1943 strike wave.

of plotters in Rome, who after ousting the *Duce* on 25 July immediately began overtures for an armistice. Notwithstanding their 'unconditional surrender' policy, Roosevelt and Churchill were prepared to cooperate with Badoglio. By 30 July the President had told US media that he would negotiate with whoever 'could best give us first, disarmament and second, assurance against chaos',<sup>26</sup> noting in a wire to 10 Downing Street that such deals would doubtless provoke complaints from 'the same element that made such a fuss over North Africa'.<sup>27</sup>

Cautious over Badoglio's real intentions, the Allies nonetheless hoped that he could extricate Italy from the war in an orderly fashion. Churchill warned his Foreign Secretary that while Rome would have to make a 'formal act of submission', it was important to avoid 'harping on about "unconditional surrender" with no prospect of mercy held out even as an act of grace', for this 'may well lead to no surrender at all'.<sup>28</sup> The British Prime Minister told Roosevelt that he was 'not in the least afraid' of 'seeming to recognise' the post-coup régime, if this meant a deal that could 'undue burdens on our troops': the King and Badoglio not only had the authority to demobilise Italy's military, but also stood against 'chaos, Bolshevisation and civil war'.<sup>29</sup> This concern to prevent social disorder in Italy seems to have figured centrally in Churchill's lenient attitude toward the Badoglio government: he warned Roosevelt that the country 'had turned Red overnight' after 'twenty years of fascism', which had 'obliterated the middle class'; there was now 'nothing between the King, with the patriots who have rallied around him, who have complete control, and rampant Bolshevism'.<sup>30</sup>

In this same transatlantic missive Churchill emphasised that the 25 July coup had sparked 'Communist demonstrations which had to be put down by armed force',<sup>31</sup> with the popular reaction to the *Duce's* downfall extending to looting, attacks on government property, and jail-breaks including the escape of over a thousand inmates from Rome's Regina Coeli prison. The new régime had deposed Mussolini not least in order to keep the state intact, and it acted decisively to prevent

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<sup>26</sup> 'President Roosevelt to Prime Minister, 30.7.1943, cited in Churchill 1951, p. 59.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> 'Prime Minister to Foreign Secretary', 9.8.1943, Churchill 1951, p. 91.

<sup>29</sup> 'Former Naval Person to President Roosevelt', 31.7.1943, Churchill 1951, p. 59.

<sup>30</sup> 'Former Naval Person to President Roosevelt', 5.8.1943, Churchill 1951, p. 89.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*



Fascism's crisis sparking wider disorder. On 26–27 July troops broke up rallies in Milan, Florence, Turin, La Spezia and Sesto Fiorentino; nine workers were shot dead in Reggio Emilia, together with 23 members of a crowd gathering outside a Bari jail to demand anti-fascist prisoners' release.<sup>32</sup> Popular-culture portrayals of 25 July typically focus on street celebrations fêting the King's dismissal of Mussolini, yet the two days of unrest that followed saw 87 people killed.<sup>33</sup> Despite Badoglio's private determination to end the war, as armistice talks continued he maintained a façade of loyalty to Berlin, declaring in his radio address to the long-suffering Italian people that 'the war goes on'.

Even in maintaining an outward rhetoric of continuity Badoglio was not merely intransigent, and after suppressing 'subversive' protests the new régime also made liberalising measures in an attempt to shore up its authority. This included an effort to co-opt representatives of democratic parties into the government, with the King's confidant Ivanoe Bonomi – 1921–22 prime minister and himself one of the actors behind the Badoglio coup<sup>34</sup> – serving as an intermediary between the new régime and the traditional anti-fascist politicians. Convening three meetings of Christian-Democrat, Liberal, Socialist, Communist and *Partito d'Azione* leaders in Rome from 27 to 31 July, the liberal grandee Bonomi made clear the new authorities' intention of breaking up the National Fascist Party and securing an armistice with the Allies. On 3 August these parties' leaders entered talks with Badoglio in search of official recognition and the release of political prisoners. These requests were granted, and the government also agreed to allow the formation of state-supervised trade unions, appointing representatives of the PCI, Socialists and Christian-Democrats as 'labour commissars' to survey working conditions in the Northern war industries.

These democratic parties termed themselves a *Comitato delle Opposizioni* (Cd'O), and during the '45 Days' between 25 July and the 8 September German invasion they maintained a difficult co-operation with Badoglio. The PCI's Giorgio Amendola proposed to the other parties that they invite Badoglio to form a 'national-unity' government, in which the Marshal would remain Minister of

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<sup>32</sup> Peregalli 1991, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> See Bonomi 1947, his diary of this period.

War,<sup>35</sup> but this proposal was sunk by the republican opposition coming from the Socialists and Actionists. Concerned to maintain a common front, the Cd'O parties thus refused any discussion of cabinet posts, in response to which snub Badoglio stopped informing them of the progress of armistice negotiations. The committee thus maintained a somewhat ambiguous position across the remainder of the 45 Days, issuing barbed public statements demanding that the government sue for peace, yet collaborating with Badoglio in creating state-supervised trade unions. The régime that had bloodily suppressed popular demonstrations in the wake of the coup had not formally incorporated the democratic parties, but had tamed possible sources of rebellion.

### 3.3. The Rome PCI after 25 July

Badoglio's overtures to anti-fascist forces found an unlikely ally in the Communist Party leadership, whose cadres sought a broad anti-Nazi alliance. In this sense, the Party's ultimate decision to join the King's government – the turn that Togliatti announced upon his return from Soviet exile in March 1944 – was far from what one Trotskyist historian has called the replacement of a 'class-struggle' strategy with one of 'national unity'.<sup>36</sup> Already in the '45 Days' of summer 1943, the PCI leaders' explicit policy was to build a broad national front against Hitler. Promoted by the Comintern since July 1941, this was a strategy to which all of the Togliattians' tactical shifts conformed, seeking common action with not just other working-class or left-wing parties but 'even bourgeois and reactionary' forces opposed to Nazi Germany. Given their common grounding in this Comintern policy, the PCI's line bore close similarities with the behaviour of France's PCF, which had on 30 May 1943 entered the Algiers-based provisional government led by generals De Gaulle and Giraud.

At a leadership summit on 15 August Northern-based organisers quizzed Amendola on his reasons for providing a labour commissar to Badoglio even before his chosen candidate Giovanni Roveda had reached the capital. Yet what was most striking about this meeting was the overriding level of political agreement, even among cadres who had little contact over summer 1943. In this

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<sup>35</sup> Amendola 1973, p. 131.

<sup>36</sup> Gluckstein 2013, p. 155.

sense, while Amendola took personal initiative in providing a labour commissar to Badoglio, this conformed to a wider PCI strategy. Not only were all present united around the 'national-front' strategy, but they even agreed over its particular tactical expression, endorsing Roveda's 'technical but not political' collaboration with Badoglio. Party historian Paolo Spriano makes much of a missive from the PCF discussed at this meeting, critical of Amendola's seeming embrace of the new authorities. He claims that attendees imagined this letter an indirect warning from Moscow against excessive trust in the new régime.<sup>37</sup> Yet this PCI leadership summit produced no change of political orientation, and resulted in a geographical rather than political reshuffling of its leading personnel.<sup>38</sup>

For want of leader Palmiro Togliatti's direct presence on Italian soil, the PCI apparatus taking form across the 45 Days combined several different centres of authority. This was a side-effect of Badoglio's liberalisation measures, which returned to Party ranks a number of cadres who had remained imprisoned or in *confino* during the PCI reorganisation efforts that preceded the coup. Concretising a divide that would endure until Togliatti's arrival in late March 1944, on 29 August 1943 the national leadership separated into two groups, with a Rome centre led by Luigi Longo, Mauro Scoccimarro, Agostino Novella, Roveda and Amendola, and its Milan counterpart by Umberto Massola, Pietro Secchia, Girolamo Li Causi, and Celeste Negarville.<sup>39</sup> As well as being one of two hubs of 'national' PCI leadership, the capital also had its own Party structures, with overlapping apparatuses for the city of Rome and the wider Lazio Federation. It was Novella, arriving from Milan at the end of August, who took charge of the capital's PCI organisation, with Amendola in turn representing the national leadership on the Lazio Federation's various working bodies.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the Rome PCI leaders' unity around the 'national-front' strategy, they faced difficulties creating Party branches on this basis. This problem was aggravated by the fact that communist groups had already begun appearing outside of PCI structures, mostly ignorant of or opposed to the official Party line.

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<sup>37</sup> Spriano 1973.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Amendola 1973, p. 153.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

A November 1943 Lazio Federation Committee report<sup>41</sup> noted that ‘before 26 July only one part of the Roman communists was directly in contact with the P[arty]’; there had only ‘existed various groupings scattered here and there’, autonomous initiatives ‘propagandising with their own local papers and leaflets’.<sup>42</sup> If these circles’ activity showed that ‘our Party was never destroyed in Rome’,<sup>43</sup> only the Amendola group had been connected to the PCI centre, with the December 1942 arrests<sup>44</sup> in particular suggesting it was ‘imprudent for Party members to present themselves as such [to other underground circles] when comrades’ conspiratorial level was not very developed’.<sup>45</sup> Only after the ‘fall of the Fascist government’ on 25 July did the PCI form a regional federation ‘to unite all these disparate groups and groupuscules’; a task made yet more difficult by the prevalent political mood among Roman communists.

Arriving from Milan to organise Rome’s new PCI federation, Agostino Novella found an underground including not only ‘the residues of old parties and tendencies’ but also the ‘movements and individuals that 25 July violently pushed onto the Italian political scene’.<sup>46</sup> The man responsible for building the Roman PCI noted that these rising forces, ‘lack[ing] a spirit of discipline’ were now ‘knocking on the door of our party, dazzled,<sup>47</sup> seduced and enthused by the Soviet Union’s clamorous political and military victories’, and ‘desirous of “doing what they did in Russia”’.<sup>48</sup> This ‘Soviet prestige’ however led these militants to want ‘to go too far, that is, to do the wrong thing for the current moment’; they were ‘anything but persuaded by the national-front policy, which they deride as reformist and collaborationist’.<sup>49</sup> Novella ascribed this leftist mentality to the ‘social composition

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<sup>41</sup> PCI Federazione Laziale, Comitato direttivo federale, ‘Rapporto politico’, late November 1943: APC/7/2/14, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> Anniversary of Russia’s October Revolution.

<sup>43</sup> PCI Federazione Laziale, Comitato direttivo federale, ‘Rapporto politico’, late November 1943: APC/7/2/14, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> The report also refers to the arrest of the *Pugno Chiuso* [clenched fist] group, led by the Catholic Communists around Franco Rodano.

<sup>45</sup> PCI Federazione Laziale, Comitato direttivo federale, ‘Rapporto politico’, late November 1943: APC/7/2/14, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> The striking use of the word ‘dazzled’ [*abbagliate*] is very telling of PCI leaders’ concern over this pro-Soviet enthusiasm, implying that these new forces were not only enthused or impressed by the Red Army’s successes, but also unsighted or even deluded by them.

<sup>48</sup> PCI Federazione Laziale, Comitato direttivo federale, ‘Rapporto politico’, late November 1943: APC/7/2/14, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

of Rome' that he had outlined in this same document: a city 'more artisanal than industrial' providing a poor terrain for trade-union-type organisation.<sup>50</sup> Its *déclassé* masses bore a 'false conception of the political moment': the Party was being invaded by 'powerful wills, rather than truly political forces'.<sup>51</sup>

Also of note here was Novella's description of the PCI's *Fronte Nazionale* strategy, complaining that it was unpopular among existing communist circles and that 'even the [other] parties joining the *FN*' had dishonestly tried to 'claim that our party was more "collaborationist" than they were'.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, PCI leaders also faced the problem of distinguishing themselves from the Socialists, now that they had abandoned the class-war intransigence that had defined their 1921 split from the PSI. Fellow cadre Antonello Trombadori described attending an August 1943 meeting in Campo de' Fiori attended by 'around twenty workers and *popolani*' and addressed by the Socialist Achille Corona.<sup>53</sup> In Trombadori's account, the audience were left unclear to why the Socialists and Communists were different parties, since the Socialists did not advance 'reformist or anti-Soviet arguments'; however, 'political clarity' came from the PCI's Fernando Mella, who explained that as against the Socialists' alleged *attesimo* (passive, 'wait-and-see' approach), the numbers of Communist arrestees in recent years demonstrated the Party's singular 'will to struggle' and 'class spirit'.<sup>54</sup>

### 3.4. The foundation of the *Movimento Comunista d'Italia*

While the *Comitato delle Opposizioni* parties won the King and Badoglio's recognition as the official representatives of Italian democracy, other anti-fascists sharply criticised these parties' relations with the post-coup régime. Among the prisoners released in the second week of August 1943 were around half the leading figures in *Scintilla*, who had already in autumn 1942 discussed the possibility that the ruling class would cast off Mussolini in order to find a managed way out of the crisis. For these Roman militants, the 25 July shake-up and the mild liberalisation measures that had followed were but the confirmation of their own prognosis, as longtime Fascist-loyalists sought to pacify Italy's social situation without

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, pp. 1–2.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> 'Una discussion con gli operai nel clima dei "45 giorni"', *l'Unità*, 20.1.1957.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

meaningfully giving up power. During the '45 Days' the popular-frontist Togliattians sought to bear influence on Badoglio's reform process by working through official channels. *Scintilla* denounced such 'class-collaborationism' as a mere trap, a stance which drew it into contact with other 'subversives' similarly distrustful of the conservative manoeuvres surrounding the palace coup.

Even before the *Scintilla* prisoners' release, parallel *Gruppi di Rinnovamento* had formed in Rome's northwestern Trionfale district, on the initiative of journalist Ezio Malatesta,<sup>55</sup> Croat theatre director Branko Bitler, and engineering worker Romolo Iacopini, a veteran of the *Arditi del Popolo*.<sup>56</sup> First emerging around 1939,<sup>57</sup> this circle's encounter with *Scintilla* was crucial to the MCd'I's creation, not least given its military contacts through SIM intelligence agent Roberto Guzzo and career soldier Gino Rossi. The Trionfale militants shared *Scintilla*'s searing disdain for the Church, King, and the bourgeoisie belatedly breaking with Mussolini, with the single issue of their bulletin *Attenti!* warning that 'the Fascist hierarchs in their luxury cars still rule[d] the roost' despite the régime's change of face.<sup>58</sup> For *Attenti!*, any democrat who rallied behind Badoglio had swallowed the idea that 'the formation of currents of ideas must be forbidden "for now" as the situation is too dangerous'.<sup>59</sup> In its view, the *Comitato delle Opposizione* represented not a challenge to the régime, but the 'resuscitation of the venerable champions of the defunct parties, who had the merit of sowing the seeds of Fascism, nourishing it and collaborating with it when it had proletarian blood on its hands'.<sup>60</sup>

Circulated in August 1943, this professionally-printed propaganda-sheet lampooned the idea that after twenty years of Fascism communists could subscribe to a politics of 'national unity'. *Attenti!* portrayed this policy as both conferring undue legitimacy on figures like Bonomi, and undermining the Left's freedom of organisation. Blasting the Socialists and the PCI for accepting posts as labour commissars in Badoglio's new régime,<sup>61</sup> *Attenti!* thus insisted that trade-union

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<sup>55</sup> See the entry in MCd'I 1944c. See also section 6.3

<sup>56</sup> See *Il Comandante del Trionfale*, a 1945 pamphlet in homage to Romolo Iacopini. Copy at INSMI.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Attenti!*, p. 2, '25 Luglio'

<sup>59</sup> *Attenti!*, p. 1, '25 Luglio'.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Attenti!*, p. 2, 'Cronachetta'.

militants 'should be supporting the strike movements [in the Northern factories], rather than seeking jobs in the state that policed them'.<sup>62</sup> The Trionfale militants' insinuation against the PCI and PSI labour commissars was certainly an ungenerous portrayal of their positions,<sup>63</sup> but also expressed the *Gruppi di Rinnovamento's* refusal to give any kind of credence to the new régime, not least after the repression following 25 July. Wary of all ruling-class factions, *Attenti!* made natural allies for the most intransigent wing of Roman communism, as its militants sought contacts with other revolutionary and anti-Badoglio conspiracies now forming in the city.

A key date in this effort to merge Rome's revolutionary circles was 15 August 1943, with representatives of *Scintilla*, the sons of murdered Socialist MP Giacomo Matteotti, and the anarchist Gabriele Pappalardo<sup>64</sup> convening at Malatesta's home to discuss their common objectives.<sup>65</sup> The meeting concluded that 'both the composition of the Badoglio Cabinet and its first actions showed that fascism was not dead, nor was there any intention of suppressing it, but simply a change of face'.<sup>66</sup> Attendees thus decided to found 'an organisation of communist propaganda and military action'.<sup>67</sup> This body was not initially a party, but instead took the name 'Provisional Communist Executive', as it began organising local cells. For *Scintilla* co-founder Orfeo Mucci, 'when 25 July and the fall of Fascism came, the monarchy thought it could get rid of Mussolini and happily continue as before', and 'the parties now felt liberated from the grip of Fascism, we instead turned our workplace cells into combat cells, ready for when ... the war would officially be over, in order to fight against the Germans and the residues of Fascism, and above all against capitalism'.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Indeed, this unfairly dismissed the PCI's role in driving the August 1943 strikes in Turin and Milan, which the Togliattians had in fact initiated precisely as a means of exerting pressure on Badoglio to announce an armistice.

<sup>64</sup> In 1921–22 Pappalardo had collaborated with Palermo's Communists in the *Arditi del Popolo* anti-fascist militia. See 'Un direttore irresponsabile', *Sicilia libertaria*, 1.6.2005; and the newspaper he co-edited, *Il Vespro Anarchico*.

<sup>65</sup> Guzzo 1964, p. 48.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Orfeo Mucci, interview for Regione Lazio, Banca della Memoria, 1995, available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OISyH9tiFZY>

If this statement of Mucci's, drawn from a 1995 interview, well-reflects the MCd'I's typical presentation of its place in the Resistance, there is good reason to doubt his and Guzzo's assertion that the 'Provisional Communist Executive' had formed armed cells already in August 1943. While Mucci claims that even before 25 July *Scintilla* 'had our comrades in all parts of the state - the Statistics Agency, the Railways, the Post, the Phone Exchange',<sup>69</sup> and that these became 'combat cells' after the Badoglio coup, his account curiously elides the idea of strategically inserting militants into key infrastructure roles (better to sabotage the state-apparatus), and the suggestion that these workplace groups became armed guerrillas in August 1943 (thus seemingly abandoning the advantages of having militants in these particular jobs). Neither interpretation seems appropriate to conditions in the 45 Days. If a militant like Giuseppe Palmidoro had maintained relations with other communist postmen throughout the 1930s, or Pietro Bättara led fellow civil servants into the MCd'I, these circles had emerged independently of one another and were seemingly not yet engaged in sabotage operations.

In practice, these 'combat cells' were not armed bands but circles of communists based in workplaces, neighbourhoods and army battalions, which gradually cohered into a single network following the meeting at Malatesta's home. The militants connected to the Provisional Communist Executive did not mount any armed actions during the '45 Days', and nor do their accounts yet report specific operations to procure weaponry, a task which would begin in earnest after 8 September. That said, the contacts among these cells in August 1943 clearly did help the MCd'I build its Resistance network, insofar as it had already begun linking together militants across the city. The 15 August meeting united a series of hitherto separate conspiracies, from *Scintilla* and *Attenti!* to the communist postmen and telephone employees, as well as a group of PCI expellees led by former electricians' union secretary Antonino Poce, now returning from *confino*. It was this patchwork of clandestine circles whose leaders formed the self-consciously unofficial Provisional Communist Executive.

This formation's politics bore clear signs of *Scintilla's* earlier clashes with the Togliattian students. The militants meeting at Malatesta's home issued a

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.



‘programmatic declaration’<sup>70</sup> that invoked the PCd’I’s revolutionary traditions while laying its own claim to represent the Roman underground. Stopping short of proclaiming itself the Communist Party, the Provisional Communist Executive however claimed that its cadres were ‘actively working on linking up with communists in other regions in order to achieve the unification and official reconstruction of the *Partito Comunista d’Italia*’.<sup>71</sup> Expressing this same provisional status, other statements from August 1943 referred to the group as ‘the Communists of Rome and Lazio’ or ‘the Communists of Italy’. Despite its claimed ideological orthodoxy – declaring that ‘Communism is and must be the theory espoused by Marx and Engels, realised by Lenin and Stalin’<sup>72</sup> – and self-description as an ‘organised and disciplined movement, ready to give the place of honour to the Party’s political prisoners’ – this remained a specifically Roman organisation, unconnected to the *centro interno* or indeed sections in other cities.

The Provisional Communist Executive insisted that the Communist Party must be rebuilt on the basis of ‘intransigent Marxist socialism’, with an immediate programme for ‘the revolutionary conquest of power’ and a ‘sovietist [sic] Constitution of intellectual and manual workers of all categories’.<sup>73</sup> It linked this ‘intransigent tactic’ to the question of ‘workers’ democracy’. According to its simultaneous ‘communist proclamation’, if ‘the Communist Party [were] not organised according to the principles of workers’ democracy’ – providing ‘the only guarantee that the Party directives will respond to the masses’ needs’ – then the ‘inevitable’ consequence would be ‘the complete emptying-out of the Party’s very substance’, ‘suffocated by Party bureaucracy’.<sup>74</sup> In compromising with Badoglio, ‘other communists’ had ‘distanced themselves from the working masses’, failing to make the case why ‘the consequences of the war must fall on the Bourgeoisie’s shoulders alone’; they had failed to realise that ‘socialisation’ was not ‘the song of the future’ but a concrete programme of immediate realisations’.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> ‘La nostra propaganda’: ACS/AGS/PS/F1/104/1314. Much of the text is reworked in ‘In linea’, BR, 5.10.1943.

<sup>71</sup> ‘La nostra propaganda’: ACS/AGS/PS/F1/104/1314

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> ‘Proclama Comunista – democrazia operaia’, FB/FGB/3/7/1. Much of the text is reproduced in ‘Serena intuizione’, BR, 22.10.1943.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

Examining a later reprint of these texts, Silverio Corvisieri discerned a classically 'Trotskyist' narrative blaming unaccountable 'bureaucrats' for the Communists' 'reformist cop-out'.<sup>76</sup> Paradoxically, however, these militants also proudly claimed to uphold the theory 'realised by Lenin and Stalin'. The 'Proclama comunista' declared 'the communists of Italy' 'convinced that they stand in uniformity with the Soviet proletariat, which is organised according to the principles of workers' democracy' - meaning 'the needs of a proletariat conscious that it alone is the master of its destiny'.<sup>77</sup> Lacking formal structures yet considering both itself and Stalin's USSR to be examples of 'workers' democracy', it seems that the Provisional Communist Executive defined this term tautologically - in terms of the socialist end goal itself, the 'Party's very substance' - rather than with regard to particular organisational forms. As in the programme's naïve promise to send delegates to the 'next Comintern Congress'<sup>78</sup> in spite of the mothballing of the International in May 1943, the Roman communists exalted Stalin's democratic probity while attacking the Togliattians as controlling bureaucrats.

The greater political significance of the 'programme' and the 'proclamation' was their insistence that the Communist Party did not yet exist and could not be refounded by existing cadres alone. In this sense, the Provisional Communist Executive was not so much an alternative to the PCI as what Cretara called part of the 'broader phenomenon of dissidence affecting all parties after 25 July' given the clandestine Left's fragmentation after two decades of Fascism.<sup>79</sup> Adopting the name *Movimento Comunista d'Italia* by the end of August, its militants continued to insist that this 'movement' would feed into the Communist Party when a congress could finally be held. Such naivety was also apparent in the MCd'I's claim that the Comintern would 'soon be rebuilt';<sup>80</sup> like the historic PCd'I it thus adopted the

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<sup>76</sup> Corvisieri 1967.

<sup>77</sup> 'Proclama Comunista - democrazia operaia', FB/FGB/3/7/1

<sup>78</sup> 'La nostra propaganda': ACS/AGS/PS/F1/104/1314. The very earliest congresses of the Third International had in fact allowed some range of debate, including the representation of multiple parties for each country and even non-communists such as anarcho-syndicalists. If this was not as diverse as the First International (1864-72), whose initial membership stretched from trade unions to Bakuninites, Marxists and Mazzinian republicans, it was far more open than the high-Stalinist Comintern of the Sixth and Seventh World Congresses (1928 and 1935, respectively), which featured no oppositional statements and were little but a display of Moscow's domination over the monolithic, 'Bolshevised' Communist Parties.

<sup>79</sup> Unnumbered 1945 typescript, MSdL/FSC/29/87.

<sup>80</sup> 'La nostra propaganda': ACS/AGS/PS/F1/104/1314.

qualifier *d'Italia* ('communists in Italy', and not 'Italian communists'), in order to highlight its continued allegiance to a worldwide and not nationally-defined movement. This further distinguished it from the Togliattians, who had adopted the name *Italian Communist Party* (PCI) in May 1943 in order to emphasise their national autonomy after the dissolution of the Comintern.

### 3.5. The united front

Keen to achieve a wider Left regroupment, across the 45 Days the MCd'I swallowed up a series of other workers' circles and dissident currents who also opposed collaboration with Badoglio. Without doubt, the 'phenomenon of dissent' described by Cretara was particularly notable on the communist underground given the exile PCI's dramatic strategic shifts over the Fascist period, leading the Party away from its foundational principles. Yet comparable phenomena also surfaced in the other anti-fascist parties as they re-emerged from clandestinity. In his diary entry for 6 August 1943, Socialist Party leader Pietro Nenni could thus lament that 'renewing contacts with the old comrades' after living in Paris since 1926 'was a case of *Heri dicebamus* ... Were it not for the fresh approach brought by a significant younger contingent I'd have thought that we were continuing the same discussions as seventeen years ago'.<sup>81</sup> Among the questions again returning to the centre of debate was the possibility of overcoming the historic split with the Communists, who had broken from the PSI at Livorno in 1921.

This was the problem posed by a *Movimento di Unità Proletaria* (MUP) which formed in Milan. On 1 August 1943 this movement issued a clandestine *Avanti!* – unilaterally adopting the name of the historic Socialist newspaper – in which its main theorist Lelio Basso proposed an alternative to the 'reformist praxis' of the Second International and the 'authoritarian, centralising, rigidly schematic tradition of the Third'.<sup>82</sup> Basso argued that the proletariat must unite in a single movement, able to fight for the socialist revolution in Italy.<sup>83</sup> This movement was characteristic of those currents emerging in this period, unbound from party structures, who sought to overcome the divides of the pre-Fascist period, in the name of forming a single working-class representation. Not only did Basso create

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<sup>81</sup> Nenni 1981, p. 23.

<sup>82</sup> As described in 'Rivoluzione o collaborazione', *Bandiera Rossa* [Milan], II/3, 25.5.1944.

<sup>83</sup> 'Unità proletaria', *Avanti!*, 47/1, 1.8.1943

armed squads in Milan assuming the name of the *Arditi del Popolo*, but he published twelve issues of a newspaper also named *Bandiera Rossa*. These, and their call for a 'revolutionary proletarian front', endured even after he integrated his movement into the Socialists.

The Provisional Communist Executive was keenly aware of the need to attract support from such resurgent Socialist circles as well as old Communists. Just as the October 1942 edition of *Scintilla* had declared the old divisions on the Left senseless,<sup>84</sup> in August 1943 its successor movement began to agitate for a single working-class bloc, crossing party divides but opposed to any collaboration with bourgeois forces. With this in mind it issued a clandestine appeal addressed to 'workers of all parties, of all categories', signed by Carlo Matteotti. The inclusion of Matteotti's name lent credibility to this argument not only in that his father, murdered by Blackshirts in 1924, was an icon for anti-fascists in general, but also because he had belonged to the most centrist wing of Italian socialism after World War I.<sup>85</sup> Where Giacomo Matteotti had once denounced communism as 'the twin of fascist violence and dictatorship', the leaflet issued in his son's name summarily dismissed 'the divisions of the past', held 'responsible for the workers' defeats past, present and future'.<sup>86</sup>

Intended to help overcome such divides, the statement signed by Matteotti laid down important political lines. Speaking of 'the grave hours yet to come' even after the 'breaking of the régime and its defeat in war', the text insisted that the workers' 'only route to salvation' was 'the compact union of the whole Proletariat, against the whole bourgeoisie'.<sup>87</sup> Dismissing the 'monotone old polemics and splits between socialists and communists' as 'often hiding personal vanities and the aspiration for jobs in the hierarchy'<sup>88</sup> the statement expressed its trust that its readers' 'own experience, class consciousness and instinct as workers' would guide them toward 'the workers' goal, not far away'.<sup>89</sup> If this appeal was vague as to precisely what 'arduous path' or 'grave hours' lay ahead, it laid down a clear

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<sup>84</sup> *Scintilla*, 2, p. 2, 'Parliamo a voi'.

<sup>85</sup> The 'United Socialist Party'.

<sup>86</sup> Carlo Matteotti, 'Compagni lavoratori di tutti i partiti, di tutte le categorie', copy in FB/FGB/3/7/1.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

strategic imperative. At the same time as working to rebuild a Communist Party in Italy, workers must form a single front, independent of a 'bourgeoisie to be held alone responsible' for Italy's 'catastrophe'.<sup>90</sup>

This invocation of the Comintern's 1920s united-front tactic<sup>91</sup> was more a means of claiming political legitimacy than a reflection of the dissidents' own activity. Not only did the main workers' parties' commitment to the *Comitato delle Opposizioni* prevent such a class-based alliance, but the Mcd'I itself sealed a pact with the quixotic *Cola di Rienzo* initiative. Named after a 1340s popular tribune, this idiosyncratically Roman movement's goal was to organise a fifteen-minute strike on 1 September to demand an armistice, imitating previous such stoppages in the Northern cities. With rumours circulating that the Pope would appeal for peace at 1pm that day, *Cola di Rienzo* called a strike for 10am, 'in order to display the popular will for this objective to be realised'.<sup>92</sup> Defined by this aim alone, *Cola di Rienzo* was backed by a rag-bag of currents hostile to the Badoglio régime, bringing the Mcd'I together with not only Christian-Socialists and republicans, but also representatives of the *Carboneria*, an anti-clerical secret society akin to Freemasons. The author of the jointly-issued strike call was, indeed, the *Carbonaro* Felice Anzalone, likely a Fascist double-agent.<sup>93</sup>

Plastered over the walls of Rome in the final days of August 1943, the appeal issued by Anzalone was sharply hostile to the Badoglio government, but otherwise lacked clear political definition. If it was bold in declaring that 1 September would see Italians 'fold their arms [i.e. strike] in the barracks, the offices and workshops, the courts, tramways and public services', it insisted that they would do so in order to 'meditate on the material and moral ruin of the Italian nation ... observ[ing] the most religious reflection, without declamations or recriminations', and 'not as a rebellion, but as a sign of civic courage, restored will and regained sense of responsibility'.<sup>94</sup> For their part the *Comitato delle Opposizioni* parties opposed the strike appeal, joining the Badoglio government in issuing a public statement,

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> A 'united front', implying a union of workers' parties only, as opposed to a 'popular front' also including liberal or democratic parties.

<sup>92</sup> Quoted in Piscitelli 1965, p. 39.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Quoted in Piscitelli 1965, p. 39.

reproduced in all legal newspapers, which dismissed *Cola di Rienzo* as a 'provocation'.<sup>95</sup> Boycotted by these parties as well as their trade union representatives, few accounts credit the 1 September strike with more than the faintest public response.<sup>96</sup>

Notwithstanding the failure of the 'peace strike', Badoglio was well-advanced in his efforts to secure an armistice, and by 3 September his diplomats had reached a secret truce with the Allies. Already in the days prior to the armistice, the Anglo-Americans had pressured Badoglio to make plans in case the Wehrmacht counter-attacked to shore up its strategic position; the announcement of the cease-fire was itself delayed until 8 September in order to allow such preparations. Similarly alert to the dangers of German retribution, from the beginning of September Roman anti-fascists of multiple persuasions began making demands on the Badoglio government to arm the general population in case of attack. According to Roberto Guzzo's account, the MCd'I received PCI emissaries seeking to discuss the armed response, suggesting that Bonomi had promised that weapons would soon be delivered. Despite their sharply opposed interests, it seemed that the imminent threat of invasion could bring Rome's anti-fascists and the government into a single line of defence.

### **3.6. 8 September: the chaotic collapse**

Its military fate hanging in the balance, Italy however sorely lacked a political leadership up to the measure of the situation. Publically announcing the armistice by radio on 8 September, Badoglio called on Royal Army forces to oppose attacks 'from whatever quarter'. Yet he said nothing of the specific threat represented by 18 German divisions already based on Italian soil – the very Axis partner he had now abandoned. Only vague calls for 'vigilance' sharply contrasted with Hitler's determination to protect what Churchill called the 'soft underbelly' of the Nazi empire. On the same day as Badoglio announced Italy's withdrawal from the war, German forces rushed to assume control of barracks, bridges, and other strategic

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<sup>95</sup> If they had no factual basis to suggest that this strike was literally designed to provoke German intervention, the CdO were at least right to be suspicious of Anzalone, showing greater caution than the MCd'I in accepting this dubious lodge-master's approaches. Playing a 'double game', Anzalone remained in contact with Fascist intelligence operatives, before later hiring himself out to the US Office of Strategic Services.

<sup>96</sup> The exception being Guzzo 1964, p. 32.

points around the country. Having received no orders of their own, the mass of Italian soldiers abandoned their positions to the far better-organised Wehrmacht. As regiments broke up in chaos, great cities like Turin, Milan and Genoa fell without resistance; having failed even to attempt a defence of the capital, the King and Badoglio cowardly fled to Brindisi, the Southern port town already controlled by the US Fifth Army.

The King and Badoglio's escape represented the disastrous political and moral collapse of Italy's royalist-military establishment, which organised no defences except for the protection of its leaders' 'flight'. This epitomised what Elena Aga Rossi has called 'a nation disbanded', with the Wehrmacht capturing Rome with a single division. Across Italy there were just a handful of cases of military resistance to the invasion, the capital most prominent among them; yet even the defence of Rome lacked overall co-ordination and relied on individual platoons' decision to participate. After skirmishes on the south-western roads into the city, the decisive battle took place at the central Porta San Paolo, the greatest concentration of armed resistance anywhere in Italy. Fighting tanks with rifles and without hope of meaningful reinforcements, the Italian defenders stood no chance of success. While the soldiers and civilians' mobilisation did something to preserve a spirit of resistance amidst a more general military collapse, by the evening of 10 September the capital's fate was sealed. Only the far south of Italy remained beyond Wehrmacht control, in areas already under Anglo-American occupation.

Lacking any orders from the *Stato Maggiore*, the isolated officers who led resistance acted either out of personal initiative or because of their anti-fascist ties. Grenadier captain and *Scintilla* co-founder Aladino Govoni led conscripts under his command against the greatly better-armed German forces. His comrades Roberto Guzzo, Gino Rossi and Tigrino Sabatini also played prominent roles in the pitched battles at strategic sites across the city, from Termini station to the Colosseum roundabout,<sup>97</sup> the thoroughfare cutting through Magliana, and the Cecchignola barracks. Numerous accounts tell us of communist military officers combining their civilian comrades with conscripts, from the forty men led by San Lorenzo-based sergeant Nicola Stame at Termini to the sixty organised by Eusebio Troiani

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<sup>97</sup> See 'Partecipazione alla difesa di Roma', MSdL/FSC/29/87.

in the adjacent Esquilino district.<sup>98</sup> The disbandment of army regiments also allowed militants to raid depots and barracks in search of weaponry in subsequent days: even where such buildings were guarded, a soldier on duty might be willing to allow access in exchange for the civilian clothes facilitating his own escape.<sup>99</sup>

Romans' isolated and *ad hoc* resistance was a first sign of the 'popular' character of the armed struggle against Wehrmacht Occupation. Perhaps a thousand civilians joined conscript soldiers in resisting the invasion, despite being only very lightly armed and often having little military training. While organised anti-fascist movements clearly did help lead the resistance in the capital on 9–10 September, it seems that most Italians joining these battles were driven by a reactive spirit of national defence, or even simple adventurism. This was clear even in the obituary claiming the symbolic legacy of the 'first martyr of the Resistance': the sixteen-year-old Antonio Calvani, one of 508 Italians killed in the two days of pitched battles at the Porta San Paolo. According to the MCd'I's 1944 pamphlet *Our Martyrs*, featuring biographies of dozens of the movement's fallen comrades, this teenage nephew of one of its founding members<sup>100</sup> had rallied to the grenadiers' defence out of 'instinctive hatred' of 'the German invader'.<sup>101</sup>

The collapse of authority sparked widespread looting. Police noted that arms stocks remained unguarded as late as 14 September. In Trionfale officers reported running battles between police and the crowds ransacking food stores, including in a local hospital.<sup>102</sup> In San Ippolito the Fascist Party office that had been closed down after 25 July was itself looted. Only in smart Trevi could the police speak of public calm in the days following the invasion.<sup>103</sup> 9–12 September saw looting across Trastevere, with one policeman reporting '100 Jews hearing of the Germans' arrival ... breaking down the doors of an unguarded armory such as to lay hold of the weapons therein'.<sup>104</sup> Informants noted guns being handed out haphazardly in that district's Piazza de' Renzi as well as in poor neighbourhoods like Quadraro.

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> As noted by Corvisieri 1967.

<sup>100</sup> Ezio Lombardi was his uncle.

<sup>101</sup> 'Antonio Calvani', in MCd'I 1944c.

<sup>102</sup> See the extensive reports on the looting on subsequent days in ACS/MI/DGPS/AGR/A5G/II guerra mondiale/146.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> ACS/MI/DGPS/AGR/A5G/II guerra mondiale/146, '13 Settembre 1943 – Relazione della Questura di Roma per il capo della Polizia'.



A police agent witnessing the distribution of weapons at Via Taranto on 9 September characterised the insurgent mood by citing the comments of one citizen handed a rifle, who declared 'this will be useful with the Germans, but at some point the time will also come for the others who deserve it'.<sup>105</sup>

In their postwar reports MCd'I commanders each claimed that their units were created on or before 8 September 1943, yet around half detailed no specific activities beyond gathering abandoned Royal Army weaponry.<sup>106</sup> This casts doubt on Mucci and Guzzo's claim to have formed partisan bands even in August,<sup>107</sup> apparently another example of the tendency – so common among Resistance memoirs in general – to collapse events following 8 September into the aftermath of 25 July. Although Italy had remained allied to Nazi Germany in the weeks following the palace coup, there is no evidence of anti-fascists attacking the Wehrmacht forces already stationed in Rome during the 45 Days, or mounting armed actions of any kind. After a summer in which the Roman dissidents focused on cohering a political leadership, it was the unexpected breakdown of army command on 8 September that allowed the movement to rally disbanded conscripts under its own banner, and indeed lay hold of weapons. Nonetheless, its militants' capacity to exploit this vacuum of authority clearly owed much to the network of military and workplace contacts pieced together during the 45 Days.

Recognising this also helps us to answer the question of how far the Romans who now enrolled in partisan movements distinguished between them politically. Social historian Alessandro Portelli casts doubt on this idea, citing such cases as Umberto Turco, who joined the MCd'I through an acquaintance after thinking that it was the Communist Party; Franco Bartolini, who joined the GAP after losing touch with MCd'I; and Raffaele Zicconi, who joined the *Partito d'Azione* because his cousin was in it.<sup>108</sup> We can find countless such cases of young and politically inexperienced militants meeting anti-fascists via chance ties of family or friendship. Yet if we understand these movements as social phenomena and not

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<sup>105</sup> ACS/MI/DGPS/AGR/A5G/II guerra mondiale/146, '10 Settembre 1943 - Relazione del capo della Polizia'.

<sup>106</sup> See files collected in MSdL/FSC.

<sup>107</sup> Guzzo 1964; Orfeo Mucci, interview for Regione Lazio, *Banca della Memoria*, 1995, available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OlSyH9tiFZY>.

<sup>108</sup> Portelli 2003, p. 122.

just aggregates of individuals, we ought to ask why such accidental contacts were so unevenly distributed. The low numbers of Christian Democrats compared to Marxists in partisan ranks reflected not their numbers of friends and cousins, but the respective importance their political strategies placed on building armed bands. The initiative they took in organising the soldiers disbanded after 8 September was itself an expression of this focus.

### 3.7. A single communist movement?

The Wehrmacht invasion had pitched the Italian state into a deep crisis, with the country now subject to two opposed invaders and two rival governments. Having abandoned the capital upon the armistice, the now Salerno-based Badoglio régime only held sway in the far South of Italy occupied by the Allies. While SS parachutists liberated Benito Mussolini from prison on 12 September, installing him as president of an 'Italian Social Republic' (RSI) spanning the German-controlled regions, the exhausted *Duce's* government effectively withdrew from Rome. Taking up residence at Salò on Lake Garda, the Fascist leader removed both his ministers and his ministries from what was now his capital in name alone. Already on 14 August, Badoglio had declared Rome an 'open city' in response to a further set of Allied bombing-raids, and after defeating the resistance at the Porta San Paolo, the Wehrmacht made a similar statement on 10 September. However, the capital remained not only a hub of partisan activity, but also the centre of the machinations that would define Resistance politics nationally.

This soon became apparent as the democratic party leaders meeting in Rome on 12 September proclaimed a new Resistance coalition. This *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale* (CLN) united the PCI, PSI, *Partito d'Azione*, Christian-Democrats and Liberals as well as Bonomi's *Democrazia del Lavoro*, all of whose clandestine newspapers issued a common call for mobilisation. 'Noting with distress that at the *Patria's* most painful hour the monarch and head of government did not remain in their command and leadership posts and that, as a consequence of this failure, all possibility of defence and resistance was deeply shaken and weakened, the National Liberation Committee proposes to pursue its activity so that the people might rediscover the paths of dignity and redemption'.<sup>109</sup> Although its parties were

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<sup>109</sup> Untitled, *l'Unità*, 19.9.1943.

militarily independent, the CLN acted as a collective political centre, issuing joint statements calling for national Resistance while insisting that the Italian people would freely choose its institutional forms once it was liberated from German occupation. Even while claiming to lead the Italian people's fight for national liberation, the CLN stopped short of declaring itself a provisional government.

The MCd'I damned such calls for national unity. The first issue of *Bandiera Rossa* on 5 October derided a 'national front rallying the most disparate political currents, which represent social classes with contradictory interests'.<sup>110</sup> It insisted that 'as has been the case ever since the 26 July [sic] coup', the CLN parties were 'destined to support the monarchical government led by Marshal Badoglio',<sup>111</sup> for this was their only possibility of convincing the Anglo-Americans that 'the Italian people [was] united and compact in its political objectives and aspirations'.<sup>112</sup> Convinced that 'on 10 September the *tricolore* was definitively dropped in the mud',<sup>113</sup> the MCd'I scorned the forces of 'capitalist dictatorship and conservative monarchist and militarist institutions' who now called for unity. Bracketing the CLN with the royalists, it argued that 'workers and peasants [could] not risk their blood and their strength in defence of privileged classes whose time has passed ... uniting in the front through which these very forces attempt to save themselves by posing as defenders of the whole Italian people'.<sup>114</sup> 'The proletariat, weapons at its feet' must instead 'reserve the sacrifice of its blood for its Revolution'.<sup>115</sup>

Declaring the CLN's watchwords to be 'in contradiction with its parties' programmatic objectives and contrary to what their directives for action should be',<sup>116</sup> *Bandiera Rossa* set down enduring dividing lines among Roman communists. This was apparent in the unity talks following 8 September, as the MCd'I and PCI attempted a merger deal. While there is no written record of the first such summit,

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<sup>110</sup> 'In linea', *Bandiera Rossa*, 5.10.1943.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> 'Perché collaborare?', *Bandiera Rossa*, 5.10.1943.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> 'Proletari!', FB/FGB/3/7/1. On 11 September the MCd'I similarly imposed its political stamp on a fresh *Cola di Rienzo* appeal, enjoining Romans to fight for 'a workers' republic of Italy' and a 'government free of bourgeois'; reproduced in Guzzo 1964.

<sup>116</sup> 'Perché collaborare?', *BR*, 5.10.1943.

taking place around two weeks after the invasion,<sup>117</sup> numerous accounts suggest that the key questions at issue were the acceptability of allying with 'bourgeois parties' and – in case of a successful fusion – co-option of MCd'I leaders onto the Party's leadership bodies. Although the PCI's incubation in Stalin's Comintern might seem to preclude openness on either the political or organisational front, both sides' accounts of this meeting do indeed record a discussion over incorporating MCd'I cadres into the Party's Rome federation leadership<sup>118</sup> – itself a reflection of this movement's influence among renascent communist circles. However, the negotiators remained divided by the MCd'I's insistence on the PCI's withdrawal from the CLN in favour of a strictly 'proletarian front'.<sup>119</sup>

According to art critic Antonello Trombadori, one of three PCI representatives at these talks, they were disrupted by the MCd'I's 'attack against our Party, principally concentrated against the person of Giorgio Amendola, whom they characterised as an opportunist and a traitor to the working class because he proposed the absurd idea of the proletariat uniting with the bourgeoisie against fascism', in a heated exchange 'that almost led to a brawl'.<sup>120</sup> In this 1957 article on the clash with the dissident-Marxists, appearing in the PCI daily *l'Unità*, Trombadori did concede that 'many of this movement's followers fought the Germans and heroically faced death'.<sup>121</sup> However, despite this lip service to its Resistance 'martyrs' he also sought to trash the MCd'I's politics. Hence he described the movement's leaders as 'determined enemies of the armed struggle' who had come from the old 'pro-Trotskyist and Bordigist opposition', while claiming that in the days after 8 September 1943 'the greater part of the leaders and activists of *Bandiera Rossa* seemed to have no goal other than to break up the ranks of what they called the "official" Communist Party'.<sup>122</sup>

Such fighting words, written over thirteen years after the event, reflected two rival leaderships' often bitter contest to win militants to their ranks; a fight for political legitimacy that profoundly shaped the entire Roman Resistance. These anti-fascist

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<sup>117</sup> Tre storie di Roma clandestina', *l'Unità*, 20.1.1957; Corvisieri 1967, based on Felice Chilanti's testimony (Primo incontro con Chilanti 3.6.1966': MSdL/FSC/26/22).

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> An appeal made in 'Serena intuizione', *BR*, 22.10.1943.

<sup>120</sup> 'Tre storie di Roma clandestina', *l'Unità*, 20.1.1957.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

formations' growth had not only been a matter of picking up new members through personal contacts, but also the integration of the armed bands that arose outside of their leadership in the wake of the German invasion. As we shall see in Chapter Four, this also led to the creation of heteroclite formations, or even ones with overlapping memberships, complicating the picture we have thus far painted of the re-emerging Left. Strategic goals certainly were important to the Roman communists, and the divisions among the main Resistance movements closely mirrored the debates we saw in Chapter Two. Yet individuals' motives for joining partisan units were hardly limited to the objectives set out in manifestos and newspapers. Examining the growth of partisan organisation in Rome's peripheral *borgate* slums, in Chapter Four we shall look deeper into the social conditions in which these communist movements took form.

## Chapter Four

### The *borgate* rise

The historic fortresses of Italian trade unionism are the great factories of the North. The FIAT plant at Mirafiori, the port of Genoa and Magneti Marelli in Milan are the country's Boulogne-Billancourt, its South Wales collieries, its Putilov works. Less important to this panorama of 'Red bastions' is the Italian capital. Never an important centre of industry, at no point in the twentieth century was it a hub of shopfloor militancy. So, too, in the Resistance period was there a striking geographical divide. There were repeated general strikes across the Northern cities from March 1943 until the end of the war, while no such action was ever fulfilled in Rome.

This was a period in which the PCI remodelled its conception of class politics, with the Northern working class at its centre. In advancing its national-unity strategy, it sought to integrate democratic and patriotic themes into a broader cult of labour. Symbolising this shift, *l'Unità* championed March 1943's FIAT strike as the opening shot of the national Resistance<sup>1</sup> and summer 1944's Northern factory occupations as proof of workers' concern to defend Italian industry from German looting. This was honoured in the postwar Constitution's reference to a 'democratic republic founded on labour', recognising workers' role in the war against Nazi Germany and share in a rebuilt national community.

These strikes clearly illustrated labour's importance to society, and the strategic power of the factory floor. This resulted in part from these workers' ability to disrupt military production, their stoppages adding to the effects of absenteeism and power cuts. But these strikes were most importantly political mobilisations, a concentration of the revolt against Occupation. Mobilising even tens of thousands in single workplaces, mass strikes could puncture the régime's reign of fear and catalyse a broader popular mobilisation. They brought economic concessions to workers at the same time as strengthening the PCI's shopfloor influence. The Party's decisive role in this workplace action also allowed it to build its own leadership within partisan ranks.

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<sup>1</sup> An essay by Tim Mason appearing in his *Nazism, Fascism and the Working Class* expertly picks apart the commonly-accepted myth that the strike wave spreading across Turin and then Milan in March 1943 did indeed begin at the Mirafiori FIAT plant. He demonstrates how the PCI manufactured this version of events as a mobilising tactic, since the idea that the nation's largest factory and a key centre of war production had downed tools could serve as a means of encouraging workers in other areas to do the same. We might moreover note that this was a classic case of the PCI seeking to co-opt and re-purpose a cult of industrial labour that had initially been built up by Fascism. See Mason 2008.

It was the PCI's political strategy that led it to emphasise the patriotic nature of these strikes rather than their socially subversive character. Party press extended this same analysis to other forms of revolt characteristic of this period. It thus portrayed the women raiding bakeries as rebels against German depredations of Italian agriculture, and young men fleeing conscription as upholders of Italian army honour. For co-editor Antonello Trombadori, *l'Unità* 'put national unity against Nazi Germany above all other considerations',<sup>2</sup> repudiating any narrow 'class particularism'.<sup>3</sup> Emphasising its patriotic character, the PCI organ invoked Milan's Five Days of revolt against the Austrians in 1848, the Garibaldian *Risorgimento* and even winter 1917 on the Brenner Pass<sup>4</sup> as precursors to Italians' latest struggle against the 'Nazi Huns', the 'barbarous foe'.

The Party's attempt to place the working class at the centre of a national alliance was more difficult in locations where shopfloor organisation was weaker. At the same time, such social revolt as did emerge was harder to reduce to this logic. This is evident when we look at Resistance activity in the *borgate*, the slum districts on the Rome city periphery. Cut off from the city centre and governed by mass unemployment and social exclusion, *borgate* residents were of little use to German war industry, unless they could be deported and made to work elsewhere. Faced with unemployment and absent rations, most Romans turned to individual survival strategies rather than collective mobilisation. But while the social revolt in the *borgate* was less able to galvanise mass organisation, it was also more sharply antagonistic, including in its attacks on propertied Italians.

As this chapter shows, the Roman proletariat little conformed to the PCI's conception of 'class politics'. As one of the Party's internal reports noted, this was not because the city was dominated by bourgeois and civil servants alone: the 1936 census classed some 40.1% of the capital's active population as 'workers [*operai*]' and 27.8% artisans. But these numbers also concealed the reality that Rome had a proletariat, more than an industrial working

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<sup>2</sup> Trombadori 1981, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> This invocation of World War I is particularly remarkable given the central role of the internationalist opposition in the classic Comintern creation story. In this Leninist account, the social-democratic 'betrayal' of 1914 had necessitated the creation of a new International opposing all competing imperialisms in the name of worldwide proletarian revolution. While some 'interventionist' socialists favouring Italy's participation on the Entente side (as came to pass in May 1915) had claimed that the fight against Austria would complete the *Risorgimento* by winning back the *irredenta* ('unredeemed') north-east of Italy, this was wholly at odds with the kind of class-war politics at the origin of the Communist Party founded in 1921. In the Resistance period PCI press was evasive about its leaders' past attitudes toward World War I: *l'Unità* denied apparent (albeit untraceable) BBC claims that Togliatti had been expelled from the Italian Socialist Party in 1915 for his pro-Entente stance, without specifying that he had indeed held this view.

class in the manner of Turin or Milan. As of 1939, just 17 workplaces had more than 1,000 employees,<sup>5</sup> and during the Occupation period a majority of the population were unemployed. The industrial workforce that did exist was too small and dispersed to galvanise any wider popular movement: under Occupation they never mounted any concerted strike action like their counterparts in the North.<sup>6</sup>

The weakness of intermediate forces between the Nazis and the abandoned *borgatari* also emboldened the dissident communists in their understanding that class hierarchies were on the brink of collapse. Building their organisation in the *borgate*, their proletarian politics in fact put minimal emphasis on workplace action, except insofar as this served narrowly military purposes. The movement instead focused on what one band leader called the 'perfection of its discipline',<sup>7</sup> the concretion of the proletarian militias that would eventually seize power. Building such a force in the *borgate* also demanded a more immediate programme of activity, recruiting draft resisters into bands and distributing the food and weapons gathered through expropriations. This imaginary of an ultimate (but deferred) moment of revolution, combined with solidarity initiatives among the general population, encouraged militants in the belief that they were building their strength relative to liberal and conservative forces less implanted in the *borgate*.

This also fed the clash between Rome's communist leaderships. We have already seen how Agostino Novella ascribed the prevalence of 'ultra-Leftism' to Rome's mass of slum proletarians and small artisans, unlike the factory workers central to PCI organisation in the industrial North. Like his comrades Giorgio Amendola<sup>8</sup> and Antonello Trombadori,<sup>9</sup> Novella argued that while dissidents could 'demagogically' appeal to *déclassé* layers' undisciplined revolt against authority, this only entrenched these populations' subalternity, marginal to the official economy and unable to influence national life. As against what young PCI intellectual Franco Calamandrei mocked as '*Bandiera Rossa*'s position of sacking

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<sup>5</sup> PCI Federazione Laziale, Comitato direttivo federale, 'Rapporto politico', late November 1943: APC/7/2/14.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 8.2. on the failure of attempts to organise such a strike.

<sup>7</sup> 'Relazione sull'attività svolta dalla banda Rossi - Porta Furba', ASR/CAP/Cd'A/1665.

<sup>8</sup> Amendola 1973.

<sup>9</sup> See his article Trombadori 1981. Secchia (ed.) 1974, p. 434 notes that the lack of an industrial working class was aggravated by the lack of a hinterland of peasant masses fighting to keep control of their produce, as in Emilia-Romagna or the Po Valley.



the homes of the wealthy',<sup>10</sup> his Party sought the 'progressive and national coalition' that could allow an institutional representation of labour's interests.<sup>11</sup>

We could rightly question whether such theoretical divides corresponded with the MCd'I and PCI's practical activities under Occupation, or whether 'productivist' or more 'antagonistic' views of class politics always implied different types of mobilisation. Not even the most reductionist account could flatly conflate class-composition and the forms of political action; only a small minority of Italians engaged in collective mobilisations during the Resistance, and any such picture is in any case complicated by the reshaping of the social order by the war itself. Nonetheless, in this chapter we shall argue that *Bandiera Rossa's* stronger organisation in Rome's *borgate* slums, as against the PCI's dominant influence among intellectuals and the industrial workplaces of the North, reflected the different classes to which they addressed themselves.

#### 4.1. A 'Red Belt'?

'Via Appia, Via Tuscolana, Via Casilina! What names – the memory of the actions executed by our organisation's comrades...'<sup>12</sup> Thus reminisced Costantino Rossi, MCd'I commander in Rome's south-eastern Quadraro district, as he reflected on his unit's military record. These thoroughfares were central focuses of partisan activity under Occupation, as armed bands mined the Wehrmacht's routes to the frontline. However, while German communications were key targets for partisans across Italy, Rossi's band combined these sabotage operations with a concerted mobilisation in neighbouring city-districts. The *borgate* slums aligning these three roads faced conditions dissimilar to those in Italy's other main urban centres. Geographically close to the capital and the Wehrmacht's base in this 'open city', these marginal populations were effectively abandoned by Mussolini's Salò Republic, and of little use to German war industry. This was less autonomy as the

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<sup>10</sup> Calamandrei 1984, p. 145 (9.3.1944 diary entry).

<sup>11</sup> This was drawn into sharp relief by postwar PCI senate leader Edoardo Perna, at a postwar cadre school (Perna 1981, p. 50): 'Our policy's expansive capacity was tested from the outset by the need to achieve a decisive victory in the battle within the working-class movement. We had secured victories over the *Bandiera Rossa* formation already by Liberation, but there were still episodes of sharp conflict ... Our central task was to establish a very broad alliance policy, incorporating as vanguard and mobilising forces the workers and intellectuals who were the bedrock of the Party during the Resistance, but also the great mass of the poor and underclass who surrounded the capital, within and outside the *Agro Romano* ... we won because we did not start out by besieging the city of the rich and powerful from the outside. We did not act following what we might compare

– a little academically – to Mao Zedong's strategy, the countryside besieging the city, but by giving the poor, the underclass, the socially weakest, a consciousness of their progressive and national role'.

<sup>12</sup> 'Relazione sommaria dell'attività svolta in periodo clandestino, dall'organizzazione Rossi', MSdL/FSC/28/64, p. 3.

endurance of a kind of purgatory, left to fend for themselves – and indeed, feed themselves – as the war raged around them.

Rome has never been a centre of industry. The city's 'differentness' has roots dating back even before the Fascist period, given the Papal capital's marginal role in the creation of the Italian state. As a country united by the Turin-based Savoy monarchy began its industrial development at the end of the nineteenth century, a Rome only annexed to Italy in 1870 was left behind by the urban centres of the North. It took until the 1880s for the capital to expand beyond the walls defined by the Emperor Aurelian in 271AD; and successive post-unification governments preserved its character as a city of small shopkeepers. Its lack of industrial development also owed to political opposition to creating centres of potential class 'turbulence' in the immediate vicinity of the capital.<sup>13</sup> An occupational census in 1927 found that just 53,028 out of a Roman population of some eight hundred thousand were employed in manufacturing industries; the figure for Milan was 205,386.<sup>14</sup>

This also meant that Rome remained peripheral to the mass strikes and factory occupations that shook Italy in the wake of World War I. The sharp social conflicts of 1919–20 were a mainly Northern phenomenon, reaching their most advanced expression in the creation of worker-elected 'factory councils' in hundreds of engineering plants across the 'industrial triangle' of Milan, Turin and Genoa. The *biennio rosso's* half-million participants were overwhelmingly concentrated in the industrial North, with no overall political leadership linking this movement to land occupations elsewhere in Italy, or the discontent among soldiers expressed in the Ancona marksmen's mutiny of June 1920. Despite sporadic strikes in sectors such as construction and the railways, the Roman working class contributed little to this movement, whose regional isolation soon led it to impasse. The capital was more notable for its resistance against the Blackshirt counterattack that followed the *biennio rosso*. As we noted in our comments on the San Lorenzo district, the 1921–22 *biennio nero* saw Rome become a major centre of the anarchist and republican-led *Arditi del Popolo*, mounting a last-ditch battle against the rising Fascist street militias.

The relative lack of industrial concentration in Rome increased under the Mussolini régime, with Fascism's plannerist effort to create a monumental capital wantonly destroying certain economic sectors in favour of others. Hotels and restaurants tripled in number. Housing

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<sup>13</sup> Seronde Babonaux 1983, pp. 227 quotes one statesman of the immediate post-unification period concerned that Rome must not 'become another Paris'; Insolera 2011 highlights this same concern, but also the small pockets of industry in such neighbourhoods as Testaccio.

<sup>14</sup> Figures from Seronde-Babonaux 1983, p. 219.

was built for civil servants at Piazza Bologna, but they did not increase as a share of the overall population. This remodelling of Rome as a centre of both tourism and imperial grandeur marginalised wide sections of the population. Most notable were the mass deportations of the residents of the historic centre, demolishing Rome's early-modern architectural heritage in order to showcase an ersatz-ancient imperial capital. Removal works lasting from 1924 to 1937 created a deliberate divide between the centre and the new *borgate* slums, most of which were separated from the city proper by several kilometres of open ground and lacked public transport. Tens of thousands of residents of the historic centre, mostly reliant on small artisan trades, were evicted and often violently deported to the *borgate*.<sup>15</sup>

Massed together with migrants from Central and Southern Italy, these populations lived in dismal conditions. While Fascism venerated industrial productivity, granting a 'Labour Code' as it invoked the harmonisation of class conflict and 'the civilisation built on labour', there was no place for the *borgate* in this 'national community'. A 1928 'anti-urbanism' law discouraging migration to the capital banned new Romans from signing up at the *anagrafe* [register-office], denying them access to the most basic services. Alongside the overcrowded 'official' *borgate* – where even new homes lacked running water or electricity – there emerged so-called 'spontaneous' or 'abusive' *borgate* made of discarded building materials. A *borgata* planned before Fascism like La Garbatella – an intended 'model community' of allotments and social housing – thus towered over Tor Marancia, a shanty-town lacking drainage and labelled 'Shanghai' due to its frequent flooding.<sup>16</sup> Even 'official' housing was allocated on an ideologically-biased basis, prioritising 'families with more than seven children and four-five child families of military or political merit' followed by 'war widows, injured soldiers, *squadristi*, combatants with at least three children, overcrowded subletting families and other categories'.<sup>17</sup>

The cult of soldiering was widespread across all areas of social life in Fascist Italy, but World War II created a particularly difficult situation for those not employed in armaments industries or the military. This sector did indeed expand on account of the war: PCI survey estimates that between 1934 and 1942 metallurgy had quadrupled in the city and chemicals

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<sup>15</sup> On the development of the *borgate* see Villani 2012, and for particular districts of Rome see Ficacci 2007, Sinatra 2006, Camarda 2007, and Masini 2010 on Piazza Bologna.

<sup>16</sup> See Rivolta 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Villani 2012, p. 193.

production tripled.<sup>18</sup> Yet looking at industry as a whole we find small production units and low industrial concentration. Among all workplaces in manufacturing, there were on average just 5.5 workers per site. The largest single industry, garment production, not only relied on a two-thirds female workforce, but was extremely fragmented: fully 6,120 out of 6,808 textile plants in the capital had fewer than ten workers, and this entire industry had less than half as many workers as Turin's Mirafiori FIAT plant alone.<sup>19</sup> After 1940, as the economy buckled under the pressures of war, electricity shortages closed businesses not directly connected to military production and a lack of materials forced builders to abandon their sites.

The beginning of the Wehrmacht Occupation in September 1943 marked a sharp decline in Romans' living conditions. The bread ration fell to 150g per person, per day and then 100g, with unreliable food deliveries and the part-substitution of sawdust for flour further thinning citizens' calorie intake. Their desperation was particularly severe after Mussolini's military draft at the beginning of November 1943, a failed conscription effort followed by a series of attempts to deport workers *en masse* to Northern Italy and the Reich itself. Breda, one of the city's few major industrial plants, ceased all activities and laid off all of its workers, before German troops stripped the factory bare, looting its machinery.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile thousands of civil servants abandoned the city as Mussolini's ministries moved to the Northern redoubts of his Salò Republic.

A common theme of the PCI's *l'Unità* was the 'plan to starve Rome'. The 'almost total paralysis of all productive activity not useful to Germany's war' combined with what it termed 'almost all Romans' disdainful rejection of voluntarily enrolling in labour service for the enemy', the Occupier sought to 'make the proud people of Rome fold' through hunger.<sup>21</sup> Yet while Romans' responses to this situation were mostly a matter of individual survival strategies rather than collective mobilisation, the vacuum of authority did also encourage the emergence of a militant minority. This was not limited to hostility toward a foreign enemy. Ever since 1940 women demanding overdue rations had mounted bread riots around the capital, their *assalti ai forni* [mass raids on bakeries] becoming an iconic expression of the Roman Resistance.<sup>22</sup> The German invasion not only exacerbated anti-

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<sup>18</sup> PCI Federazione Laziale, Comitato direttivo federale, 'Rapporto politico', late November 1943: APC/7/2/14.

<sup>19</sup> Figures from Seronde-Babonaux 1983.

<sup>20</sup> Regia Questura di Roma to DGPS Roma, Comando Città Aperta di Roma and Regia Prefettura di Roma, 17/11/1943, in ACS/MI/DGPS/AGR/A5G/II guerra mondiale/146

<sup>21</sup> *L'Unità*, 17/11/1943, p. 2, 'La disoccupazione e la fame della popolazione romana'.

<sup>22</sup> Particularly as portrayed in Rossellini's *Rome: Open City*.

régime feeling and food crisis, but also catalysed communist militants' attempts to drill this 'army of hunger' into literal battalions.

#### 4.2. Motors to Resistance

With the fragmentation of Italy's political and military authorities in the wake of 8 September, the German forces capturing Rome imposed a harsh Occupation régime. While the city was nominal capital of the now reduced Mussolini's *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* (RSI; 'Salò Republic', proclaimed 23 September), the *Duce's* régime was a distant power, maintaining little pretence of restored Fascist authority as its ministries abandoned Rome for the North. Despite its formal status as an 'open city' the RSI capital became a Wehrmacht supply base, with German units taking over barracks, office buildings, schools and hospitals across Rome as the operational centre for the Gustav Line defences. Such was the occupier's presence in the city under military governor General Reiner Stahel that tank units parked in open ground around the Colosseum, Vatican and Altare della Patria in the confidence that the Allies would not bomb these historic sites. While German forces were initially mostly limited to the centre and the transport routes attaching it to the front line, Resistance attacks on Wehrmacht convoys also drew these units into peripheral areas in order to crush pockets of partisan organisation.

This also reflected the enfeeblement of Italian police. On 16 September crowds in Testaccio overwhelmed *carabinieri* and ransacked flour stores; in a similar incident at Tiburtina station eight days later, looters raided parked wagons for food.<sup>23</sup> So under-resourced was the RSI's Roman police-chief that his reports were typed on the old Savoy letterhead, with the royalist crest crudely crossed-out. With barely a hundred German policemen to complement their Italian counterparts, the Occupier ruled the *borgate* via sporadic sorties rather than ongoing patrols. Telling in this respect were the events of 26 September in Tormarancia, as German troops raided this *borgata* in search of looted weaponry. Italian police reported that as Wehrmacht soldiers arrived, young residents of Rome's 'Shanghai' ran away in the false belief that the Germans had come to press them into labour-service.<sup>24</sup> This repressive effort was itself often found lacking: on 21 September *Polizia dell'Africa Italiana* (PAI) and German units conducted house-to-house searches in Trionfale yet found no hidden weapons; the 28 September raids in Torpignattara and Tiburtino III, and in Pietralata two days later, also failed to detect the partisan weapons caches in these districts.

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<sup>23</sup> 16.9.1943 report in ACS/MI/DGPS/AGR/A5G/II guerra mondiale/146.

<sup>24</sup> 26.9.1943 report in ACS/MI/DGPS/AGR/A5G/II guerra mondiale/146.

Partisans used a variety of weapons in attacking the Italian Fascists and German troops. As one PCI slogan had it, they had to ‘make the ground burn under the Occupier’s feet’, disrupting the social peace that allowed Rome’s use as a Wehrmacht supply base. A group of young intellectuals recruited to the Party’s crack *Gruppi di Azione Patriottica* (GAP) were particularly effective in mounting such attacks in the city centre, for instance the 28 October bombing outside Palazzo Braschi, injuring 12 Fascist *militi*; the 5 December assault outside the Opera, torching two German tanks; or the bomb-attacks on cinemas and restaurants frequented by Wehrmacht soldiers. Surprise attacks by passing cyclists throwing grenades soon led to a general ban on the use of bicycles in the capital. One commonplace partisan tool was the *chiodo a quattro punte*: a simple but ingenious device made by welding two nails together. When thrown in the path of German traffic either point of the *chiodo* could tear apart a vehicle’s tyres, bringing whole columns to a halt and thus exposing Wehrmacht crews to armed potshots.

Beyond any mobilisation against Occupation forces, the proliferation of armed bands on the Roman periphery also reflected a social conflict fuelled by soaring unemployment and draft-resistance. Police in rural districts at the outer limits of the province reported ‘a real emigration [from the city] of elements subject to conscription’<sup>25</sup> and a food crisis aggravated ‘by the presence of bands of disbanded soldiers’.<sup>26</sup> A 1 December report to Rome’s police-chief evocatively described the factors swelling partisan ranks in Genzano, a *comune* twenty miles from the centre: ‘After 8 September local police services disappeared, predictably followed by the looting of schools, German and Italian barracks and private homes, with laws or disciplinary norms openly disavowed. Subversive currents do not refrain from taking on organised form. Only about a month ago did local police reappear ... Add to this the influx of disbanded soldiers coming to the countryside in this district: youth whose mood and difficult living conditions (mostly Southerners) would alone allow us to consider them easily “won to” subversive currents. There have been thefts of the now-ripe olive-vine harvest; in the fields, thefts of livestock and produce’.<sup>27</sup>

Romans’ fight for self-preservation was shaped by harsh economic circumstances. These also had uneven effects on different sections of the population. Given *borgate* residents’ marginality to industrial production – or even the official economy – Rome’s slum

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<sup>25</sup> See the reports on armed bands in ACS/MI/DGPS/AGR/A5G/II guerra mondiale/150.

<sup>26</sup> ASR/Prefettura Gabinetto/1495, ‘Relazione del segretario comunale di Genzano per il capo provincia di Roma’.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

proletarians were of little use to the Axis war effort unless they could be removed to and made to work in other industrial centres, even in Germany itself. Not only did this tend to diminish workplace-based organising as a means of undermining war production (and thus Occupation infrastructure) relative to cities like Turin or Milan, but it also radically increased the importance of draft-resistance in *borgate* residents' concerns. Compulsory labour service – effectively implying deportation from Rome – as well as the Salò Republic's November 1943 attempt to conscript a fresh '*classe*'<sup>28</sup> of troops for its armed forces were key factors in driving such *renitenza alla leva*. Draft-resistance also contributed to the conflict over the food supply, since those who evaded conscription were deprived of access to rations – or rather, compelled to lay hold of food by other channels, often to the detriment of farmers and grocers.

With even those receiving regular salaries ever less sure of the reliability of food supplies, increasing numbers of Romans were driven toward the unofficial economy. This was a grim 'autonomy', forcing them to head to the country or directly appropriate food, as wages and fixed incomes became mere strips of paper. While the mass absenteeism in the Northern factories (reaching the order of 10-15%)<sup>29</sup> points to a similar phenomenon in the more conventionally industrial context, with even wage-rises won through strikes and régime concessions evaporated by inflation, the difference in the capital was the extreme collapse of the rationing system. Across late 1943 even a much-depleted police force arrested between four and six hundred Romans *per week* for black-market activities,<sup>30</sup> hinting at a widespread parallel economy: the unofficial price of bread soared to around 50 lire a kilo (tantamount to a skilled worker's daily wages), butter to 250 lire a kilo, and cigarettes to 50 lire a packet.<sup>31</sup> These records break off in early February 1944; diaries and memoirs suggest that the crisis reached yet more severe proportions in April-May, with armed bands' looting of farms and foodstores peaking in the final month of Occupation.<sup>32</sup>

This social breakdown itself fed the MCd'I's distinctive conception of 'class politics', distant from trade-union-type corporatism. While historians have typically<sup>33</sup> identified the PCI's

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<sup>28</sup> I.e. those Italian men born in a given calendar year.

<sup>29</sup> Gobbi 1971.

<sup>30</sup> Extensively documented in ACS/Segreteria del Capo della Polizia/RSI/1943-1945/70.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> E.g. Mafai 2008, Chilanti 1996.

<sup>33</sup> Corvisieri 1967, a sympathetic treatment of *Bandiera Rossa*, argues that the movement was mistaken to show such little regard for workplace organisation. He insists that the social breakdown in the *borgate* – and the MCd'I strong organisation in these areas – ought not to blind us to the pockets of industry that did exist, and the fact that many of the movement's leading cadres were skilled workers. While these are both necessary qualifications to any portrayal of the movement's social

proletarian base with Italy's major industrial centres – and thus the 'class war' of 1943–45 with the strikes the Party organised in the great Northern factories – the MCd'I showed little concern for mass action in the workplace. Across tens of thousands of pages of its press and internal documents we find only a handful of references to trade unions;<sup>34</sup> *not once* was its propagandistic invocation of the value of strike action addressed to workers in specific companies or industries. Tellingly, 2<sup>nd</sup> Zone commander Tigrino Sabatini quit his tram-depot job – a seemingly classic base of union activism – in order to lead sympathetic workmates in a full-time effort of armed expropriations and sabotage. The MCd'I's practical initiatives were dominated by the procurement of weapons and supplies, and increasingly, the practicalities of defending its base from repression. This set of activities, grouped under the title *Soccorso Rosso* ['Red Aid'], combined self-preservation with communist political organisation.

Lacking industrial strength in the sense of forming trade unions, the MCd'I was inventive in mobilising particular groups of Romans in service of its armed bands. Beyond its post and telegraph workers' sabotage of German communications, one key workplace unit was its 'special band' in the fire brigade, whose militants derailed a Wehrmacht supply train before hosing water on the wreckage in order to feed the petrol-fuelled blaze.<sup>35</sup> As well as fire its militants found an ally in ice, centrally produced in breweries in these early years of refrigeration. The teenage 'Dantin [sic]' Pepe, whose job involved cycling from the Wührer beer factory to grocers and butchers distributing ice-cubes, recounted the pretext this gave him to cross Rome at all hours with a cargo of weapons and contraband covered by layers of frost. Named after the French revolutionary Danton, Pepe was active in COBA, the MCd'I youth group so-called in homage to Stalin's teenage sobriquet. Gloria Chilanti, teenage daughter of *Bandiera Rossa* co-editor Felice, wrote in her diary of how COBA used 7 to 14-year-olds and particularly girls as *staffette* [relays] able to carry 'Red Aid' ranging from food to guns and newspapers around Rome without being searched by German troops.<sup>36</sup>

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base, Corvisieri's political argument seems difficult to ground in any experiential evidence. Not only did the MCd'I evidently prefer to use workplaces as bases for clandestine-military type organisations ('special bands'), but the Socialist or Communist Parties also proved unable to initiate strike movements in the capital. See Chapter Eight on the failure to organise a general strike.

<sup>34</sup> Notable in this regard is the complete lack of detail in Poce's trade union report at the February 1945 MCd'I congress, a declaration of principles and critique of the Socialist and Communist parties' collaboration with Badoglio, lacking any detail of workplace organisation... 'Relazione sull'azione sindacale del compagno Poce Antonino', copy in FGF/275/222.

<sup>35</sup> See the report by Renato Gioia in MSdL/FSC/26/55/Vigili del Fuoco.

<sup>36</sup> See Chilanti 1996. The book features an appendix with the whimsical 'Statutes and Norms' that novelist Guido Piovene drew up for COBA, here reproduced in full. In homage to Stalin, child members adopted the name 'Koba' and their adult supervisors 'moustaches':



Women MCd'Iers were largely limited to such auxiliary roles rather than properly political or military ones. This was not true of all Roman Resistance forces: the PCI's GAP units were around one-quarter female, their militants even pairing into pretend couples in order to present an outward air of 'normality'.<sup>37</sup> The MCd'I's contemporary records (like Allied reports on its post-Liberation 'feminine groups')<sup>38</sup> mostly refer to women only as wives, sisters or lovers of male members, without independent initiative of their own. *Bandiera Rossa* did like other Resistance groups make an *Appello alle donne italiane*, highlighting the suffering of Italian women who grieved for lost sons, and calling on them to join the Movement. Yet the overall tone was strongly patronising,<sup>39</sup> and tended to highlight women's use to the movement in auxiliary roles, than any solution to their particular

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*'COBA: Association of free children in rebellion*

1. COBA is a clandestine association, so all those who belong to it must be sure to be able to keep a secret. 2. To be part of COBA, the following qualities are necessary: a) To be brave and loyal; b) Never to tell lies, without having first obtained the authorisation of the leadership committee. If it is necessary to tell a lie in the interests of COBA, without there being time to obtain authorisation, the members concerned must communicate this to the committee within 24 hours. 3. To be intelligent and always help each other in the following situations: a) At school: helping out other members questioned by the teachers, and passing notes in exams; b) In everyday life: practicing absolute equality, such that there are neither rich nor poor. COBA members will share amongst themselves in equal measure not only sweets but also clothes, books and, if necessary, bread. 4. COBA members must do everything possible to earn money, to be given to the leadership committee's funds. Each will do everything necessary, through their own initiative (selling strips of cloth, paper and bottles - variety shows or acting - those who can sing well can perform in public places - etc.). With these funds, COBA will buy books and clothes or food for the poorest, for orphans, and those wounded or made homeless by bombings. If COBA gets a lot of money, we will organise trips to the mountains or the sea. 5. If parents place obstacles to a member's participation in COBA, they must rebel, and in all cases keep it a secret from them. 6. 7 to 14 year olds can join COBA. 7. Membership is also open to grown-ups, but they must be watched very carefully such that they do not attract enemies into our homes. 8. Grown-ups affiliated to COBA will take the name 'moustachioed', or just 'moustaches'. They will have special duties. 9. The motto of COBA is 'I for all of you, and all of us for you'. 10.

Before having the right to a COBA membership card, it is necessary to make the following declaration in the presence of three other members: 'I have read the statute and I declare my absolute loyalty to the COBA association, I am a free and rebellious child and for this reason am a COBA'. 11. For grown-ups, the declaration will be the following: 'I have read the statute and I declare my absolute loyalty to the COBA association, I am a free and rebellious "moustache" and for this reason am a COBA'. 12. Punishments - Those who, in the view of the committee, are not giving their active collaboration after three weeks of membership, will be expelled, and be entitled to the reimbursement of their dues. Liars: Will be expelled without any right to reimbursement of their dues. Traitors: will be beaten with 24 strikes of a whip, and expelled in disgrace'.

<sup>37</sup> Several of these pairs did in fact marry *after* the war, having been introduced to one another as secret GAP contacts: most prominently in Rome, Carla Capponi and Rosario Bentivegna; Lucia Ottobri and Mario Fiorentini; and Maria Teresa Regard and Franco Calamandrei. In the film *Senza Tregua* Milan *gappista* Giovanni Pesce recounts meeting his future wife Onorina Brambilla in this manner; upon their first appointment at a fountain he falsely told her that he had orders from the Party that she was hitherto to stay at his own home.

<sup>38</sup> See Chapter Eight.

<sup>39</sup> In particular, the text highlighted women's lack of political activity under Fascism, and implored women not to stop their husbands from entering the struggle, even if they did not understand what purpose it served.

concerns.<sup>40</sup> This made particularly exceptional the case of Matilde Bassani Finzi, a Jewish socialist commanding a band in eastern Rome. Her activity, explored in Chapter Five was closely connected to both the MCd'I and Allied intelligence.

### 4.3. The MCd'I's command structure

The Central Executive Committee formed over October-November 1943 worked to unite these armed bands and communist circles into a city-wide insurrectionary force. Here artisans and tradesmen predominated, and not the *borgatari* at its social base. Formed through co-option rather than election, this leadership body was nonetheless diverse in its political make-up, with *Scintilla* (De Luca, Cretara, Govoni) and *Attenti!* (Malatesta, Merli, Paolorossi, Bitler) members featuring in Executive Committee ranks as well as the socialist Matteo Matteotti and the anarchist Pappalardo. Also included were cobbler Ezio Lombardi, the telephone engineer Giuseppe Palmidoro, San Lorenzo lawyer Salvatore Riso, bookkeeper Franco Bucciano, the SIM intelligence operative Roberto Guzzo, and Filiberto Sbardella. Malatesta, Merli, Paolorossi and Bitler were all executed on 2 February 1944 and their co-defendant Paolorossi deported to Germany; Bucciano together with Govoni died in the Fosse Ardeatine massacre seven weeks later. They were each replaced by militants from elsewhere in the organisation, though as we will see in Chapter Six these killings greatly weakened the MCd'I's military capacities.

The Executive created working committees covering 'internal bands', 'external bands', 'press and propaganda', 'assistance and finance' and 'technical services'. Executive members appeared on these bodies together with militants like electrician Antonino Poce and carpenter Orfeo Mucci (responsible for internal bands), career soldier Gino Rossi (external bands; executed 2 February 1944), and for press Felice Chilanti, Carlo Matteotti and Pietro Bättara. The 'assistance and finance' committee led by Pappalardo also included Costantino Rossi and Austrian dancer Herta Habernig, and the 'technical services' operation eleven sympathetic police contacts. Zone Commanders oversaw six areas of Rome, comprising twenty-seven local units; eight 'special internal bands' organised firemen, railworkers, ISTAT statistics staff, post and telegraph workers, telephone engineers, and student draft-resisters; added to this were thirty-nine 'external bands' in outlying and rural areas. Highlighting the difficulty of communications, 17 of 35 members

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<sup>40</sup> The PCI press, at least, presented a more developed view of these questions: APC/7/2/23, from December 1943, outlined a plan of women's work in Rome. While assuming women 'not interested in political questions' and interested in 'tranquility', it sought to connect women's concerns over food, housing and welfare to the wider struggle for national liberation.

handling contacts between internal bands met their deaths during the nine-month Occupation; of the 19 responsible for external bands, four were deported, one killed and one wounded.

The final months of 1943 also saw a *de facto* geographical division between PCI and MCd'I operations in the capital. Whereas the latter dominated the Resistance in the peripheral *borgate*, to the near-exclusion of other parties,<sup>41</sup> in the centre the armed attacks on German troops, prisons and police stations mostly owed to the PCI's GAP units, largely formed of young intellectuals. There were some cases of overlap: an MCd'I band active to the south of San Giovanni helped collect funds for *l'Unità*,<sup>42</sup> Quadraro's Banda Rossi hesitated between 'the Party and the Movement' before a majority vote to join the MCd'I in late October,<sup>43</sup> and upon his arrest during a failed GAP attack on the 'Aquila d'Oro' hotel in January 1944 Umberto Scattoni was a member of both organisations. Nonetheless, there are no signs of GAP activity in the *borgate* before February 1944, and a prominent *gappista* like Rosario Bentivegna could describe a visit to Centocelle that month as the discovery of an unknown universe, a '*borgata* of free men'.<sup>44</sup> Organised in terrorist cells, Bentivegna's comrades isolated themselves from the wider population, never venturing outdoors except on operational business; following strict rules of clandestinity, each *gappista* was known to just a handful of fellow militants.

The MCd'I's attempts at 'mass' organising in the *borgate* sharply contrasted with the GAP's disciplined secrecy. Members' accounts tell of a near-open-door recruitment policy, printing 4,000 membership cards amidst exuberance over the numbers of bands joining the movement. 'Dantin' Pepe's unpublished memoir reports a 'joyous' 30 October 1943 *tesseramento* [registration session] in his district 'when we forgot reasons for sadness. Romoletto and his two sons brought along several bottles of fizz and we sang "The Red Flag will triumph, long live communism and freedom"'.<sup>45</sup> Protected from Fascist assault by armed guards, the meeting nonetheless 'allowed everyone to get to know each other, with

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<sup>41</sup> Orfeo Mucci even spoke of a division of the city: '[we were] across the whole periphery, Tor Pignattara, Quadraro, because it was there that our comrades fought. While they [the PCI leaders] were in the centre of Rome, we had a kind of understanding, they fought in the centre and we on the outside': CGB/FAP, Mucci, p. 31. Gremmo 1996a writes that 'in the *borgate*, *Bandiera Rossa* WAS the Resistance'.

<sup>42</sup> 'Relazione particolareggiata delle attività della Banda "Metronio"', MSdL/FSC/26/55.

<sup>43</sup> 'Relazione sull'attività svolta dell'Organizzazione comunista del Quadraro del MC d'Italia': ASR/CAP/Cd'A/1665.

<sup>44</sup> See Bentivegna 1983, p. 114.

<sup>45</sup> The old socialist/communist anthem *Bandiera Rossa*, with origins at the turn of the twentieth century.

larger and smaller squads coming together to form the great “Certosa and Torpignattara formation” uniting over three hundred men’.<sup>46</sup> In Chapter Six we will examine how the Fascist secret services exploited such laxity. Here we need only note that one of the MCd’I’s first armed actions on 20 October brought the execution of ten members, followed on 2 December by the collapse of Malatesta and Iacopini’s Trionfale group at the hands of the spy Ubaldo Cipolla, resulting in 16 arrests and 11 executions.

While from its first issue *Bandiera Rossa* proclaimed the MCd’I a ‘regularly disciplined movement’,<sup>47</sup> it seems that it was more a ‘tyranny of structurelessness’ cohered by the prestige and initiative of local leaders. ‘Organisational Rules’<sup>48</sup> circulated in November 1943 stipulated the creation of 3-to-8 member cells<sup>49</sup> and proclaimed the movement organised ‘on the principle already tested in all countries: from the bottom up’.<sup>50</sup> Local commanders’ reports on their armed actions however suggest an essentially *ad hoc* tactical-military organisation, with many of the bands affiliating to the MCd’I after 8 September failing to subdivide into smaller cells even if they had several dozens of members. The only truly centralised element of the MCd’I was its press; the Executive that issued Rules proclaiming ‘democratic organisation ... through which all members follow directives emanating from their own selves’ to be the ‘indisputable basis for political emancipation and voluntary revolutionary activity’<sup>51</sup> was itself unelected. When internal elections were suggested in February 1944, Orfeo Mucci not only dismissed this as impracticable in clandestine conditions, but reasoned that ‘the MCd’I founders are already “elect” because they are the organisation’s heart and soul’.<sup>52</sup>

Beyond the understandable dysfunctions in the MCd’I’s internal structure, we can also distinguish between its ‘intransigent’ political perspective and its local units’ more immediately practical concerns. While all its bands distributed a common centrally-produced press and even sent militants to a ‘Marxist school’ at Grotta Rossa (see section 4.6) they were autonomous in their practical operations and collaborated with local forces of less definite political character. In sabotaging Occupation infrastructure MCd’I partisans worked together not only with isolated PCI members or Socialists such as the armed bands

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<sup>46</sup> Pepe n.d., p. 34.

<sup>47</sup> ‘In linea’, *BR*, 5.10.1943.

<sup>48</sup> MCd’I 1944a, p. 10. Copy at ACS/MI/Gabinetto/Archivio Generale/Fascicoli Permanenti, Partiti politici/181/3212.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> ‘Riunione del Comitato romano tenuta il 13.2.1944, copy in MSdL/FSC/28/91.

led by Franco Napoli,<sup>53</sup> but also forces steeped in the world of criminality and *malavita* such as the gang run by Giuseppe Albano, the sixteen-year-old ‘Hunchback of Quarticciolo’.<sup>54</sup> And just as bandits could be useful conduits for fuel or weaponry, so too could priests and medical doctors be allies in finding refuge for POWs or draft-resisters gravitating toward the movement’s Red Aid network. As the MCd’I repudiated the state and even ‘bourgeois’ Resistance parties, its self-proclaimed ‘working-class solidarity’ relied on practical collaboration with forces standing far from Marxist politics.

#### 4.4. The ‘Banda Rossi’

Instructive for understanding how these communists extended their clandestine networks across autumn 1943 is the example of Quadraro’s Banda Rossi, whose ultimate detachment from the MCd’I also highlights the movement’s fragmentary character. Voting to join the MCd’I in October 1943 and operating along three major Wehrmacht transport routes, the history of Costantino Rossi’s band is particularly well-attested thanks to the June 1945 Allied Control Commission (ACC) trial of seven of its leaders, charged with armed robbery. The arrival of US-UK troops brought neither an end to these partisans’ ‘expropriations’ nor any blanket amnesty for Occupation-era crimes against property; ACC prosecutors thus interviewed dozens of partisans and local onlookers as they investigated what one British operative stuffily termed ‘Robin Hood’ activities.<sup>55</sup> Combining communist agitation, ‘Red Aid’ for fugitives, and rather murkier banditry, this unit combined many aspects of the armed bands forming in the peripheral *borgate* as the central state’s authority crumbled. Here we shall begin by explaining the Banda Rossi’s basic organisational forms, before continuing to trace its progress across subsequent chapters.

In its own report to the Allied authorities the band emphasised the defensive and anti-Nazi character of its activity. Listing twenty squad-leaders, the Quadraro formation spoke proudly of the base it had formed at its ‘improvised fortress’, the ‘Ramazzini sanatorium in Porta Furba, where in September 1943 Costantino Rossi founded a band made up of the communist comrades hiding from Nazi-Fascist persecution’.<sup>56</sup> Like other partisans we have encountered, the band based at the hospital initially devoted all its activity to procuring weapons, listing a series of armed attacks on German convoys as well as raids ‘on depots,

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<sup>53</sup> See his memoir Napoli 1996.

<sup>54</sup> Recchioni and Parrella 2015, Corvisieri 1999.

<sup>55</sup> ACS/ACC/B245A/S50/‘Extract from file No. 636/3 sheet no.23’.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Relazione sull’attività svolta dalla banda Rossi – Porta Furba’, p. 1. See also ‘Relazione sull’attività svolta dell’Organizzazione comunista del Quadraro del MC d’Italia’: ASR/CAP/Cd’A/1665. Further documents from this band appear in MSdL/FSC/26/55.

namely Ciampino and Centocelle [airports], Forte Prenestino, Cinecittà and the Forte dell'Acqua Santa' in the wake of 8 September.<sup>57</sup> 'Skilled, proven men guarded [the sanatorium] day and night, checking people coming in ... checking weapons out for actions and patrols, and in again once they were complete'.<sup>58</sup> More than a weapons cache, the hospital was a 'Holding Centre for all fugitives from political persecution', including 'English and Russian prisoners and men escaping conscription and labour service'.<sup>59</sup> Some such soldiers provided written confirmation of aid received.<sup>60</sup>

Cut off from the official rationing system, young men from Quadraro evading conscription to Mussolini's army were particularly active in Rossi's band. Its 'Red Aid' operation forged identity papers and ration-books, and as provisions dwindled over winter 1943-44 its militants increasingly turned to expropriating and redistributing food. While in November 1944 it told the Allied Control Commission that its help for 'political fugitives and the families of deportees' consisted of 'food, flour and whatever could be obtained from collaborating sympathisers' and 'daily quintals of bread and flour supplied by mills and bakeries',<sup>61</sup> it seems that these supplies were mostly looted from official distribution centres or else extorted from farmers and grocers by ultimatum.<sup>62</sup> 'Very many times requisitioning livestock requisitioned by the Germans and butchering it to support the population and fugitives', the Banda Rossi claimed to have spent 896,260 lira in Quadraro during the Occupation, and 1,006,474 in the five months after the Allies' arrival.<sup>63</sup> Detailing the 'butter, cheese, parmesan, flour and petrol' and boxes of flour his unit seized from Wehrmacht stocks,<sup>64</sup> Rossi's report to the ACC left unmentioned what they had seized from Italian producers and traders.

While the Banda Rossi's leaders admitted to such thefts at their June 1945 trial, arguing that they were necessary for feeding a famished population, it is more difficult to determine their real level of attacks on Occupation forces. Rossi's own list of missions details seventeen armed assaults on 'Nazi-Fascist' convoys, depots and patrols during the nine-month Resistance, involving 84 militants and mainly aimed at stealing weaponry. The band's arms

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<sup>57</sup> 'Relazione sull'attività svolta dalla banda Rossi - Porta Furba', pp. 2-3.

<sup>58</sup> 'Relazione sull'attività svolta dalla banda Rossi - Porta Furba', p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> See MSdL/FSC/26/55.

<sup>60</sup> 'Relazione sull'attività svolta dalla banda Rossi - Porta Furba', p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> See the complaints by these latter in ASR/CAP/Cd'A/1665/1.

<sup>63</sup> Relazione sull'attività svolta dell'Organizzazione comunista del Quadraro del MC d'Italia': ASR/CAP/Cd'A/1665

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

stocks reported to the Allied Military Government in June 1944 included 70 rifles, 18 pistols, 600 grenades, three heavy and three light machine-guns, two submachine-guns and two rocket-launcher pistols.<sup>65</sup> Rossi's reports are prone to omission as well as boastfulness; in February 1945 police discovered nineteen undeclared firearms in the Sanatorio Ramazzini, used for the Band's continuing 'extortion' efforts. Yet overall this level of activity seems quite plausible for a group with a few dozen armed members. Its accounts for the Occupation period describe some 658,802 lira of its expenditure being devoted to aid to the population, 25,000 for false documents, and 7,800 on aid to Russian POWs.<sup>66</sup>

The extortion of food and money did not end upon the Allies' arrival in June 1944, and one British official describing the partisan bands still operating after Liberation could thus decry militants seeking 'the destruction of the bourgeoisie and the established order by means of Robin Hood tactics which admit that a rich landowner may be "eliminated" provided his wealth is put at the disposal of the proletariat [sic]'.<sup>67</sup> Despite this class-war aspect of the Band's activity, the construction of its 'Red Aid' relief networks under Occupation also relied on seemingly unradical forces. According to a report by the band's 'Quadrumvirate', 'many hospital managers were aware' that the Sanatorio Ramazzini had been used to hide fugitives, 'with the whole personnel, particularly the nuns, collaborating prudently and heroically',<sup>68</sup> 'offering aid even to us heathens'.<sup>69</sup> This document described the hospital's 'bursar Telemaco Conti, informed about everything' as 'the soul of this solidarity'.<sup>70</sup> Banda Rossi collaborators included policemen and even Vatican officials, with the printing of false papers realised with 'the truly valuable and selfless collaboration of Comm. Zonghi, Chamberlain to His Holiness' as well as that of the Italian Red Cross'.<sup>71</sup>

Like all Roman Resistance networks, the band based at the Sanatorio Ramazzini also took care of fugitive Allied soldiers, including the POWs liberated in a series of prison breaks. For German embassy adviser Eitel Friedrich Moellhausen 'the way to escape Rome was either the Vatican or Quadraro';<sup>72</sup> seeking to prevent such 'flight', on 26 October Stahel introduced the death penalty for whoever aided escapee POWs. While this mostly

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<sup>65</sup> 'Relazione sull'attività svolta dalla banda Rossi - Porta Furba'.

<sup>66</sup> 'Relazione sull'attività svolta dell'Organizzazione comunista del Quadraro del MC d'Italia', p. 10.

<sup>67</sup> ACS/ACC/B245A/S50/'Extract from file No. 636/3 sheet no.23'.

<sup>68</sup> ASR/CAP/Cd'A/Rossi/1665/1/'Relazione sull'attività svolta dall'organizzazione comunista del Quadraro del MC d'Italia'.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Moellhausen 1948, p. 126.

concerned Allied fugitives, the MCd'I's 'Red Aid' did in isolated cases extend beyond wartime national divides. This was most evident in the presence of Wehrmacht defectors at the Sanatorio Ramazzini and even as Banda Rossi militants, its leader describing Hans Bracher, Stefan Fischer (both squad-leaders) and Herbert Salamm as 'among our [unit's] best elements', men of 'elevated anti-Nazi-Fascist sentiment'.<sup>73</sup> While mere handfuls of soldiers switched sides, the idea of working-class conscripts turning against their generals fed MCd'I propaganda on its internationalist character, asserting in one clandestine newspaper that the Anglo-Americans now feared 'not Nazi Germany facing defeat today but the triumphant Soviet Germany of tomorrow'.<sup>74</sup>

Such lofty Marxist slogans were distant from the Banda Rossi's more prosaic activities. While the band was attached to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Zone MCd'I and the anarchist Pappalardo's city-wide *Soccorso Rosso* operation, the movement's political leadership took its distance from Rossi during postwar trials, not only accusing him of embezzlement but falsely telling prosecutors he had never belonged to the MCd'I at all.<sup>75</sup> Yet if they went along with Allied efforts to distinguish between 'idealist' elements and those using the Resistance 'as a mere cover for their criminal activities', this distinction had not necessarily existed in partisans' own heads during the armed struggle. Considering the competing Italian governments illegitimate and the victory of communism imminent, the outlaw Rossi had acted regardless of outside authority, even after the Anglo-Americans' arrival. Building the Banda Rossi thus itself became a revolutionary act, and anything that served this purpose legitimate; the Quadraro communists stole livestock even from the Sanatorio Ramazzini's own estate despite the hospital authorities' help for their Red Aid effort. Only after the ACC dissolved all armed bands in Rome would the MCd'I repudiate Rossi's 'criminal' activities.

Given the importance of *Soccorso Rosso* to building MCd'I organisation, there is no simple separation between banditry and its more explicitly political efforts. This is all the truer when we consider that the individuals whom Rossi sought to train as communist cadres were fugitive conscripts. The Quadraro unit not only offered shelter to draft-resisters and refugees but also sought to educate them politically. A Press Office report boasted that 'our comrades ardently worked to inspire in a small group of young people [Rossi's] faith in communism, such as to infuse in these others love for the proletariat and social justice as

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<sup>73</sup> ASR/CAP/Cd'A/Rossi/1665/1/'Relazione sull'attività svolta dall'organizzazione comunista del Quadraro del MC d'Italia'.

<sup>74</sup> *Bandiera Rossa*, 14/11/1943, p. 2, 'La voce dell'operaio'.

<sup>75</sup> A claim also made in print in 'Comunicato', *Bollettino del Movimento Comunista*, I/5, 26/10/1944.



the essential basis of the struggle'.<sup>76</sup> The most concrete evidence of this was 'a little paper called *L'Italia Proletaria*' with which 'we educated and emancipated those attached to us. Our own comrades passionately contributed as impromptu journalists, and also took charge of distributing it'.<sup>77</sup> By the band's own account, after its October 1943 decision to join the MCd'I 'while preserving its own autonomy', '[i]n a short time all those attached to us acquired a perfect political consciousness'.<sup>78</sup>

Reading this handwritten paper<sup>79</sup> we find less sign of political 'perfection' than autodidact eclecticism. This reflected both *L'Italia Proletaria*'s autonomy and its educational purpose. Combining its own texts with readers' letters, this 'internal paper'<sup>80</sup> carried articles from both *Bandiera Rossa* and *l'Unità* as well as reports on Fascist press claims. It echoed the MCd'I's insistence on the imminence of socialist revolution<sup>81</sup> and exaltation of the Red Army.<sup>82</sup> A programmatic-type statement reasoned that given the bourgeoisie's 'identity' with Fascism, 'collaborating with it amounts to betraying the rights of the masses, who ask of us communists the material-political intransigence guaranteeing them a battle waged with no goal other than destroying capitalism'.<sup>83</sup> However, it distinguished itself from MCd'I propaganda by reproducing PCI statements calling on *all Italians* to join the armed struggle, and indeed by its own effort to melt nation into class. An epigraph proclaimed 'Young Italians follow us, for us there is a *Patria*, but not one under bourgeois-capitalist hegemony, but the one the whole people wants, namely a truly proletarian *Patria*'.<sup>84</sup>

#### 4.5. Strategic directives

Rossi's claim that his comrades opted to join the MCd'I in October 1943 after comparing *Bandiera Rossa* to *l'Unità*<sup>85</sup> reflects the importance the communist leaderships placed on

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<sup>76</sup> 'Relazione sommaria dell'attività svolta in periodo clandestino, dall'organizzazione Rossi', MSdL/FSC/28/64, p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Not conserved in any library or institutional archive, it seems the only remaining issues are nos. III and IV (both from December 1943), in the personal possession of Quadraro MCd'I member Ercole Favelli. My thanks to Riccardo Sansone for providing me with photographs of Favelli's copies.

<sup>80</sup> See the co-editor's comments in Di Cesaris 2004, p. 141.

<sup>81</sup> 'Parole ai giovani comunisti', *L'Italia Proletaria*, III, 1.12.1943, signed 'Nipro'; same text but titled 'Parla un comunista' in issue IV, 13.12.1943.

<sup>82</sup> Particularly 'Viva Stalin', *L'Italia Proletaria*, III, 1.12.1943.

<sup>83</sup> 'Parole ai giovani comunisti', *L'Italia Proletaria*, III, 1.12.1943, signed 'Nipro'; same text but titled 'Parla un comunista' in issue IV, 13/12/1943.

<sup>84</sup> *L'Italia Proletaria*, IV, 13/12/1943, untitled box. Similarly in that issue's front-page headline 'For freedom, justice and a people's Italy the whole youth rallies under the Red banner, sure defender of the proletariat'.

<sup>85</sup> 'Relazione sull'attività svolta dell'Organizzazione comunista del Quadraro del MC d'Italia': ASR/CAP/Cd'A/1665.

propaganda. This was crucial in the effort to mould *ad hoc* bands of draft resisters into political movements. While *l'Italia Proletaria* resembled the copied leaflets and handwritten bulletins discussed in Chapter Two, there now emerged professionally-produced broadsheets for a mass audience. The two-page weekly *Bandiera Rossa* (edited by journalist Felice Chilanti and graphic designer Francesco Cretara) claimed a circulation of 12,000<sup>86</sup> and the Rome edition of *l'Unità* as many as 10,000 copies. Beyond agitating for Romans to join Resistance activities, each paper sought to educate militants in its own political line. Given this objective (as well as their necessarily irregular distribution), both *Bandiera Rossa* and *l'Unità* favoured 'programmatic' over 'news' content, offering analyses of the political situation, Resistance objectives, and the lessons of Marxism. Some partisan bands distributed both publications, as well as papers like the Socialist *Avanti!*, the Catholic-communist *Voce Operaia*, and, after a January 1944 split in the Socialist Party, *Il Partigiano*.<sup>87</sup>

The PCI was first to issue a newspaper in the capital after the invasion, with a Rome *l'Unità* appearing from 19 September 1943. While tailored to local events, the Party's organ reflected the same national-front strategy as it promoted in its Northern redoubts. The first issue's banner headline called on 'ALL THE FORCES OF THE ITALIAN PEOPLE to chase out the Germans and destroy Fascism';<sup>88</sup> this article was accompanied by appeals to 'workers, peasants and intellectuals' but also 'all Italians', 'soldiers and officers' and 'agents and officers of the security services' to join a common front to redeem 'the honour of the *Patria*'.<sup>89</sup> A series of texts on the 'new historic tasks of the working class' insisted that the Party was 'not abandoning its socialist end goal, but taking a positive step in that direction'; in the immediate, workers must fight for the achievement of 'National Independence and a people's democracy [sic]',<sup>90</sup> of which the PCI was the 'proudest champion'.<sup>91</sup> The working class must raise 'the *tricolore* that flew among the Italian people's armies on the barricades

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<sup>86</sup> Primo incontro con Chilanti 3.6.1966': MSdL/FSC/26/22.

<sup>87</sup> See section 5.4.

<sup>88</sup> *l'Unità*, 19.9.1943, p. 1, 'TUTTE LE FORZE DEL POPOLO ITALIANO per cacciare i tedeschi e distruggere il fascismo'.

<sup>89</sup> *l'Unità*, 19.9.1943, p. 1. 'La nostra guerra per l'indipendenza e la libertà'.

<sup>90</sup> It should be emphasised that this term did not yet have the connotation it adopted in the postwar period with the creation of 'People's Democracies' in Central and Eastern Europe, where states liberated by the Red Army in 1944–5 adopted Soviet-type political and economic structures. Its use here reflects an idea developed by Comintern president Georgi Dimitrov in 1935, replacing the classic Leninist counterposition of either 'bourgeois' or 'proletarian' 'dictatorships' with the idea of an expansive democracy excluding fascists and embodying a certain element of social 'progress', but without as such meaning socialism or working-class rule.

<sup>91</sup> *Supplemento al n° 17 de l'Unità*, 29.9.1943, 'I nuovi compiti storici della classe operaia: Indipendenza Nazionale e democrazia popolare'

of Milan, the fields of Lombardy and the mountains of Veneto every time they had to defend Italy's freedom against the Germans'.<sup>92</sup>

The PCI organ's constant refrain was the need for Italians to unite in Resistance 'even if starting from different perspectives or having different future goals'.<sup>93</sup> While advocating a CLN government, it emphasised that Italians' first task was to free the country's soil; it proclaimed that its opposition to Badoglio owed 'not to any class or party prejudice' but rather to the fact that after the royalists' failure on 8 September '[o]nly a CLN government [could] realise the union of all national forces'.<sup>94</sup> Within this alliance the working class was the 'national class' *par excellence*: invective against particular 'treacherous industrialists' or 'collaborationist financiers' expressed a class radicalism now rerouted into a narrative distinguishing between 'patriotic' and 'unpatriotic' capitalists. While *l'Unità* asserted that 'the proletariat pick[ing] up the banner of National Independence dropped by the decadent bourgeoisie'<sup>95</sup> would be at the 'centre' or 'heart' of a 'progressive democracy' and a 'new political order', it left undefined its vision of the future Italy. The PCI instead outlined a classic 'stageist' argument, arguing that winning Italy's freedom from foreign occupation was the necessary first step before workers could fight for further social progress.

*l'Unità*'s articles on the working class's 'new historic tasks' addressed Party militants whom branch reports consistently termed indisciplined and 'ill-informed'. Meant as a Leninist 'collective organiser' - a 'weapon for mobilising, educating and politically orienting the masses'<sup>96</sup> - it initially met with the same 'incomprehension' cadres had faced since 25 July. A November 1943 agitprop-section report portrayed a membership 'unhappy with P[arty] propaganda in general and *l'Unità* in particular, intolerant of words like "*Patria*", "nation" etc., and distrustful of the P[arty] line'.<sup>97</sup> Similarly stark claims dominated a 4<sup>th</sup> zone dossier that same month: 'Frankly, we know that *l'Unità* gets a real hearing in bourgeois circles, whom we might hope to conquer or neutralise; but it seems

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<sup>92</sup> *l'Unità*, 19.9.1943, p. 3, untitled box.

<sup>93</sup> *l'Unità*, 26.10.1943, p. 2, 'Punto e basta'. This text appeared in a polemic against *Bandiera Rossa*, arguing that whatever this *giornaletto*'s 'lectures based on insinuations and hypocrisy', the PCI was 'proud of realising in the struggle against fascism the union of all those forces that, even if starting from different perspectives or having different future goals, have nonetheless come together on the positions of fighting fascism, which in its both Mussolinian and Hitlerite forms is the main enemy of the working class'.

<sup>94</sup> *l'Unità*, 29.9.1943, 'Per l'unità del popolo italiano nella lotta contro il nazismo e il fascismo'.

<sup>95</sup> *Supplemento al n° 17 de l'Unità*, 29.9.1943, 'I nuovi compiti storici della classe operaia: Indipendenza Nazionale e democrazia popolare'.

<sup>96</sup> As explained in *l'Unità*, 17/11/1943, 'Vita di Partito'.

<sup>97</sup> 'Appunti sull'attività di agit-prop del P. in relazione alla sua linea politica', November 1943: APC/7/10/4, pp. 3-4.

almost written for them alone, while disappointing our properly “popular” base ... It disappoints them because it speaks of nothing but national liberation, fighting the Germans, collaborating with other anti-fascists to this end, of Badoglio and the King ... but nothing specifically communist, to distinguish us from other parties’.<sup>98</sup> ‘The Right accuse us of bad faith, while the grassroots say we have become national-jingoists, which allows the harder, red-painted Trotskyist [sic]<sup>99</sup> papers to out-compete us’.<sup>100</sup>

Amassing a series of such local reports, Lazio PCI organiser Agostino Novella identified a ‘raw, proletarian anti-fascism’ little reconciled with the politics of national unity.<sup>101</sup> ‘Sectarianism’ prevailed among both ‘old comrades’ ‘stuck’ to the intransigent positions of the 1920s and the PCI’s new recruits: ‘almost all Roman comrades, including many with important roles in the Party, [did] not know the first elements of communism’,<sup>102</sup> ‘instinctively feeling that the world is turning in our direction, yet not fully knowing who we are or what we want’.<sup>103</sup> This vacuum in their understanding was filled ‘by the triumphalist verbal extremism of *B[andiera] R[ossa]*’,<sup>104</sup> whose ‘revolutionary bluster’ Novella deemed ‘more readily accepted and assimilated by still-inexpert comrades and the working-class masses in general – ill-educated by twenty years of Fascism – than is the tight, concrete reasoning of our own *Unità*’.<sup>105</sup> Attracted by ‘extremist phrase-mongering’,<sup>106</sup> ‘apolitical infants [were] becoming political infants won to ultra-Leftism’.<sup>107</sup> Commenting on similar remarks by Giorgio Amendola, Corvisieri notes the irony of PCI hierarchs ‘accusing the old comrades of sectarianism because of their past experience, while directing the same accusation against the young on account of their inexperience’.<sup>108</sup> Party cadres feared such ‘unpreparedness’ and ‘indiscipline’ feeding dissent, as ‘the dissatisfaction over *l’Unità* ensure[d] a very favourable reception for *Bandiera Rossa*’.<sup>109</sup> This

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<sup>98</sup> Intervento del “coadiutore” della IVa Zona’, November 1943, APC/7/2/13, p. 2.

<sup>99</sup> There were no Trotskyist papers in wartime Rome; this is doubtless a reference to *Bandiera Rossa*, the only dissident-communist publication that could possibly ‘out-compete’ *l’Unità*.

<sup>100</sup> Intervento del “coadiutore” della IVa Zona’, November 1943, APC/7/2/13, p. 2.

<sup>101</sup> Rapporto sulla 2° zona’, December 1943, FGAN/87/262–70.

<sup>102</sup> ‘Fida’, ‘sull’orientamento del P’, November 1943, APC/7/2/12.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> PCI Federazione Laziale, Comitato direttivo federale, ‘Rapporto politico’, late November 1943: APC/7/2/14, p. 7.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. The idea of ‘infantilism’ is clearly a reference to Lenin’s 1920 pamphlet, *Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder*, a polemic written for the Comintern Second Congress whose main polemical targets included Amadeo Bordiga, by 1943 a hate-figure in the PCI.

<sup>108</sup> Corvisieri 1968, p. 29.

<sup>109</sup> Intervento del “coadiutore” della IVa Zona’, November 1943, APC/7/2/13, p. 4.

latter was dominated by the class-war rhetoric the PCI now abandoned, its 5 October first issue publishing an abridged version of the earlier 'Proclama comunista'. As against what it termed 'the directives circulated and implemented by disparate currents combining in a National United Front, which do not conform to Communist thinking and action',<sup>110</sup> the MCd'I organ insisted that the question now posed was the 'revolutionary conquest of power'.<sup>111</sup> A self-described 'battle-organ for defeating all reactionary forces blocking the proletariat's road to redemption', *Bandiera Rossa* lustily enjoined workers 'to unite around our banner ... poin[ting] the weapons of our Revolution, inflexibly and openly, without fail and without compromise, against the enemies of yesterday, today and tomorrow'.<sup>112</sup> It damned a CLN that 'represent[ed] classes with opposed interests and aims'; a conception of Resistance based on national unity would 'destine' communists to end up 'supporting the monarchist government headed by Marshal Badoglio', 'leader of Fascism's first imperialist endeavour in Abyssinia'.<sup>113</sup>

For *Bandiera Rossa*, the class war could not be subordinated to any common national interest. At times it did suggest that national Resistance and socialist revolution would follow in two distinct phases, such as where it referred to the need to 'free Italy from first foreign occupation then bourgeois domination'. Yet its overwhelming polemical thrust was directed against this latter foe. The war was already lost for the Axis, but there remained a threat of capitalist 'restoration'; for the 'bourgeois democrats', 'the liberation of Italy [was] not an end, but a means of securing the right to restore capitalist domination'. In its own efforts to conquer Italy's future, 'the working class [could] have neither unity of action nor of ideology with the Italian ruling class'.<sup>114</sup> It was 'time to raise the red flag, not the *tricolore*'; in a moment where workers must clearly recognise their distinct class interests, 'all who adopt the symbols of nationalism [were] abandon[ing] any claim to be legitimate representatives of the working masses'.<sup>115</sup> The MCd'I insisted that 'the political parties representing the working class can and must form a United Front, in a "crusade" of thought and action, means and ends' aimed only at proletarian revolution.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> In linea', *Bandiera Rossa*, 5.10.1943.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Untitled box, *Bandiera Rossa*, 5.10.1943. This text appeared at the top of the front page of the first issue, beneath the masthead.

<sup>113</sup> 'In linea', *Bandiera Rossa*, 5.10.1943.

<sup>114</sup> 'In linea', *Bandiera Rossa*, 5.10.1943.

<sup>115</sup> Perché collaborare?', *Bandiera Rossa*, 5.10.1943.

<sup>116</sup> Serena intuizione', *Bandiera Rossa*, 22.10.1943.

*Bandiera Rossa* frequently invoked class unity as an alternative to national unity. The 15 October edition republished the Provisional Executive's call for the refoundation of the Communist Party of Italy, accompanied by an article entitled 'Toward the Single Party of the Proletariat'.<sup>117</sup> Scorning the divisions that hampered workers' collective organisation, this piece advocated 'a unitary representation of the whole proletariat[,] embracing the exploited of all categories under a single name expressing its modern needs[,] and preparing to be a fraction that does not only represent workers in a bourgeois parliament[,] but is a secure guide preparing to lead them to the social revolution'.<sup>118</sup> *Bandiera Rossa's* awkward syntax was matched by its often superficial analysis, decrying the 'old outmoded ideological questions' and 'superfluous tactical questions' that divided Marxists, which it blamed on 'the egotistical instincts permeating bourgeois society'.<sup>119</sup> While the MCd'I's ideological and tactical mores in fact had everything to do with its clashes with the PCI, its refusal to admit the Togliattians' 'official' character prevented it from frankly addressing the reasons why unity had proven impossible.

These divides between 'the Movement' and 'the Party' soon deepened. *Bandiera Rossa* had declared the two 'distinct but not separate organisations', and expressed its 'confidence' they would 'meet on the higher path of revolution, if both sides are sincere';<sup>120</sup> Orfeo Mucci would later remember 'a clash of leaders, whereas among the grassroots there was no difference'.<sup>121</sup> However, in areas where both operated they competed to integrate new bands and poach each others' militants. The memoirs of Trastevere barber Aleandro Servadei, a PCI member, thus recount an October 1943 meeting in the cloisters of the Madonna d'Orto church where Matteo Matteotti told partisans that 'the only anti-fascism is the fight inspired by *Bandiera Rossa* - a fight also directed against the Badoglio government', repudiating 'the Communists who collaborate with that government, who real anti-fascists therefore distrust'.<sup>122</sup> Servadei relates his own intervention to 'rebut these false arguments, denying that the Party supported Badoglio, and clarifying its national-unity policy', namely that 'the Italian people would freely choose its institutions after

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<sup>117</sup> 'Verso il partito unico del proletariato', *Bandiera Rossa*, 15.10.1943.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> 'Equivoco da chiarire?', *Bandiera Rossa*, 29.10.1943.

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Alessandro Portelli, in CGB/FAP, p. 34.

<sup>122</sup> Servadei n.d., p. 53.

chasing out the Nazi-Fascists'.<sup>123</sup> He boasts that this left even Matteotti 'unconvinced of what he had said', with 'all present joining the [PCI's] Garibaldi bands'.<sup>124</sup>

Despite this claimed polemical triumph, internal PCI reports speak of ongoing tensions in Trastevere. Surveying this district west of the Tiber in spring 1944, Egle Gualdi noted that 'given the dominant disorientation and infantilism',<sup>125</sup> she was unsurprised to be told that '*l'Avanti*, *Bandiera Rossa*, *Voce Operaia* and anti-royalist tracts are more widely desired and appreciated than *L'Unità*, and read by our own comrades with greater enthusiasm'.<sup>126</sup> She reported an unease with patriotism, for '[m]any comrades are scandalised about our use of the word *Patria* while others consider our national policy a mere ruse, believing that the Comintern is more active than ever';<sup>127</sup> 'many, many other misunderstandings, almost all of an extremist bent'<sup>128</sup> fed the 'overall impression that our leading activists see the Party's functions as detached from the practical fight. They think we need the same forms of struggle as in 1920 and 1921 – as if these twenty years of Fascism had not completely changed the situation'.<sup>129</sup> A militant recruited from *Bandiera Rossa* 'occasionally expressed extremist views yet this [was] not particular to him alone': Gualdi claimed that 'the majority of our grassroots comrades are still disoriented and have not assimilated our Party's policy, often interpreting it in a sectarian manner'.<sup>130</sup>

While Gualdi's comments concerned Trastevere specifically, the branch reports her husband Agostino Novella amassed in late 1943 consistently refer to the dissidents' role in undermining PCI discipline. A report on the reorganisation of the Party's agitprop section bemoaned the 'infantilism prevalent among almost all members' and the 'apolitical fideism' of those 'layers of the proletariat more given to movements like *Bandiera Rossa* than a paper like *l'Unità*, which fails to enlighten them on the nature and policy of a P[arty] that claims to be working-class, yet speaks in terms barely different from the bourgeois papers'.<sup>131</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> Zone organiser reported that when he suggested that partisans wear *tricolore* armbands, there was a general refusal'; 'amidst great uproar they decided that they would instead

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> 'Rapporto sulla 2° zona', December 1943, FGAN/87/262–70.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> 'Risultato di questo mese di lavoro', December 1943, FGAN/87/271–84. My italics.

<sup>131</sup> Appunti sull'attività di agit-prop del P. in relazione alla sua linea politica', November 1943: APC/7/10/4, p. 4.

make red ones with the hammer-and-sickle, and to the Devil with the *tricolore*'.<sup>132</sup> A dossier by one cadre visiting isolated Zagarolo, Prenestina and Viterbo by bicycle reported that local PCIers had not only shown sympathy with MCd'I propaganda,<sup>133</sup> but themselves distributed it.<sup>134</sup> Local members thus received a stern order to 'Accept, read and distribute only the Party press, delivered by your leaders', and not that of the 'dissidents and deviationists of *Bandiera Rossa*'.<sup>135</sup>

Bemoaning members' 'lack of ideological preparation',<sup>136</sup> PCI cadres were also perturbed by 'so-called communists acting on their own initiative'.<sup>137</sup> Seeking to contain the 'further development of such displays of indiscipline, which bring very dangerous disorientation'<sup>138</sup> the PCI organ lashed out at *Bandiera Rossa*. A 15 October polemic publicly accused 'this movement, which we have nothing in common with', of 'sowing confusion when clarity is so necessary', 'brandishing the "communist" label in order to exploit a prestige that belongs to our Party alone'.<sup>139</sup> When *Bandiera Rossa* retorted that 'the confusion and disorientation among the masses comes not from we who follow the trusty old red flag ... but those who have since 25 July been "upholding the *tricolore*"',<sup>140</sup> *L'Unità* dismissed its claim to the communist tradition: 'it would take a lot more than a few dilettanteish proclamations of revolutionary faith to credit a "movement" of such limited merits in the fight against Fascism'.<sup>141</sup> It was 'untroubled by *Bandiera Rossa*'s insinuations about [its] top-down appointments' of cadres; these 'recall[ed] the positions all kinds of opportunists have taken against the iron discipline that must govern the Communist Parties'.<sup>142</sup>

While 26 October's 'Enough is enough'<sup>143</sup> declared the Party 'uninterested in further debate', cadres continued to deploy the Stalinist 'amalgam technique' in order to smear the dissidents. Echoing the Milan section's claims that such movements were merely 'the Gestapo's mask' in its efforts to divide Resistance,<sup>144</sup> the Lazio Federation warned members against reading '*Bandiera Rossa* and the *agent provocateur* material produced by the secret

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<sup>132</sup> Intervento del "coadiuvatore" della IVa Zona, novembre 1943': APC/7/2/13, p. 5.

<sup>133</sup> 'Caratteristiche generali della zona [Stefano, marzo 1944]', APC/7/8/8, pp. 1-2.

<sup>134</sup> 'PCI, Com. Prov. di Viterbo - Zona 3-4, 2 aprile 1944', APC/7/7/15, p. 5.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> Untitled, November 1943, APC/7/10/5, p. 4.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> Untitled, November 1943, APC/7/10/5, p. 5.

<sup>139</sup> *L'Unità*, 10/10/1943, 'Equivoco da chiarire'.

<sup>140</sup> *Bandiera Rossa*, 22/10/1943, 'Equivoco da chiarire?'.

<sup>141</sup> *L'Unità*, 26/10/1943, 'Punto e basta'.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> *L'Unità*, 26/10/1943, 'Punto e basta'.

<sup>144</sup> 'Il sinistrismo: la maschera della Gestapo', *La Nostra Lotta*, November 1943.



services'.<sup>145</sup> *L'Unità* accused the Roman dissidents of issuing 'Goebbelian propaganda'; if *Bandiera Rossa* 'seem[ed] not to be the work of Prussian agents', it came from an 'irresponsible little group misusing the red flag' in its 'stubborn game of provocation against the working class and communism'.<sup>146</sup> Cadres accused the dissidents of 'objectively' giving 'succour to Nazi propaganda about the "Bolshevik" threat', thus 'dividing the anti-fascist front'.<sup>147</sup> For their part, they set themselves the task of 'win[ning] back comrades who easily fall prey to the diversion campaign ... waged by groups and individuals not all acting in good faith, doubtless aided and guided by the Fascist 5<sup>th</sup> column'.<sup>148</sup> Their own goal was 'to break up the MCd'I, absorbing its healthy part until the movement is liquidated from the local political scene'.<sup>149</sup>

#### 4.6. 7 November

Beyond the circulation of propaganda, the MCd'I and PCI also sought to galvanise their base through spectacular acts of publicity. This was epitomised by their respective celebrations of 7 November, anniversary of the Russian Revolution. Together with their wall-writings and a special edition of their newspaper, *Bandiera Rossa* militants' flying of red flags from public buildings was both an act of defiance against Occupation forces and a means of asserting their own claim to the Soviet tradition. Even such symbolic acts posed great dangers: raising a red flag on the Via Appia in the Alberone neighbourhood on 7 November Costantino Imperiali's band were caught by local Fascists, with Luigi and Costantino Lo Bue arrested as their comrades escaped.<sup>150</sup> For their part, members of the PCI's GAP held *comizi volanti* [literally, 'flying meetings', speeches lasting just one or two minutes] in central Piazza Fiume and outside San Giovanni basilica. *L'Unità* spoke of how 'red-painted wall-writings praising the USSR, Red Army and Stalin literally flooded the

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<sup>145</sup> 'PCI, Com. Prov. di Viterbo - Zona 3-4', April 1944, APC/7/7/15, p. 5.

<sup>146</sup> *L'Unità*, 6/4/1944, 'Manifesti provocatori'. My italics.

<sup>147</sup> The claim that the MCd'I's positions 'objectively' divided anti-fascist ranks (even if some or most of its members acted in good faith) clearly provided PCI cadres their most effective argument against 'the Matteotti group's sordid paper'. They could thus explain to members that even if '*Bandiera Rossa*'s 'extremist rhetoric and big talk of communism [found] favour among the masses', who 'identif[ied] with this lurid sheet, finding something in it that responds to their demands' 'it almost seem[ed] to have been printed by [Nazi] general Stahel, for the sake of breaking up the anti-fascist front...!' (Intervento del "coadiutore" della IVa Zona, novembre 1943': APC/7/2/13, p. 4).

<sup>148</sup> PCI Federazione Laziale, Comitato direttivo federale, 'Rapporto politico', late November 1943: APC/7/2/14, p. 5.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

<sup>150</sup> See Lillo Pullara's report in MSdL/FSC/26/57.

streets' together with red flags 'saluting the Red Army in the name of the whole Roman citizenry'.<sup>151</sup>

While the popular-frontist *L'Unità* duly fêted 7 November as 'a concrete part of the history of all humanity', with 'the power of the first socialist state now becoming the power of a cause that unites nations and peoples in struggle against Nazi-Fascist barbarism',<sup>152</sup> *Bandiera Rossa* invoked the Revolution's more strictly class-war inheritance. Hailing 'the Russian comrades celebrat[ing] their anniversary of the Revolution amidst the fervour of the war which they have fought with such heroism', it emphasised the similarity with 'our comrades also celebrating the anniversary of 7 November, a date that heralds their own future struggles'.<sup>153</sup> The revolutionary anniversary itself presaged the coming 'day of liberation'. '[T]he communist workers know that their day has come and they will be present, vigorously to chase the Fascists out of the last hiding places guarded by the Germans. *Avanti Popolo alla riscossa/Bandiera Rossa trionferà*. Our anthem will sound the reveille for the masses' return to the terrain of proletarian revolution'.<sup>154</sup>

Past traditions were renewed as 'the red flags once so common on our demonstrations, conserved by the workers for twenty years, flew over Rome on 7 November'.<sup>155</sup> If a 18 November 1943 *Guardia Nazionale Repubblicana* report to Mussolini on the mood in the *borgate* claimed that 'Moscow is their Mecca',<sup>156</sup> this report written just days after the revolutionary anniversary likely reflected the most visible signs of anti-fascism, rather than popular sentiments as such. Even those who did rally around the 'trustworthy old red flag' did not necessarily know anything about the USSR beyond its opposition to Fascist Italy. A local MCd'I commander in Viterbo, won to the PCI after Liberation, recalled how 'we [*Bandiera Rossa*] won workers to us with the red flag and the word "revolution", but that was the beginning and end of their political understanding'.<sup>157</sup> This reflected the argument present

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<sup>151</sup> *L'Unità*, 10 November 1943, 'Roma ha celebrato il 7 novembre'. In his autobiography (Bentivegna 2011) the GAP's Rosario Bentivegna takes particular pride in those graffiti invoking the names of German Communists such as Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, showing the internationalist character of the struggle.

<sup>152</sup> 'Nel XXVI Anniversario della Rivoluzione Russia i popoli di tutto il mondo vedono sorgere l'aurora della vittoria della libertà e dell'indipendenza nazionale', *L'Unità*, 3 November 1943. My italics.

<sup>153</sup> '7 Novembre', *Bandiera Rossa*, 7 November 1943.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> See the 18 November report, reproduced in Bonomini (ed.) 1974.

<sup>157</sup> See Attilio Vagnoni's reminiscences in Galli (ed.) 1984, p. 127.

throughout internal PCI reports that ‘intransigent’ class-war feeling came more easily to the poorest Romans than any notion of political organisation or strategy.

The MCd’I did however lay emphasis on political education. Beyond the risks its militants took in distributing a clandestine press, from November 1943 they also organised a clandestine ‘Marxist school’. Led by student Unico Guidoni, this ‘Grotta Rossa’ [‘Red Cave’] welcomed ‘students, workers, builders’ labourers and smiths’.<sup>158</sup> His night-time lectures<sup>159</sup> were accompanied by a ‘library’ for militants’ political edification. There is no inventory of the books included, but an internal bulletin listing ‘texts necessary for a communist library’ mentioned not only Marxist-Leninist classics like Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* and *Capital*, Lenin’s *State and Revolution* and Stalin’s *Short Course* history of the Bolshevik Party, but also such texts as anarchist Errico Malatesta’s ‘Among the Peasants’, Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution* (legally published in Italy in 1938), Bukharin and Preobrazhensky’s *ABC of Communism* and Michels’s *History of the Italian Socialist Party*.<sup>160</sup> This eclectic selection speaks not only of a thirst for any available reading materials, but also of a pro-Soviet movement unbound by Stalinist doctrinal orthodoxies.

From the outset Grotta Rossa operated as something more than a ‘Marxist school’, for it also served as a hub of MCd’I military planning. Establishing radio communications with the US Fifth Army in November, Ezio Malatesta provided information on German troop displacements in the rural areas north of Rome, as the Allied forces approached from the South. Indeed, while the issues of *Bandiera Rossa* discussed at Grotta Rossa’s one-sidedly championed the Red Army’s role in defeating fascism, over the winter the Roman communists increasingly faced the question of what they would do when the Western Allies reached the Italian capital. Already at the beginning of October the Anglo-Americans had captured Naples in the wake of a popular uprising; political machinations in that city, including in its trade-union movement, pointed to the role the Western powers might have in shaping Italy’s future more broadly. As we shall see in Chapter Five, this was a problem particularly sharply posed in January 1944 as Allied troops landed at Anzio, just fifty kilometres from the capital.

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<sup>158</sup> A later obituary of the ‘martyr’ Guidoni would eulogise ‘the long and anxious nights when beneath the ground Rome was inhabited by young students, workers, builders and smiths, intent on hearing the word of Unico, who was inspired by a passion to make the humble hear the process of time, the mathematics of proletarian victory, the considerable importance of the rebirth of a people mastering its own destiny’: MCd’I 1944c, Unico Guidoni e Grottarossa.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> ‘Per la bibliotechina di sezione’, *Bollettino del Movimento Comunista d’Italia*, 13/11/1944.



## Chapter Five

### The Allies' approach

*We must today carry out the greatest, most fruitful activity for the organisation and regimentation of proletarian forces. The aim is to train and constitute the preponderant force that at the coming moment "X", coinciding with the end and the settlement of the war, will achieve the revolutionary conquest of power by the working class, in contest with the opposing reactionary forces.*

*Bandiera Rossa, 29 October 1943*<sup>1</sup>

Partisans began 1944 optimistic that the war was turning to their advantage. In recent months the Allies had surged through Southern Italy, breaking through the Wehrmacht's Winter Line defences at several points. Further good news came from neighbouring Yugoslavia, where Josip Broz Tito had declared a republican government, and the Eastern Front, where the Red Army had advanced deep into Ukraine. After the 'turning point' of 1943, *L'Unità* could herald 1944 as 'the year of victory'.<sup>2</sup> Such hopes were further raised in late January, as the Allies landed troops within striking range of the capital. Establishing a beachhead fifty kilometres south of Rome, the landings at Anzio promised a decisive breakthrough in the Italian campaign. Thinking that an Allied march on the city might be just days away, partisans prepared for insurrection.

This also fed hopes of political overhaul. Badoglio had already pledged to resign once the Allies reached Rome, a promise that also opened up the prospect of a wider change of government. Seeking a rapid solution of the 'institutional question', anti-fascists developed plans to form their own administration. In CLN ranks this was particularly the concern of the Socialist and Actionist parties, who pushed for the coalition to proclaim itself a provisional government. They also sought Allied backing for the formation of such an authority. Yet partisan organisers on the Roman underground instead sought to force the issue, presenting the Allies with a *fait accompli*. The most ambitious planned to seize control of public buildings, exploiting the power vacuum in the interval between the Germans leaving and the Anglo-Americans arriving.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'L'Ora presente e noi', *BR*, 29.10.1943

<sup>2</sup> '1943: Anno di svolta - 1944: Anno di vittoria', *l'Unità*, XX/29, 30.12.1943.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Seven.

The regions controlled by the Allied Military Government (AMG)<sup>4</sup> were already the stage of sharp political and social conflicts. While conservative and ex-fascist circles held onto power in the South, both labour protests and rising republican sentiment expressed the desire for change. This situation also created grounds for friction – if not outright antagonism – between the anti-fascist parties and AMG. The Allies had clearly played the central role in liberating these regions from Wehrmacht occupation, and could thus be thanked for laying the fundamental bases of any democratic politics. Yet the Allies were also concerned to prevent institutional upheaval, and any fighting that might tie up troops. This attitude, expressed in their continued recognition of Badoglio, also posed limits to the scope and pace of change that democratic forces could hope to achieve.

Decisively important within this context were those forces who sought a compromise between the royalists and the anti-fascist parties. As early as December 1943 officials in the South had floated plans for the King to step down in favour of his son upon the liberation of Rome, and allow a constitutional referendum.<sup>5</sup> This proposal had the merit of pushing aside a monarch compromised by his ties to Fascism, but without pre-empting any final decision on Italy's future order. At the suggestion of Benedetto Croce and Count Carlo Sforza, a CLN congress held in Bari at the end of January embraced this proposal. This was received positively by CLN president Ivanoe Bonomi.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, the left-wing parties were concerned that replacing a tarnished King might in fact strengthen the monarchy as an institution. Plans for a unity deal thus divided the anti-fascist coalition.

The CLN's difficulties in sealing such an alliance also threatened its parties' internal solidarity. Formed in summer 1943 out of two different movements, the Socialist Party was particularly riven by conflict.<sup>7</sup> Leftists in the party never reconciled to the CLN accused leaders of failing to advance the Socialists' republican agenda,<sup>8</sup> and in January 1944 split away to form their own *Movimento Partigiano*. Seeking to prevent further such divides, Socialist leaders adopted a more aggressive policy, calling for the CLN to declare a provisional government.<sup>9</sup> This did help galvanise party ranks, and also cohered a left-wing

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<sup>4</sup> Initially known as Allied Military Government for Occupied Territories (AMGOT), here called AMG throughout for simplicity's sake.

<sup>5</sup> NA/FO371/43814, 5.12.1943.

<sup>6</sup> Bonomi 1947, p. 145, entry from 2.2.1944.

<sup>7</sup> Amati 2005 is the best-researched history of the *Movimento di Unità Proletaria* (MUP) that flowed into the PSI to form the PSIUP. This like the volumes Neri Sereni (ed.) 1988 and Fondazione Basso-Issoco 1988 offer extensive documentation on the leftist currents within this party, as does *Critica Marxista* of March-April 1965.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

bloc in the CLN. However, this also antagonised liberals and conservatives within that coalition who remained intent on a deal with the royalists. Disturbed by the shifting mood, on 23 March Bonomi resigned as its president. The CLN risked a permanent split.

These tensions reflected anti-fascists' frustration at the slow pace of institutional change. However, their keenly-felt desire to overcome this political blockage did not translate into the power to do anything about it, for the Allies in any case remained the clear masters of the Italian situation. For the arriving liberators, the desire to democratise Italy's government was also conditional on the higher need to prevent unrest. In the South, this demanded a careful management of the post-Fascist transition, allowing the rise of new parties and unions while also stabilising the state machine. This also forced militants to recognise the barriers to immediate change. The days after the Anzio landings enthused anti-fascists in the belief that insurrection was near. Yet they also came to understand that the Allies would themselves be a direct actor in Italian politics. As Chapter Five shows, this was also no uniform process, and the different parties offered wildly varying visions of what kind of change remained possible.

### 5.1. Insurrectionary plans

Partisans in Rome had long believed that the Allies' approach would mean the moment of insurrection. There was no shared understanding of how this would take place, but most such outlooks relied on the assumption of a dramatic upsurge in popular mobilisation as the Allies were in any case about to arrive. One common trope was the idea of exploiting a temporary power vacuum, wiping out the last Fascist personnel in order to seize control of government offices, military bases and radio stations. Antonino Poce drew up a list of infrastructure around the city that would be most important to capture.<sup>10</sup> This idea was also present in *Bandiera Rossa*, which spoke of a 'moment "X"' when the revolutionaries would clash with the reactionary forces.<sup>11</sup> The CLN president posed the question frontally: 'With the new year there begins a new concern. Who will govern Rome in the interval between the Germans' departure and the Allied forces' arrival?'<sup>12</sup>

The Anzio landings concentrated minds on this problem. On 30 January the Rome PCI called on citizens to prepare for an uprising, which would 'strike the oppressor's army at all its most vulnerable points' upon the Allies' arrival.<sup>13</sup> The battle for Rome concerned 'not only the Allied troops but also and above all Rome's own people'; it was 'decisive' to turn

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<sup>10</sup> 'Riunione del Comitato romano tenuta il 6.2.1944, copy in MSdL/FSC/28/91.

<sup>11</sup> *L'Ora presente e noi*, BR, 29.10.1943

<sup>12</sup> Bonomi 1947, p. 140.

<sup>13</sup> 'Cittadini di Roma', dated 25/1/1944, appears in *l'Unità* 30.1.1944.

it into an 'irresistible movement of national insurrection'.<sup>14</sup> Romans would have to read between the lines to see how this would indeed be 'decisive' for 'Italy's fate', beyond hastening the Allies' arrival.<sup>15</sup> *L'Unità's* call to arms made no reference to the Allied-recognised government; this, combined with other articles characterising the royalists as a spent force, and a call on Romans to unite around the CLN, hinted at the goal of declaring a new authority. Reflecting the heady mood, cadres drafted a final appeal for insurrection.<sup>16</sup>

With the Allies on the brink of reaching the capital, the MCd'I also developed its plans for insurrection. The Rome leadership meeting on 6 February – one of very few for which minutes survive – evidenced the frenetic activity of this movement, trying to create all manner of initiatives in the time before the Allies reached the capital. Poce insisted that the groups of the 'central Party' would join them in battle at the 'given moment' in the fight to take over 150 objectives around the city.<sup>17</sup> Red flags would be raised and strategic points occupied. When it was mentioned that local bands had not given information on membership numbers to the centre, Filiberto Sbardella immediately derailed this into an argument that military ranks were uncommunist and indeed 'no longer relevant' in the Soviet armed forces.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile Eusebio Troiani complained that the paper must become more 'alive, polemical, intransigent', even though it was over a month since it had last appeared at all.<sup>19</sup>

While the discussion at this meeting suggested that bands still lacked for maps or common norms of organisation, Poce and Sbardella had already embarked upon another initiative. This was apparent in militants' proclamation of an Italian 'Red Army' at the end of January. The bombastically-named *Armata Rossa* had the declared aim of joining all communists in a single military force, which would be able to pursue the armed campaign through central and Northern Italy together with the Allies. This was a recognition of the fact that the liberation of Rome would not mark the end of the partisan war. In the first months of 1944 this 'Red Army' became one of the largest Resistance forces in the capital, building partisan bands in parallel to the MCd'I's own military organisation. It had 424 recognised partisans during the clandestine period.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> 'ALLA BATTAGLIA DI ROMA La popolazione deve partecipare in massa', *l'Unità* (unpublished), 1/2/1944. This would have followed the regular edition two days previously.

<sup>17</sup> 'Riunione del Comitato romano tenuta il 6.2.1944', copy in MSdL/FSC/28/91.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



As well as forming its own bands the *Armata Rossa* sought to establish operational unity between Rome's communist movements. Its founding appeal preached the unity of the 'Movement', the 'Party' and the Catholic-Communists.<sup>20</sup> PCI cadres could only see this as a form of sectarian competition; it threatened to undermine the CLN's own internal solidarity by uniting Party members with communists outside of the coalition.<sup>21</sup> Such hostility was not necessarily shared by their own militants, who sometimes collaborated with *Armata Rossa* militants when this was practically useful. Particularly notable is the case of Rosario Bentivegna, among the most prominent GAP militants in the capital. He visited *Armata Rossa* commander Celestino Avico's San Lorenzo gravestone workshop in order to procure explosives for his 'Antonio Gramsci' unit.<sup>22</sup>

*Armata Rossa* was closely bound to the MCd'I, but not simply part of it. Sbardella and Antonino Poce served on its command together with three communists who were not aligned either to the 'Movement' or the 'Party'. Giordano Amidani, Otello Terzani and Celestino Avico were each PCI expellees who had been kicked out of its *confino* organisation together with Poce. The wider membership also seems to have been broadly similar in composition to the MCd'I. An appeal for recruits reflected the outlook of its veteran communist leaders, who signed it as 'the comrades of yesterday, today and tomorrow'; the text however cited letters from two new fighters. On the one hand was an 'old anarchist, driven to fight for the sun of the future'; on the other, an abandoned young soldier who wanted to 'defend the *Patria*'.<sup>23</sup> Likely 'types' rather than real individuals, their letters indicated the kind of militants the 'Red Army' could hope to attract.

On 1 February PCI cadres prepared a special issue of *l'Unità*, whose distribution would serve as the call for insurrection. Yet the Allied advance stalled, and the issue was withdrawn. The Allies' approach had spread enthusiasm in Resistance ranks, and a spark of belief that insurrection was about to arrive. This popular mobilisation would never in fact come. As wartime suffering ground on, and the Allies' arrival seemed to be just around the corner, Romans were entrenched in the *attesismo* of waiting for this outside relief. The

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<sup>20</sup> See the posters and leaflets in the BCF/FOT.

<sup>21</sup> See section 8.4

<sup>22</sup> Bentivegna 1983, pp. 64–68 recounts his meetings with Avico. He describes the former *Arditi del Popolo* fighter as 'frankly out of the ordinary, not so much for exceptional qualities as for his "vivacity". A little agitated, perhaps even rather boastful, he claimed to be preparing great projects for a struggle without quarter against the German and Fascist commands with the city. He never wanted to establish continuous, regular contacts with us nor to be considered a member of our organisation'.

<sup>23</sup> BCF/FOT. This document is undated but likely from early March 1944.

desire for an end to their hardships far from amounted to any identification with the Allied cause, or still less any effort to aid it militarily. This was particularly notable in the mass peace rallies held by the Vatican, which prominently called on the Allies to desist from bombing the city. Such passive hopes for deliverance would remain a dominant sentiment over the next four and a half months, even as the Anglo-Americans faltered. Only a small minority were aiding the Allies' approach.

## 5.2. Military contacts and POWs

Before the Anzio landings the contacts between the Roman Resistance and the Allied powers had mostly been a matter of intelligence-gathering rather than direct military collaboration.<sup>24</sup> While operatives of the UK's Special Operations Executive (SOE) were already active across Yugoslavia (from September 1941) and Greece (from November 1942), providing technical support for partisans and reporting back on the political situation, the SOE placed distinctly less priority on the far weaker partisan forces that had formed in southern-central Italy.<sup>25</sup> Not before the landings in Sicily in July 1943 did SOE operatives reach Italy at all, and only on 6 February 1944, two weeks after the establishment of the beachhead at Anzio, did the organisation make its first, unsuccessful attempt to infiltrate an agent into the Italian capital.

Even insofar as Allied commanders considered it important to establish a relationship with Italian partisans, in early 1944 they had a low estimation of the Resistance's military capacities. This was particularly true in the Lazio region, where partisan movements were both sporadically organised and largely unknown to Allied agents. The AMG knew that such movements existed, and used them as scouts: Allied radio broadcasts also invoked partisan actions to present an image of mounting revolt against the Germans. But operational collaboration only developed after the liberation of Rome. Widespread in AMG and PWB reports on 'partisan and patriot activity' was the attitude that partisans had contributed little to the fight against Nazi Germany and should not be allowed to sow social instability or attempt to monopolise power for themselves.

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<sup>24</sup> See Le Gac 2008.

<sup>25</sup> The AMG's own official historian describes 'the dropping of arms and radio transmitters' in the South. But 'during the winter of 1943-4, when the Allied line was more or less stationary just north of Naples, a number of partisan bands had formed themselves south of Rome in the Abruzzi and in the hills of Lazio, but these were practically wiped out after the failure of the Anzio landing to lead to an immediate capture of Rome'. Harris 1957, p. 179.

Such attitudes did only regard forces of explicit revolutionary intent. They saw the Resistance above all as an extension of the parties organising in the South, whom it considered the greatest threat to stability and who were most active in placing unwanted political pressure on the AMG. The Allies maintained a privileged relationship with the forces politically linked to the Kingdom of the South, most notably Di Montezemolo's *Fronte Militare Clandestino*. The MCd'I's own contacts with the Allies were mostly via such forces, and its own career soldiers, rather than spontaneously established with the Anglo-Americans.

As with the welfare initiatives explored in the previous chapter, the MCd'I's efforts to aid Allied troops involved collaboration with figures far from its own politics. This was particularly evident in the Allied prisoner organisation in the capital, in contact with Aurelio Borg, an Augustinian priest involved in Hugh O'Flaherty's shelter operation. Herself connected with this 'Vatican Pimpernel' organisation, the MCd'I's Herta Habernig managed a series of safehouses where Allied POWs could be hidden and then slipped out of the city. San Lorenzo priest Libero Raganella was also a key figure in this activity, collaborating with the movement's Renato Gentilezza as well as other partisans.<sup>26</sup>

Central to this work was Matilde Bassani Finzi, like her partner Ulisse an agent of the Psychological Warfare Branch. In this capacity she wrote extensively for Resistance press,<sup>27</sup> but she also played a military-command role in both Rome and Florence. Particularly important was her role in finding shelter for Allied POWs, including through her abduction of German medical supplies on the false pretence of working for the Red Cross. Contacts with the O'Flaherty organisation also allowed her to find sanctuary for Jews. She was also part of the 'Supreme Military Command' formed by dissident elements of the Socialist Party in January 1944. The 25 year-old Bassani Finzi was of middle-class extraction,<sup>28</sup> but her extensive leadership role was particularly remarkable given that she was a Jewish woman.

While little in Bassani Finzi's writing suggests any close identification with the MCd'I's class-war agenda, her practical activities closely bound her to this movement as well as dissident elements in the Socialist Party. Her leading collaborators in the capital included Carlo Andreoni, the PSIUP's leading military commander in Rome, as well as the MCd'I's

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<sup>26</sup> Raganella 2000.

<sup>27</sup> She wrote widely for both *Il Partigiano* and the PWB's own *l'Italia combatte*. Her archive is kept at *Yad Vashem* and the *Unione Femminile Nazionale*.

<sup>28</sup> Her father was a language teacher, albeit one unable to find work on account of his anti-fascist views.

Aladino Govoni, Tigrino Sabatini and Angelo Lombardi (her cousin). Despite this collaboration, Bassani Finzi's takeover of Andreoni's newspaper *Il Partigiano* after his arrest in early March would strongly moderate its political tone, as she shifted it to an agenda focused on partisans' practical role in aiding the Allied war effort.

Bassani Finzi was keenly involved in the Allied prisoner organisation, whose central focus was to help POWs back across the frontline. After the armistice there were around thirty thousand Allied prisoners in Italy, and camps in the Lazio region held not only Western troops captured in the Italian campaign, but Soviet POWs transported from the Eastern Front and downed RAF and USAF airmen. Around a third of this total managed to escape thanks to prison breaks and Allied air assaults; this however left them at large in a country where they rarely spoke the language or had personal contacts of their own. Italian partisans like Bassani Finzi were key to providing a solidarity network for these POWs, and a route to safety.

These militants' activity 'overlapped with' the Western Allies military effort, but was never integrated into it. The US Air Force carried out arms drops in the Lazio countryside from November 1943, but no MCd'I sources report benefitting from this. Some of the career soldiers involved in the movement did at least see themselves as useful aides to the Western Allies, providing information on German troop movements and, most boldly of all, supplying detailed invasion plans designed to guide the arriving armies. Radio contact also provided information from reconnaissance missions.<sup>29</sup> Its political leaders were however less interested in the Anglo-Americans than the hope of establishing contacts with the USSR. At a 13 February committee meeting Eusebio Troiani emphasised that the leadership should have the authority to deal 'not only with the other Italian parties but also the Delegates of the Soviet Union, who will soon be in Rome'.<sup>30</sup>

The idea of a privileged connection with the USSR also reflected a certain political diffidence toward the Western Allies. Despite these latter's decisive role in liberating Italy, *Bandiera Rossa* portrayed them as merely secondary actors in the Soviet Union's war effort, and in its pages only this state earned the label 'ally'. The Anglo-Americans remained 'imperialist' powers, and their slow advance through Italy evidence of their limited will to fight Nazi Germany. This even extended to the claim that these powers wanted the war to

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<sup>29</sup> Recounted in 'Grotta Rossa', MCd'I 1944c; 'Relazione del compagno Otello Di Diego, capo del concentramento 'Grotta rossa', MSdL/FSC/28/61' displays extensive such contacts as well as aid for Allied airmen.

<sup>30</sup> 'Riunione del Comitato romano tenuta il 13.2.1944', copy in MSdL/FSC/28/91.

continue, in the attempt to stave off 'Bolshevisation' in Germany and the end of arms-industry superprofits. This reading was however curiously bereft of indications of the Western Allies' attitude toward Italy's internal politics. It was instead assumed that communists should fight with the 'imperialists' against the Germans and then impose their own political agenda once the Wehrmacht was defeated.

*Bandiera Rossa* instead presented the USSR as the ultimate guarantor of self-determination, as if this state would be able to block any Anglo-American influence on Italy's future. A 14 November article denied the 'myth designed by bourgeois states' that the USSR was itself participating in an imperialist carve-up. It contrasted Anglo-American influence, which would mean continued capitalist domination, and Soviet influence, which would mean the 'redemption of labour from Capital's economic-political tyranny'<sup>31</sup>. Its authors assured themselves that this latter would be the decisive force, once Soviet representatives had arrived in Rome. The article invoked the Soviet leader's authority as a guarantee of national self-determination: 'Stalin warns: "the Peoples of Europe will be granted the widest freedom to decide on their own Countries' political structures"'<sup>32</sup>.

Where it was recognised that the Western Allies would attempt to shore up Italian capitalism, or even take measures to prevent social unrest, this led immediately to the conclusion that the revolution would have to be put on hold. Two weeks after the Anzio landings Orfeo Mucci told a Rome committee meeting that given the likelihood that 'the plutocrats will return to power with the Anglo-Americans' aid ... communists [could] take power only after the Allies had left'.<sup>33</sup> But internal bulletins continued to point to the Moscow Declaration as proof that the dominant military forces would stay out of politics. Left unexplained was how Moscow could guarantee the Western Allies' 'non-intervention' in an occupied country's politics, in particular in the kind of short term scenario within which the MCD'I hoped to launch an insurrection. In fact, the British Prime Minister was about to make a clear statement of intent for Italy's future.

### 5.3. The Churchill speech

Speaking to the Commons on 22 February, Churchill expressed his concern for Italy's political stability. The Prime Minister told the House that the democratic parties were not yet ready to take over the government. While victory in the battle for Rome would allow a

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<sup>31</sup> 'Il comunismo e Mosca', *BR*, 14.11.1943.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> 'Riunione del Comitato romano tenuta il 13.2.1944', copy in MSdL/FSC/28/91.

'more broadly-based government' to be formed, it made no sense for 'unsettling change' to be 'made at a time when the battle is at its climax, swaying to and fro'.<sup>34</sup> For Churchill, the King and Badoglio were best-placed to command the armed forces' loyalties. As he tersely remarked, 'when you have to hold a hot coffee-pot, it is better not to break the handle off until you are sure that you will get another equally convenient and serviceable or, at any rate, until there is a dishcloth handy'.<sup>35</sup> Churchill declared that the parties could have 'no elective authority, and certainly no constitutional authority, either until the present King abdicates or until he or his successor invites them to take office'.<sup>36</sup>

Already after 25 July the Allies' readiness to deal with Badoglio had owed much to the belief that he could prevent a slide into chaos. This desire for stability remained an imperative for both main Western Allies. Progressive-minded American officials in the South often spoke of the need to extend the 'four freedoms' to Italians, and did seriously expand the space for free expression. At the same time they sought to forestall the kind of social unrest that might disrupt Allied supply lines or even tie up troops.<sup>37</sup> This was a real possibility, given the resurgence in the South not just of the old democratic parties but also armed bands, independent trade unions and overtly revolutionary movements. None of these forces were straightforwardly hostile to the Allies, being in any case preoccupied with their own domestic political problems. Their mobilisations nonetheless exceeded the limits of what AMG was prepared to allow.

The controversy over Churchill's speech itself illustrated this tension. Reported by radio, the Prime Minister's comments marked a serious blow to any hope of removing the royalist and ex-Fascist officials who had remained in place after 25 July. He had effectively ruled out any possibility of a change of government, except at the King's instigation. The CGL union, which had already built its strength through labour protests in the Southern port city, called a ten-minute protest strike for 4 March. Even though this was not intended to undermine Allied war production, and for this reason would be compensated by 15 minutes overtime at the end of the day, the AMG quickly moved to stop it happening. Military police invaded a printshop to seize the 7,000 leaflets calling for the strike. Generals

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<sup>34</sup> Churchill 1951, p. 499.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> See documentation in WO207/2167. The history of the CGL in Naples is extensively covered in Giliani 2013, including a detailed reconstruction of the role of AFL-CIO officials brought into the Italian labour movement from the United States.

MacFarlane and Wilson leaned on the party leaders to stop the strike: if it did go ahead, they would be ordered to leave AMG territory within 24 hours.

Summoned to meet General MacFarlane, the Communist, Socialist and Actionist leaders agreed to stop the strike happening, and instead to hold a rally the following weekend. This took a markedly different tone to the originally planned strike action. While calling for a 'truly peoples' army' and the purging of Fascists, the monarchy and their supporters, it affirmed the parties' will to fight alongside the Allies and support their cause.<sup>38</sup> The outlier in this regard was the Trotskyist speaker Enrico Russo, a leader of the CGL who more strongly criticised Allied conservatism; the PCI's Italo de Feo described his intervention as 'little short of calling Churchill a fascist'.<sup>39</sup> AMG officials noted a rally of 6,000 to 10,000 people at which reference to Russia and Yugoslavia was warmly applauded, but talk of Britain and the United States more coolly.<sup>40</sup>

The demobilisation of even such a tender strike mobilisation also helped change the dynamics within the labour movement in the South. Replacing the corporatist unions inherited from fascism, the CGL had been created by veteran militants including Russo and Nicola di Bartolomeo, both of whom were Trotskyists. This was thus a case where the parties had to join a union organisation created by much smaller circles. The political tone of its leadership was apparent in their newspaper *Battaglie Sindacali*, which was opposed to the politics of class compromise. Yet the PCI waged a hard battle to impose its own control over the CGL and dissolve it into its own organisation. This ultimately succeeded in August as the AMG revoked authorisation for *Battaglie Sindacali*, until it was reconstituted in the hands of the PCI.

What even this distinctly unmilitant strike had shown was the way in which anti-communist officials could lean on CLN leaders and even the Communist Party for the purpose of reining in more uncontrollable forces. Whether the PCI would indeed be a force for moderation remained an open question, but it was at least flexible under pressure. AMG officials tended to see the PCI as an unreliable ally, whose professions of good faith toward the Allied cause concealed a focus on building its own organisational muscle. Without doubt, a facility with tactical about-turns and an instrumental attitude toward alliances were real attitudes of PCI culture. Yet as we shall see in section 5.4., opportunism or cynicism did not necessarily

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<sup>38</sup> See 'Translation of 'resolution' adopted at 12 March Naples meeting' in WO207/2167

<sup>39</sup> De Feo 1973, p. 85.

<sup>40</sup> NA/W5089/64083, General Wilson to USFOR, AGWAR, Hall PWB, 13.4.1944

translate into an effective Machiavellian policy. This became starkly apparent in the early months of 1944, as a crisis in the CLN escaped the PCI's control.<sup>41</sup>

#### 5.4. The CLN crisis

Already before the Anzio landings it was widely understood that the capture of Rome would bring the formation of a new civilian government.<sup>42</sup> Despite the counter-attacks by German and Mussolini-loyalist forces in early February, the salient established by the Anglo-Americans had held firm, and a march on the capital now seemed imminent. For the Socialists' *l'Avanti*, 'to the cannon fire from Moscow, celebrating the triumphant victory of Leningrad, there responds the cannon fire of Nettuno, which announce the Anglo-Saxon allies' approach to the Italian capital'.<sup>43</sup> It hoped that the 'people of Rome ... gathered around the CLN' would win this battle for the city.<sup>44</sup> Yet as Liberation neared, the Roman CLN faced a damaging split, with a political crisis ending in Bonomi's resignation as the coalition's president.

The roots of the CLN's crisis lay in a split in the Socialists. Returning from exile in the wake of the Badoglio coup, the Socialist leaders had like their Communist counterparts encountered an array of non-party movements created by clandestine militants. The most important of these was libertarian socialist Lelio Basso's MUP. Although this movement merged with the PSI during the 45 Days, it continued to publish a distinct press in Milan. In calling for a 'revolutionary proletarian front' it sharply criticised not only the Badoglio government but also the less belligerent stance adopted by the CLN. In Rome, such criticisms were particularly voiced by Carlo Andreoni, who was also the Socialists' leading military commander in the capital. He accused party leader Pietro Nenni of a purely platonic republicanism, which he did nothing to advance in CLN ranks. At the start of 1944, Andreoni and his comrades walked away to create their independent *Movimento Partigiano*.

First appearing the day after the Anzio landings, Andreoni's paper *Il Partigiano* announced the formation of a new military command outside of the CLN. *Il Partigiano* referred but

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<sup>41</sup> Far stronger was the tone adopted by Pietro Secchia in 'Risposta a Churchill', *La Nostra Lotta*, March 1944, describing the success of the strike against the Occupier on 1 March as an action 'in which the Italian popular forces, the working class in the lead struck Nazi-Fascism hard, said no to Badoglio, and gave an eloquent response to Churchill'.

<sup>42</sup> Note the claim by the Duke of Acquerone, the Minister of Court, as early as 5 December, that the representatives of the Rome CLN parties were already aware of the monarch's plan to resign at this moment. NA/FO371/43814/96.

<sup>43</sup> 'La battaglia di Roma sarà vinta dal popolo di Roma', *l'Avanti*, 7.2.1944

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



obliquely to the command's plans as it referred to the eventual solution [that] cannot but be decisively influenced by what happens in the immediate aftermath of German withdrawal';<sup>45</sup> Bonomi feared that 'the hardest elements (among them Carlo Andreoni) [planned] to impede the Royal Army forces ... from prevailing in Rome'.<sup>46</sup> The Supreme Partisan Command also linked Andreoni's comrades to the MCd'I and *Armata Rossa*. These dissident movements collaborated in both sabotaging Wehrmacht infrastructure, and in aiding Matilde Bassani Finzi's Allied prisoner organisation. At a more symbolic level, *Il Partigiano* was also notable as the only other Roman Resistance newspaper to pay homage to the MCd'I's 'martyred' partisans, who went unmentioned in the CLN parties' press.<sup>47</sup>

Responding to the *Movimento Partigiano* split, Socialist leaders adopted sharper republican positions. The slogan 'All Power to the CLN' was designed to evoke a sharp opposition to the monarchy, but the distinct means by which it might be realised implied strongly different social contents. Based on the workplace CLNs of the North, or establishing itself in power through an insurrection in Rome, the CLN government would be a very different beast to one created by a transfer of power from the Badoglio government. Even if the CLN did indeed reach such an agreement, with the King and the Marshall agreeing to step down, this would tend to imply a less disruptive change in the state machine than a government directly emanating from Resistance forces. In pushing for the CLN to declare itself the legitimate government, the Socialists tilted the scales in this latter direction.

The disagreements this produced within the CLN were evident at the Bari Congress, the first CLN conference held in liberated Italy. The AMG had banned a similar meeting planned for Naples on 20 December, and only after a public petition did it allow the anti-fascists to convene in Bari on 28 January. Representatives of all six CLN parties attended, but Benedetto Croce and Count Carlo Sforza made the defining interventions. This latter set the tone for the Congress with his combination of moderate liberalism and antipathy toward the King. The Socialists and Actionists sought to set up an interim parliament, and called on the congress to sit in permanent session. However, they dropped this motion in

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<sup>45</sup> 'La situazione politica in Italia', *Il Partigiano*, 23.1.1944.

<sup>46</sup> Bonomi 1947, p. 143, 25.1.1944 entry. Bonomi confusedly grouped Andreoni together with unnamed others who wanted the CLN to take over the 'vital points in Rome' to the exclusion of the Royal Army.

<sup>47</sup> References to the anti-war socialists of World War I as well as an appeal to German soldiers reflected its similar embrace of sharp internationalist positions. One notable difference was the absence of the Stalinist rhetoric so commonplace in *Bandiera Rossa*, despite its positive references to Soviet military advances. Andreoni would in postwar years become a militant of the Titoite USI and later an anti-communist social democrat.

the face of liberal and Christian-Democratic opposition. Expressing the prevalent distrust for the royalists, the Bari Congress passed a resolution calling on Sforza to create a 'National Council' that could prepare the way for a republican government.

The Actionists' and Socialists' intransigent republicanism had long set them at odds with more conservative forces in the coalition who were ready to a deal with Vittorio Emanuele III. Since Badoglio's government enjoyed sole Allied recognition as Italy's legitimate leadership, CLN president Ivanoe Bonomi insisted on the necessity of a deal. He was open to the possibility of the King abdicating, yet made no principle of this; above all he insisted on the need to avoid disorder at the moment that the Allies reached the capital, telling the CLN parties that they must instead 'provide the spectacle of a national solidity which resists even such political disagreements as will inevitably occur', avoiding any clashes with 'the forces charged by the Command of the Italian Army to keep order'.<sup>48</sup> He feared that such social peace would be difficult without political compromise.

The Socialists soon brought the situation to a head. A motion to the Rome CLN declared the inadmissibility of negotiations with the Kingdom of the South. While a bid to move the CLN into a more intransigent position rather than an attempt to split the coalition, the motion's passing was the last straw for conservatives impatient at the Left's posturing. Bonomi was no longer willing to serve as president of a coalition so adamant in its opposition to the Badoglio government. On 23 March he resigned from his post, damning his CLN partners in an irate missive; the Communists, Socialists and Actionists had tried to 'impose their will' on the rest, showing none of the spirit of national unity to which they laid claim.<sup>49</sup> *L'Unità* appealed for the CLN to show 'responsibility' in this grave hour, but did not even mention the crisis.<sup>50</sup>

This crisis owed much to the Party's own vacillation. Its peripheral position in this dispute driven by the Socialists belied its own organisational muscle. Over the first months of 1944, its cadres remained opposed to CLN participation in the Badoglio government. Yet it also sought to avoid any split with the liberals and conservatives more favourable to this possibility. The PCI thus attempted to prevent the Socialist motion being tabled. However, the Communists' longstanding partnership with the Socialists as well as their wariness of being 'outflanked' to their Left did compel them to vote with the other republican parties.

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<sup>48</sup> Bonomi 1947, pp. 143–44, 25.1.1944; in his entry on 31.1.1944 (p. 145) he noted that the left-wing parties had admitted the need to avoid armed clashes.

<sup>49</sup> Bonomi 1947, 23.3.1944.

<sup>50</sup> 'Coscienza della responsabilità', *l'Unità*, XXI/8, 30.3.1944.

The PCI sought to maintain the unity of the CLN; yet the Socialists' hard line was forcing it to take sides in the most important dispute that divided this coalition. As we shall see in Chapter Seven, only Palmiro Togliatti's return at the end of March would allow the PCI again to take the political initiative.

### 5.5. The 'Committee of Public Safety'

This blocked situation also fed the creation of a coalition seeking a cleaner break with the Badoglio regime. In January 1944 dissident parties outside the CLN declared a 'Committee of Public Safety' in the capital. This committee included not only Andreoni's movement but also the Roman dissident-communists (represented on the committee by Antonino Poce), Gerardo Bruni's Christian-Socials, the Republicans, as well as lesser-known circles including a 'Feminine Movement'. This was not a military command, but a union of the political leaderships opposed to any deal with Badoglio and the King. The attempt to form a coalition defined by republicanism and not simply anti-fascism also pointed to partisans' contrasting conceptions of what new political authority could be created. The dissidents assembled in the Committee sought to create a new power based not on the old state machine, but rather the partisan militias themselves.

This name made telling reference to revolutions past. The *comités de salut public* declared in 1793 and 1871 had each seized control of the French capital in order to lead a fight against foreign occupation and domestic reaction. Drawn from the history of revolutions on the other side of the Alps, this imaginary was also fired by a reality that had emerged during the Italian Resistance itself, the 'partisan republic'. In pockets of territory around the peninsula, armed bands able to free villages and towns from Wehrmacht Occupation through their own efforts proclaimed these authorities separate from both Mussolini's Salò régime and the Kingdom of the South. Mostly formed in response to immediate military necessities, they nonetheless expressed the idea of directly turning the partisan war into a new kind of political authority. This was inspiration for Roman militants who dreamt of forming a 'new Commune' on the Parisian model.<sup>51</sup>

Often amounting to only a few valleys, the 'partisan republics' were not meaningfully 'governments' so much as sets of rules negotiated between armed bands and local

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<sup>51</sup> There are multiple references to the Paris Commune throughout MCd'I propaganda, the most extensive of which is the article 'La Comune di Parigi', *DR*, 29.3.1944, which comments: 'At a moment in which the bourgeois fatherland had turned into a laughing stock and a bloodbath by the German invasion and bourgeois cowardice, the Paris Commune established and proclaimed the workers' fatherland. For we who are living through the same pain as then, it points the right path'.

populations. Starting with the Repubblica di Maschito in mid-September 1943, these were most concentrated in mountainous regions of Northern Italy in the latter part of 1944. Their decrees most notably concerning the food supply and the enforcement of an ad hoc justice; Fascists were suppressed, and those accused of theft, rape or murder could themselves be put to death. In the Repubblica Partigiana dell'Ossola, one of the most renowned such 'republics' food prices were established by decree, and a government giunta formed to control its over 1,500 km<sup>2</sup> of territory.

While this was a principally rural phenomenon, some accounts speak of such partisan control being established on Rome's city periphery. The area referred to by Orfeo Mucci as the 'partisan republic of Torpignattara and Certosa' was the strongest centre of Resistance organisation in the capital. It was not at any point liberated from the Wehrmacht,<sup>52</sup> who maintained a base within this territory. Partisans did however exert their control over the Italian police, which aided both the extension of their armed organisation and their efforts to evade repression. This negative 'control' over officials in the neighbourhood, combined with an operation distributing false papers and even food, allowed communists to build their authority among the local population.

Whatever margin of 'autonomy' was left to the people of Torpignattara most of all reflected their abandonment. As we have noted in our comments on the Quadraro district, just south of Torpignattara, it is true that the collapse of law and order, the lack of war industry and the deportation of the Roman *carabinieri* left a vacuum of authority in the peripheral *borgate*. These conditions allowed militants to assert their own control, including through military demonstrations. On 1 February 1944 Uccio Pisino staged a training session in Torpignattara at which communists openly brandished their weapons, the routes in and out of the square protected by an armed guard.<sup>53</sup> This movement and the GAP also held brief public rallies

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<sup>52</sup> Bentivegna 1983, p. 133, describes the Germans as absent from Centocelle for 'more than a month', and Pepe n.d. similarly portrays the Wehrmacht as too afraid to enter this district. This allowed the GAP to hold a public meeting in the Piazza dei Mirti. The Occupier nonetheless remained a headquarters on the Via dei Glicini.

<sup>53</sup> Gloria Chilanti writes, in a comment on her own teenage diary, that in Torpignattara 'the *Bandiera Rossa* movement had a big detachment of partisans and the population was all for us. On that occasion [1 February] I had my first training with weapons. Some partisans closed the entry and exit to a street and I came along together with others including Giovanni Pepe and his brother, who did a drill in the open air with old rifles from 1891. All the women watched with admiration from the windows' (Chilanti 1996, p. 115, 1.2.1944). The idea of 'unanimous' popular support is common across all partisan accounts, reflecting either the desire to associate their cause with a popular and national unity, or indeed the recognition that a single determined opponent would have been sufficient to report and destroy any kind of public activity.

in Centocelle's Piazza dei Mirti. On May Day there was also a public demonstration guarded by the partisans.

Such actions were only possible assuming the absence of German troops and the non-intervention of Italian police. Their only freedom of operation owed to them being able to bear some form of influence over remaining regime officials, through a mix of sympathy and intimidation. This was evident in Torpignattara, where the MCd'I managed to secure the collaboration of local police. This particularly owed to the aid of Dr. Angilella, introduced to a command role in this area after the GAP killing of the Fascist policeman Antonio Stampacchia on 25 February. He was linked to the MCd'I's 'internal band' in 'technical services', also including ten other agents<sup>54</sup>.

In reality, the local nature of such control also corresponded to its weakness. Angilella continued to work under the official auspices of the RSI, and the Nazi-Fascist regime had no difficulty in imposing its authority over the district. While partisan republics like Ossola had emerged from military confrontations with Occupation forces, which thought better of retaking these areas at unnecessary cost, these Roman districts were less autonomous than abandoned. The school on the Via dei Glicini remained a German HQ, and was never threatened by partisan forces.

As the Allied advance toward the capital halted, the possibility of any radical political change was itself subdued. The Allies still stood close to the capital, and it could still be expected that they would soon relieve the city. Diaries from this period do not show mere defeatism; there were constant rumours of breakthroughs, and false hopes that the Allies would soon arrive. Yet what changed over the spring of 1944 was the strength of the Resistance movement itself. Mounting ever bolder actions in the hope of coming insurrection, they were instead compelled to retreat, broken. As we shall see in Chapter Six, the apparent 'autonomy' of winter 1944 was not to last.

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<sup>54</sup> He is listed in 'MSdL/FSC/28/55, 'Banda Prenestino'.

## Chapter Six

### **The forces of repression**

Euphoria over the Anzio landings did not long endure. After the Allies' initial breakthrough, the Wehrmacht managed to hold a defensive front that blocked the route to the capital. The Allies were similarly held back further south at the Gustav Line, as Monte Cassino proved similarly difficult to breach. The liberators stood just fifty kilometres from the capital. But Rome's partisans had been drawn into a dangerously exposed position. In the days following the landings, Resistance movements around the city intensified their public agitation, exhorting Romans to join the final struggle. Yet as the Germans held firm, militants lay vulnerable to heightened counter-insurgency. At the end of January 1944, Rome's partisans had imagined that the final victory was within sight. They now instead faced heightened bloodshed.

The Nazis used counter-insurgency measures that had been developed across occupied Europe. Combining surveillance and raids with deportations and collective punishment, this was a repressive apparatus of a scale unknown to Roman anti-fascists. Particularly threatening were the efforts to subvert their organisations from within, through the insertion of spies working to organise chain arrests. In January 1944 one such *delazione* destroyed the MCd'I's band in the Trionfale district, killing several of the movement's key leaders. Like all Resistance forces, it was also affected by the repression targeted against the general population, and in particular the series of deportations. Some 220 of its militants were transported to Germany during the Occupation; these losses added to the 186 members who were either executed or killed in action.

What turned mass arrests into mass executions was the Nazi collective punishment policy. Already in September military governor Stahel had declared that ten Italians would be executed for each German killed by Italian 'banditry'. This was a blackmail against partisans, designed to paralyse the armed struggle. They could now only attack German troops in the knowledge that this risked provoking reprisals. Some Resistance forces drew the conclusion that they should limit themselves to defensive activity, waiting for the Allies' arrival. The PCI however strongly resisted this *attesismo*, instead emphasising the need for Italians to make their own contribution to the war of liberation. The fear of reprisals could not serve as a pretext for passivity. Terrorist tactics were however a point of divergence among Rome's communists.

For the GAP, exemplary attacks against German troops were a key means of stirring Romans from their passivity. Terrorist actions sought to 'make the ground burn under the Occupier's feet', sowing fear in enemy ranks while also showing Italians the possibility of armed mobilisation. This protagonism in turn sought to galvanise the Party's role as a patriotic leadership. While its militants knew that their actions risked reprisals against innocents,<sup>1</sup> the Party insisted that they were legitimate 'acts of war'. It dramatised Nazi atrocities politically, using them as calls for intensified Resistance. In no way did this imply that the GAP actively sought to provoke reprisals.<sup>2</sup> The GAP's armed actions proceeded *in spite* of this threat, rather than with an aim of realising it.

Directed toward a future moment of insurrection, the MCd'I's strategy was far less focused on attacking German troops. Its policy was above all defined by the aim of seizing power at the moment of their withdrawal. To this end it prepared a network of clandestine militias across the capital, as well as the political structures which it hoped could lead these forces. This was not *attesimo* in the fullest sense; it had taken part in the resistance on 8 September and conducted an energetic campaign of sabotage operations: even in resisting raids and looting weapons they inevitably came into conflict with Occupation troops. But fighting the Wehrmacht was more a by-product of their activity than its purpose. Both self-defence and the primacy of the future end goal counselled against exhausting their organisation in frontal clashes. As the GAP's actions drove a mounting wave of repression, the dissidents were in fact hardened in their opposition to terrorist tactics.

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<sup>1</sup> Rosario Bentivegna discusses his agonising over this question, and indeed the killing of Wehrmacht conscripts, in Bentivegna 1983, pp. 91–2.

<sup>2</sup> The belief that this was indeed the GAP's agenda has a diffuse historiographical influence. Bocca 1966, pp. 165–6, writes that 'rebel terrorism, as the communists well know, is carried out not to prevent the enemy terrorism, but to provoke it, to harshen it'. It was a strategy of 'premeditated self-harm: it sought wounds, punishment, reprisals, to involve the uncertain and deepen the abyss of hatred. It is a ruthless pedagogy, a fierce lesson. The communists rightly considered it necessary and were the only ones to impart this lesson unhesitatingly'. Yet the evidential base for the claim that the GAP *deliberately* provoked reprisals is very thin. There is no record of any such policy being debated or agreed. In his reconstruction of the Roman GAP's debate on terrorist tactics, Dan Kurzman argues that it switched from attacking Fascists only, to also attacking the Germans, after a 'meeting of national Communist leaders led by Luigi Longo, at Monchiero in Piedmont' (Kurzman 1975, p. 103). He claims that this meeting decided 'that the most effective way to enhance partisan power and influence would be to incite the Germans to take reprisals against the Italian people' (*ibid.*). He provides no reference for this claim, but seemingly relies on the sole account of such a discussion in Monchiero, by the monarchist Resistance leader Piero Operti. Briefly leader of the CLN forces in Piedmont, Operti relates a meeting with Longo and the Actionist Ferruccio Parri at the cafe in Monchiero station, at which Parri suggested that the Resistance should seek 'to provoke further reprisals and deepen, among the people, the dramatic sense of the hour we are living through, even where bombs have not brought ruin' (Operti 1963, p. 135). Such words do, indeed, appear as a justification of seeking reprisals. But this was no 'meeting of Communist leaders', and nor does even Operti suggest that Parri's comment could be considered a 'decision', still less of the PCI's.

This fed PCI press claims that any focus on the 'problems of the future' was a distraction from the fight against Nazi-Fascism. No other social or political goal could be realised before liberation from this regime, and thus this military campaign had to be prioritised over all other considerations. Yet the tension between present initiative and building for the future was in fact present in every Resistance movement; it was the obvious question posed by every decision to commit forces to risky actions. As even other parts of the PCI press made clear, its concern for military protagonism was itself directed at consolidating the Party as a mass force which could help shape postwar society. It was also this more sectarian goal which determined its efforts to discredit and break up the rival communist movement. It attacked the MCd'I not because it was passive (a critique more aptly applied to some of its CLN partners) or because it was oriented toward future goals, but rather because these particular goals conflicted with its own.

As we shall see in Chapter Six, the Party's strategy of escalating military actions failed to produce any wider mobilisation. Terrorist attacks instead prompted reprisals that devastated all partisan ranks. This disproportionately affected the dissident communists, who were ill-prepared to confront an onslaught on this scale. Some of their number were killed in clashes with Fascists or German soldiers; far more died after falling into police hands, whether through spy infiltration, raids in their districts, or as a result of their own security lapses. The effort to build a city-wide clandestine network left the Roman dissidents little able to defend themselves from chain arrests. This was particularly evident in the devastating losses among those militants responsible for contacts between their 'internal bands'. This did not bring total disaggregation, and new security measures were soon implemented. But as Nazi repression intensified, even the bearers of the most aggressive tactics were forced to scale back their actions.

### **6.1. The arsenal of repression**

Since 8 September 1943 the Nazi-Fascists had presented Rome as an 'open city' beyond the zones of conflict. The German High Command gave the city this status immediately after the invasion, and within weeks Rome was declared capital of the Italian Social Republic. The legal press portrayed the Wehrmacht not as an army of Occupation, but as a 'police' presence welcomed into the city by Mussolini's government. In practice the Germans and their Fascist allies did little to maintain such a pretence of normality. The fact that the Wehrmacht had taken the city in the face of dogged resistance had openly demonstrated its repressive character, and this was confirmed in October with the beginning of mass deportations. As the Resistance intensified, over winter the Nazi-Fascists extended their



specifically anti-partisan measures. The arsenal of repression ranged from a system of curfews and passes to spy rings, torture cells, and collective punishment.

Even the first partisan actions alerted Rome's communists to the scale of Nazi repression. A first sign of this came on 20 October 1943 as the MCd'I's Pietralata band attempted to invade the Forte Tiburtino. The barracks there had been abandoned by the Royal Army, and they planned to loot its arms and food stocks. Unaware of the presence of an SS division, the militants arriving at the scene were rapidly ambushed. Put on trial, nine were condemned to death and ten to deportation. The executions of the men, not allowed to put up any defence, took place two days later. Executed together with them was an entirely uninvolved young man who just happened to be passing on a bicycle. This gave Rome's partisans their first bitter taste of the *rappresaglia*, one of the most effective weapons in intimidating the Resistance.

The heavy blows suffered in the first months of the Resistance sparked reflection in MCd'I ranks as to the value of its armed activity. Already on 5 January an article in *Bandiera Rossa* offered a withering critique of the 'adventurism' that had seen dozens of its comrades captured or killed. This extended into the broader advocacy of the 'need to wait for the right moment'; not a strategy of passivity, but one that avoided direct confrontation with the Wehrmacht forces.<sup>3</sup> The bite of repression had certainly alerted militants to the dangers of clashes with Occupation troops, in practice the building of armed bands remained the central focus of all MCd'I activity.

From its foundation, the MCd'I's strength was its ability to build communist political leadership within military organisation. This rooted its proselytising in a real social revolt on the city periphery, expressed in the proliferation of armed bands. As Chapter Four demonstrated, these bands' activities were not simply a matter of attacking Wehrmacht men and materiel, but also involved an array of solidarity and welfare initiatives directed at the wider population. Resistance against raids and deportations kept militants constantly on alert for armed action; not only the desire to hasten the Allies' advance, but also these initiatives, demanded an ongoing campaign to sabotage the machinery of Occupation. This was not all-out warfare, and militants often had good reason to avoid frontal clashes with the Wehrmacht troops. But they also had to be ready for confrontations being imposed upon them.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Saper attendere', *BR*, 15.10.1943; 'L'Azione', *BR*, 5.1.1944.

Without doubt, the death of 186 MCd'I militants in nine months of Resistance in some sense refutes critics' claims that its political 'sectarianism' reduced it to mere 'passivity'. This amounted to over a third of all of the Resistance casualties in Rome, after the invasion of 8 September. Nonetheless, the large numbers of militants condemned to death for 'anti-German activism' or 'favouring the [Allied] enemy' are not simply an index of effective anti-Wehrmacht actions. The movement was also characterised by security lapses, from its use of membership cards to its propensity for spectacular acts of publicity. It was moreover struck by the wider repression against the population, and the *borgate* in which it established its social base. The violence deployed by the Nazis and their Italian accomplices like the 'Banda Koch' was far from simply a response to partisans' own actions.

## 6.2. Raids and deportations

This was most evidently true in the case of the Roman Jews. While at its origins Italian Fascism was not remarkable for its anti-Semitism, the regime's racist dynamic heightened through its colonial endeavours and then ties to Nazi Germany. In 1938 the regime enacted *leggi razziali* banning Jews from public functions and forbidding Aryan-Jewish marriages. Bringing profound moral and material hardships, these measures isolated Jews from the wider population. With the Wehrmacht invasion in September 1943 there began mass deportations from Italy to the death camps. With the Allies approaching from the South, the Nazis and their Italian helpers hastened their Final Solution. Most important of their targets was the *ghetto ebraico*, a maze of streets close to the Tiber which had stood as the centre of Roman Jewry since 1555. Invading its narrow avenues on 16 October 1943, SS forces and Italian police rounded up 1,259 ghetto residents. 'Half-bloods' and those 'mistakenly' considered Jewish were released; the remaining 1,023 victims were deported to Auschwitz. Only 16 would return.

From the GAP's Lucia Ottobrini and Mario Fiorentini to the Socialists Anna-Maria Enriques and Matilde Bassani-Finzi, several prominent anti-fascists were of Jewish-assimilationist backgrounds, while the likes of the MCd'I's Angelo Lombardi had more distant Jewish ties. Other *resistenti* also invoked the racial laws of 1938 as a key moment of anti-fascist identification. However, organised Resistance movements were poorly-implanted among the Jewish population. *Bandiera Rossa* made no reference to the fate of Rome's Jews even after the 16 October raid. Orfeo Mucci remembered the ghetto residents as essentially helpless, complacent in the belief that they could reach an accommodation with the

Occupier.<sup>4</sup> For its part *l'Unità* invoked the ghetto raid as reason for Italians to join the war of Liberation, although it devoted far less coverage to Jewish suffering than it did the partisan victims of Nazi repression.<sup>5</sup> If not making the Jews a *cause célèbre*, each movement did produce false papers to help survivors evade detection.

Of more direct concern for the MCd'I were the raids in the *borgate*, the heart of its own social base. Notable was the *rastrellamento* in Quadraro, the south-eastern district mentioned in Chapter Four. This was what Erich von Moellhausen had termed the 'vipers' nest', both a centre of partisan attacks on German transport lines and an area through which draft-resisters and Allied POWs made their escape from the capital. Cordoning off the roads in and out of the *borgata* on 17 April 1944, SS troops and Italian police rounded up 947 men. Loaded into trucks and taken to the Fossoli holding camp, these 'Italian labour volunteers' were deported to concentration camps in Germany and Poland. Used for slave labour, the 947 were not meant to be exterminated; however, given the gruelling conditions in the disease-stricken camps, barely half survived the war.

The Quadraro raid also had an explicitly political purpose. The German High Command declared that it was striking against a population in a 'certain neighbourhood of Rome' that had protected 'political murderers'. Its statement published in the Italian press on 18 April reported the deportation of 'communists and able-bodied men able to work who have collaborated with the communists'.<sup>6</sup> In rounding up all men they found between 16 and 60, the Occupation troops directly identified the Resistance and the wider population. Without doubt, most of those deported from Quadraro were not literally collaborating with the communist movements. Yet such raids hit hard at the MCd'I's social base. Over the nine-month Occupation, some 220 of its militants fell victim to deportations, which disproportionately struck at working-age men in the *borgate*. This was not far short of one-tenth of its membership.

As well as the blunt instrument of mass raids, one of the most effective means of repression was the insertion of spies into Resistance ranks. This allowed the intelligence services to uncover and then crush partisans' clandestine networks. The most dramatic such example in Rome was the destruction of the MCd'I's band in the Trionfale district, eleven of whose

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<sup>4</sup> CGB/FAP/Mucci.

<sup>5</sup> 'Pogrom a Roma', *l'Unità*, XX/21, 26.10.1943, hence described 'a general proof of the sinister design to remove not just the Jews, but all Romans from Rome', an end for the 'illusions of those who do not today believe in the barbarous plan to depopulate Rome of all men able to fight and work'.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Majanlahti and Osti Guerrazzi 2010, p. 137.

militants were executed on 2 February 1944. This band grew out of the *Attenti!* group founded at the beginning of the war.<sup>7</sup> Trionfale militants were central to the Grotta Rossa 'Marxist school' as well as the MCd'I's links to the Allies via Matilda Bassani Finzi. However, at the turn of 1944 the spy Ubaldo Cipolla unleashed a wave of repression against the band, as he organised the ambush of seven of its leaders at the Piazzale Flaminio.<sup>8</sup>

Cipolla worked together with Biagio Roddi to undermine the band from within. These men were both convinced Fascists, who had managed to insinuate their way into the group and win its militants' trust. They received 5,000 lire for each male partisan consigned to the SS and 4,000 for each woman. Certain accounts describe the MCd'I as establishing the membership criterion that each new militant must already be known to two existing members, but this pair easily managed to infiltrate it without previously being known to the other members. They also played on the militants' inexperience with clandestine organisation. Cipolla expressed his own fears that the German Command was already on the band's tail, as he argued that they should move their operations away from Trionfale. They met at Piazzale Flaminio in order to flee the city, where they were instead arrested.<sup>9</sup>

Held at the Forte Bravetta prison, these seven and nine of their comrades rounded up around the capital were put on trial on 27 January. They were charged with 'attempted violence against the Occupation troops, the illegitimate possession of arms, the failure to report the illegitimate possession of arms, and the distribution of anti-German newspapers favouring the enemy'. At the military tribunal eleven were condemned to death, and the rest sentenced to prison spells ranging from five to fifteen years. The men shot at the fortress on 2 February included such important leaders of the MCd'I as the engineer Romolo Iacopini, the journalist Ezio Malatesta and the Croat theatre director Branko Bitler. The imprisoned militants including Herta Habernig would be freed upon the Allies' arrival at the beginning of June.

Certain details of the trial reveal other ways in which militants had exposed themselves to discovery. Particularly notable were the risks taken for the sake of spreading propaganda, with even such important leaders as Romolo Iacopini distributing *Bandiera Rossa* in public places. This boldness reached its most extreme proportions on 6 December, as MCd'I

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<sup>7</sup> See section 3.4.

<sup>8</sup> Both Roddi and Cipolla were jailed after the war, and their German interpreter executed. The case records, including extensive interviews with MCd'I militants, appear in ASR/CAP/Corte d'Assise Speciale 177/b. 1590.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

groups around the capital combined in a simultaneous propaganda action. This sought to mobilise the whole organisation at once, carrying out leaflet drops in 60 cinemas around the city in a single evening. Cinemas were well-established as a site for such actions, since militants could throw handfuls of leaflets into the crowd from behind the projector and then flee under cover of darkness. Yet the actions around Rome were not truly simultaneous, and not all militants succeeded in escaping.

At the trial the Trionfale militants managed to avoid implicating their comrades from outside the district. The prosecutors made no reference to the rest of the movement, believing the defendants before them to be not only key figures in its command, but *the* central leaders on which the rest of the organisation depended. Iacopini, known to both Socialist and PCI militants as well as his own comrades, resisted torture to the last. The hazy references to the 'Communist Movement' in the trial records indicate prosecutors' lack of clear understanding of this as an organisation distinct from the PCI. For their part, the Trionfale militants were no wiser to the nature of the Nazi spy operation: they had not at any point understood that Cipolla was an enemy agent, and even after their arrest their surviving comrades did not identify him as the traitor. Deprived of all its main leaders, the band did re-organise in February 1944, as Iacopini's brothers took over its leadership. Nonetheless, its activity was now greatly diminished.<sup>10</sup>

### **6.3. Via Rasella and the Fosse Ardeatine**

The destruction of the Trionfale group was but part of a wave of repression that now struck the movement. Already on 4 January one of its founding leaders had been arrested. Brought before a military tribunal, Raffaele de Luca was sentenced to death for 'distributing anti-German propaganda' and 'organising armed bands'. Held in Regina Coeli prison, he was soon joined in its cells by San Lorenzo commander Nicola Stame. Arrested at Piazza Mignanelli on 24 January, Stame arrived at the jail having already undergone hours of torture at the hands of the SS. The following day, Aladino Govoni, Uccio Pisino and Eusebio Troiani fell into an ambush by Fascist spies. On 28 January Umberto Scattoni was arrested together with the PCI's Guido Rattoppatore during an abortive GAP assault on the German-occupied Aquila d'Oro hotel. The MCd'I's ranks had already been decimated after the audacious action on 6 December; by late March close to a hundred of its militants lay in jail cells around the Italian capital.

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<sup>10</sup> See Fifth Zone report in MSdL/FSC/28/59.

Rome's GAP suffered similar repression in the immediate wake of the Anzio landings. Just four days after Rattoppatore's arrest, the SS broke into the 'Santa Barbera' GAP bomb factory run by Gianfranco Mattei and its 'head artillery-maker' Giorgio Labò, arresting both men as well as Antonello Trombadori. However, the GAP's command structures remained largely intact. Seeking to rouse the population from its passivity the GAP counter-attacked against the Occupation forces. On 5 March a *gappista* assassinated a German soldier in Centocelle's Piazza dei Mirti. When this led to a reprisal on the established ratio, with ten prisoners including Labò shot at Forte Bravetta on 7 March, Giorgio Amendola insisted that the GAP in turn raise its own operational level. Two weeks later his comrades conducted a bomb attack on a German military-police patrol on central Via Rasella.

This was the Roman Resistance's biggest single military feat. *Gappisti* had long observed troop movements in the district bound by Via Tritone, and decided that a bomb on the steep and narrow Via Rasella would have the most explosive force. The date chosen for the attack was 23 March, anniversary of the founding of the *Fasci di combattimento*. As the Polizeiregiment 'Bozen' turned up the Via Rasella, the GAP's Rosario Bentivegna slowly pushed a trolley downhill toward them. Dressed as a waste-collector, as the soldiers approached Bentivegna threw his charge. Four of his comrades hurled hand grenades from both sides. Shrapnel tore through the column, as the force of the blast set off the soldiers' own explosives. Shooting broke out between the *gappisti* and the surviving troops. Bentivegna had already escaped unnoticed. A manhunt began. 32 military-policemen lay dead on the street. Two passers-by were also killed in the crossfire.<sup>11</sup>

Nazi retribution was swift. Rather than await the discovery of the assailants, Hitler ordered immediate vengeance. SS officers and Italian police collaborated in drawing up a list of victims, who were to be drawn from the city's jails. They included 68 members of the MCd'I, 52 from the PCI, 52 from the Action Party and 18 Socialists, as well as 43 from the monarchist *Fronte Militare Clandestino*. 75 of the victims were Jewish, around a third of them with links to anti-fascist organisations. With one German soldier still in critical condition and the late addition of extra numbers, in total 335 Italians were rounded up. Loaded into wagons, the prisoners were driven down the Via Appia to the Fosse Ardeatine caves, on the southern outskirts of the city. There the blindfolded hostages were lined up in rows in front of a

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<sup>11</sup> Piero Zuccheretti, a 12 year old boy, and the TETI worker Antonio Chiaretti, himself a member of the MCd'.

trench. As each set of executed prisoners fell into the pits, the next took its place. The systematic slaughter took some two hours.

The MCd'I's victims ranged from its youngest sympathisers to its leading commanders. Former grenadier commander Aladino Govoni was the most renowned among the victims; others included San Lorenzo tenor Nicola Stame as well as Umberto Scattoni, the only one of the movement's members who was also a *gappista*. While these militants had been condemned to prison sentences weeks beforehand, most of the victims were never tried at all, some having been picked up by police just days beforehand. Eusebio Troiani, leader of the Marxist school at Grotta Rossa, was arrested on 21 March and murdered three days later. His student Unico Guidoni was also among the victims, as were band-leaders like Costantino Imperiali and Pietro Principato. Orfeo Mucci and Felice Chilanti narrowly escaped arrest on the day of the massacre by climbing across a roof terrace. Their comrade Raffaele de Luca was also spared at the last moment, as sympathetic prison guards declared him 'too ill to be transported to the execution site'.<sup>12</sup>

The massacre produced much soul-searching among the victims' comrades. In a display of defiance, militants carried out a series of tributes at the Fosse Ardeatine, including the laying of a crown of red carnations and the staging of a ceremony by nightfall by the Torpignattara and Quadraro bands. The atrocity however also provoked more angered

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<sup>12</sup> Given the numbers of MCd'Iers killed in the massacre, the PCI's role in 'provoking' it has been the subject of wild conspiracy theories. The 1996 trial of SS officer Erich Priebke saw a ragbag of such allegations appear in print form, after they had long enjoyed an only diffuse renown. Exploiting the publicity around the trial, works by self-published historian Roberto Gremmo and far-right journalist Pierangelo Maurizio each claimed that the PCI deliberately provoked the Nazi reprisal in order to destroy rival Resistance forces. In Maurizio's terms, the Communists had 'entrusted their dirty work to the Germans', in order to 'free themselves of competition in the scramble for power'.

Maurizio curiously combines this with the claim that even the passers-by killed in the attack (including not only an MCd'I member but also a thirteen-year-old boy who had, by Maurizio's account, 'foreseen' his own demise) were also deliberately targeted. The far-Right publicist claims that while the lynching of Regina Coeli prison director Donato Carretta was in fact a PCI bid to prevent him from revealing that the Communists had selected the victims.

Beyond lacking in evidence, these hypotheses make little sense in terms of PCI strategy. While the Nazi reprisal policy was well-known, there was no reason to expect that it would particularly negatively effect the MCd'I. All Communist Parties around Europe faced similar Nazi blackmails, and all insisted on the need to attack Occupation forces regardless. While this approach could be criticised in terms of its tactical efficacy or the danger in which it placed innocents, it has nothing to do with the Stalinist repression of dissidents. While in other contexts Stalin-loyalists did propagate the need to treat 'Trotskyists' as Nazis and advertised that they had done so in practice, the Via Rasella conspiracy theory alleges that the PCI attacked these opponents both secretly and via the unlikely intermediary of the SS. Maurizio's indignation that 'only members of the *Fronte Militare Clandestino*, the *Partito D'Azione* and *Bandiera Rossa* were sent to the Fosse Ardeatine' is quite unjustified; several dozen PCI militants were also killed, as well as Socialists and non-partisan Jews.

responses. A text by Govoni's father, circulated by the MCd'I, extended blame to the Via Rasella attackers. The Futurist poet's tribute to his son raged at those whom he accused of provoking the massacre. Corrado Govoni wondered 'Who was the dark soul of the bomb/Bonomi, or Togliatti. Or was it Badoglio? ... Whoever was guilty, forever/All that blood, the cold of the heart will crush him'.<sup>13</sup> Govoni's comrades did not make a similar claim; paying tribute to the martyrs of all creeds, their bulletin called on militants to 'avenge' the fallen by keeping their cause alive. Nonetheless, the catastrophic effect of the Nazi reprisal also hardened their attitude in opposition to terrorist tactics.

#### 6.4. A retreat

MCd'I leaders sought to discourage further terrorist attacks. To this end they offered analyses of why such actions were 'not part of Marxist strategy'.<sup>14</sup> Their 29 March internal bulletin emphasised that 'heroic gestures' and 'romantic impulses' were foreign to the collective, class basis of 'revolution in the Marxist sense'. To risk 'blowback against the innocent' was inadmissible; such an attitude was 'useless and reprehensible', 'individualist, not communist'.<sup>15</sup> While communists sought 'to conquer power, even violently', 'the sacrifice of proletarian blood' could only be worthwhile if this brought 'tangible victories for the proletariat alone'.<sup>16</sup> Rome's communists thus emphasised very different lessons from the Fosse Ardeatine massacre. Where *l'Unità* called for unremitting attacks on troops in order to avenge the victims,<sup>17</sup> the *Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie* called for a more cautious approach, avoiding further losses to the 'proletarian vanguard'. Given this priority on collective organisation over individual military feats, militants' priority task must be 'active defence against the repression of our Movement'.<sup>18</sup>

This related to a broader disagreement over the merits of attacking Wehrmacht troops. For the MCd'I, the proletariat's interest was 'above all to distinguish and assert itself as a class', as it built toward final insurrection.<sup>19</sup> Both this end goal and the immediate tasks of expropriations and draft-resistance demanded armed force; in this sense, it could only build its 'working-class Resistance' by extending its military apparatus. Yet this did not imply that attacking German troops was an end in itself, or that spectacular terrorist attacks gave

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<sup>13</sup> Govoni 1944.

<sup>14</sup> 'I fatti di via Rasella', *Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie*, pp. 1-2, 29.3.44

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> 'Gloria eterna ai 320 fucilati di Roma! Vendicare i nostri martiri - Liberare la nostra Patria', *l'Unità*, XX/8, 30.3.1944.

<sup>18</sup> 'I fatti di via Rasella', *Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie*, pp. 1-2, 29.3.44

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



workers a sense of collective agency. It was inadmissible to risk 'the lives of conscious workers', for these were 'precious to the proletarian vanguard's cause and it alone'.<sup>20</sup> This offered a practical expression of what Tigrino Sabatini termed the difference between 'turning war into revolution' and 'sending revolutionaries off to fight the war'.<sup>21</sup> His comrades bitterly criticised the GAP's incautious embrace of this latter approach, accusing it of an adventurist desire 'to get a mention on the BBC'.<sup>22</sup>

The GAP was indeed planning a 'counter-reprisal', an attack against a German military-police column at Via Tassino on 28 March. Faced with pressure from other CLN leaders to stop the cycle of violence, the PCI however called off the action.<sup>23</sup> GAP militants struggled to make sense of this fall into *attesimo*, in evident conflict with the idea of an accelerating campaign of attacks.<sup>24</sup> Yet repression would soon force the GAP to take a more cautious approach. On 21 April, as the GAP's Guglielmo Blasi passed through a police checkpoint, he was found in possession of doctored papers and a pistol. Betraying his comrades in order to save his own life, Blasi revealed details of the GAP organisation to *questore* Pietro Caruso. He in turn had six *gappisti* arrested and tortured. Only Calamandrei's escape allowed him to warn the few survivors, who fled to the *borgate* beyond the capital. They would remain there until the Allies' arrival.

GAP militants' accounts like police and MCd'I records thus point to a decline in Roman partisan activism in April 1944.<sup>25</sup> The Allied landings at Anzio in January had raised militants' hopes of a coming insurrection, and this in turn encouraged them to ever more confident public agitation. Yet as the Allied advance stalled, the clandestine networks that had come out into the open were left exposed to repression. The result was bloodshed, feeding passivity among the population and even within partisan ranks. In the days after the Fosse Ardeatine massacre, MCd'I press only subtly departed from *Bandiera Rossa's* characteristic triumphalism, oblique referring to a 'great socialist future which at times seems superior to our forces'.<sup>26</sup> Yet the bulletin produced on the eve of May Day had to

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Chilanti 1969, p. 49.

<sup>22</sup> A subsequent bulletin criticised PCI 'adventurism' in even sharper terms: 'No one can say what the Badoglio-Communists are capable of doing to get a mention on the BBC. But sadly we all know what horrific acts the Teutonic criminal madness is capable of'.

<sup>23</sup> Bentivegna himself recognised that this 'action also had suicidal characteristics'; 'not because we wanted to die ... but because we were so enraged that we did not care'. See his discussion in Bentivegna 1983, p. 172.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> See the discussion of the destruction of the MCd'I by police measures in ACS/MI/RSI (Gabinetto, 10), 'Panorama della situazione dei partiti politici antifascisti', cited in Gremmo 2015, p. 110.

<sup>26</sup> 'Ammonimenti', *Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie*, p. 1, 30.4.1944.

recognise that the organisation was in crisis: 'With the shootings, the arrests and the deportations the ranks of our best comrades have been thinned out, and fear and unease have crept in among the less mature. Indiscipline slithers through our ranks'.<sup>27</sup>

This bulletin's very existence reflected leaders' attempts to restore a sense of cohesion following the Fosse Ardeatine killings. Since the SS printshop raid in January there were no new issues of *Bandiera Rossa*. From 29 April the MCd'I Executive thus produced the handwritten and copied *Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie* in order to issue centralised directives to local bands. The first issue opened with a call to keep the struggle alive, arguing that to shrink into passivity now would simply reflect 'the moral disarray produced by fascism'.<sup>28</sup> It called on MCd'Iers to maintain their 'balanced nerves, historical and political sensibility, moral purity, spirit of sacrifice, trust in the proletariat and above all the overall vision that does not lose itself in the particular ... [but] keeps the supreme conquest' in sight.<sup>29</sup> Bitter references to 'petty criticisms', 'personal tittle-tattle', those who 'abandoned themselves to bourgeois chicanery' and 'old minds trapped in self-contemplation' scorned those finding pretexts to retreat from the struggle. 'To have doubts' now 'would mean offending the memory of the dead, being unworthy of the name we bear'.<sup>30</sup>

Demanding tightened organisation, the bulletin edited by Cretara and Mucci admonished the 'large share of organisers' who '[had] fail[ed] to show any capacity for conspiracy'. This was blamed on their either 'not know[ing] the bite of police repression or ignor[ing] its lessons'.<sup>31</sup> Given the 'fundamental' need for 'political education' 'cells should meet frequently to keep their revolutionary spirit and political capacity alive';<sup>32</sup> however, to avoid 'chain arrests' they should remain isolated from one another, with only one militant per cell maintaining contact with the 'group captains' coordinating their efforts. This cell structure had both political and security implications: 'meeting and discussion in the small and comfortable circle of five people who know and respect each other is immensely more productive than big assemblies where generally the mass's only role is passively expressing itself through diffuse shouting, whistling and applause'.<sup>33</sup> This cell structure was

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<sup>27</sup> '1 maggio', *Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie*, p. 1, 30.4.1944.

<sup>28</sup> 'Ammonimenti', *Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie*, p. 1, 30.4.1944.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> 'La lotta clandestina', *Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie*, p. 1, 30.4.1944.

<sup>32</sup> 'La cellula', *Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie*, pp. 2-3, 30.4.1944.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

fideistically defined 'so valuable ... to political consciousness that it serve[d] as the basis of all cultural organisations ... [and] self-government in the USSR'.<sup>34</sup>

In practice, as Nazi repression spread havoc in MCd'I ranks in spring 1944, it reverted to its original state as a scattered series of local bands. As we have seen, the 'Organisational Rules' issued in November had failed to regularise its armed units, and such problems worsened after Govoni's arrest. Despite Orfeo Mucci's best efforts to reorder its internal bands, Nazi violence had turned its command structures into a bloodbath. Of 35 militants responsible for contacts between internal bands, no fewer than 13 were killed at the Fosse Ardeatine. 1<sup>st</sup> Zone commander Nicola Stame was also executed on 24 March; his 2<sup>nd</sup> Zone counterpart Tigrino Sabatini, arrested on 16 April, suffered the same fate on 3 May. Fellow Executive member Salvatore Riso had already fled to Milan, fearing for his life after Govoni's arrest. External bands in the Umbria region had represented the MCd'I's best hope of building a clandestine movement beyond Lazio; after a Fascist raid on 14 March, these depleted units instead took shelter under a local PCI command.<sup>35</sup> The MCd'I looked ever less like a coherent movement building toward insurrection.

While this bulletin distinguished between undisciplined 'terrorist' actions and other armed activity, neither the MCd'I nor even GAP militants obeyed any clearly defined policy in the weeks following the massacre. *Gappisti* fleeing the capital via Torpignattara headed to the village of Poggio Mirteto. There they joined with the *Brigata D'Ercole Stalin*, clashing with the Wehrmacht on 7 April in the 'Battle of Monte Tancia'. Despite the call for retreat in *Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie*, some of the MCd'I's own bands also remained active in military operations. In subsequent weeks they sabotaged German telephony and mounted armed robberies of food and weaponry, but equally conducted armed assaults on German and *Polizia dell'Africa Italiana* convoys.<sup>36</sup> Quadraro's Banda Rossi reported just one, risky, armed sortie in the four weeks following the Fosse Ardeatine massacre, as ten militants snuck into the caves by night to lay red flowers to their fallen comrades.<sup>37</sup> Above all the movement was characterised by disorder: the breakdown in communications, and of trust, that resulted from repression.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> The Foligno V Brigade Garibaldi. See MSdL/FSC/28/66/'Raggruppamento bande "Bandiera Rossa"', pp. 4, 7.

<sup>36</sup> Reconstructed in Corvisieri 1967.

<sup>37</sup> 'Relazione sull'attività svolta dalla banda Rossi - Porta Furba', ASR/CAP/Cd'A/1665.

The disappearance of the MCd'I's newspaper also undermined the movement's political cohesion. After the SS raid on its printshop in January, its co-editor Felice Chilanti had been unable to find a commercial alternative, and for four months there were no new issues.<sup>38</sup> Despite the examples of solidarity between dissident communists and fugitive *gappisti* in Torpignattara in the face of repression, PCI cadres' hostility played an important role in frustrating Chilanti's efforts. As he noted in a press-section report in mid-April, he had made steps to revive the paper 'without success, especially because almost all the printshops in Rome include CLN elements and many communists of the central party who block our work. ... At first I got assurance from the [PCI] typographer Fausto Guercino at *Il Messaggero* that the paper would be printed. He then informed me that his local sector chief forbade him from taking this on'.<sup>39</sup> Only thanks to another PCI printworker flouting this anathema did it reappear in a small format on 11 May.<sup>40</sup>

Much had changed since its previous edition. Even at the start of the year, key organisers like Iacopini, Malatesta and Bitler had fallen under arrest; already then, *Bandiera Rossa* had begun to doubt the merits of 'adventurist' military action. Yet nothing prepared its militants for the repression which tore through their ranks over the first months of 1944. The destruction of movement structures and the loss of militants' lives could not help but sow distrust and pessimism. As the Occupation ground on, the possibility of insurrection not only seemed further away, but impossible. This deprived the movement of the common purpose that might have restored its coherence. The 'Red Army' declared at the start of the year had sought to combine partisan warfare with the ideal of 'doing like in Russia'. A wave of Nazi repression had now torn its military plans asunder. As we shall see in Chapter Seven, it soon had reason to doubt what really connected its activity to the 'workers' fatherland' at all.

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<sup>38</sup> MSdL/FSC/28/60/'Relazione Chilanti al CE sull'attività della cellula stampa'.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> 'Sottoscrizione', *BR*, 11.5.1944 was also the first appeal for funds in its pages.



## Chapter Seven

### A Soviet foreign-policy move

*Togliatti arriving in Italy from Russia was just like a Christ descending on Earth. He came from Moscow, he had worked in direct contact with Stalin, who had directly appointed him: no one else could boast a similar charisma. He came with the message that he had received from the recognised, beloved leader of the international workers' movement. There was just too much of a difference in stature between him and all the rest.*

Antonio Giolitti reflects on the PCI leader's return:

The Fosse Ardeatine massacre marked a watershed in the Roman Resistance. Stunned by the murder of their comrades, the MCd'I worked desperately to avert further reprisals. An internal bulletin on 29 March instructed band organisers that 'comrades' activity is only and must remain – defensive',<sup>2</sup> cautioning that this critical situation demanded 'not passive flight but active defence against repression'. Militants would now have to tighten their security, prioritising 'the identification and punishment of spies and the suspect'.<sup>3</sup> Likewise relenting their attacks in subsequent weeks were the GAP, as the authors of the Via Rasella attack fled to Torpignattara. Ever since the Anzio landings, militants had been preparing for the moment of insurrection. As the Allied advance stalled over the spring, they were instead forced to scale back their activity.

Communists were still reeling from the massacre when they received news of a decisive shift in the political situation. On 27 March Palmiro Togliatti finally reached Italian soil, bearing new instructions for his comrades. After a hastily-convened congress in Naples, on 1 April he announced his party's support for the Badoglio government. Institutional questions were to be deferred until the end of the war, in the interests of strengthening Italy's contribution to the Allied cause. His 'Salerno Turn' pushed the CLN toward a deal with Badoglio, and within three weeks each of its parties were represented in his 'National Democratic Government'. Bonomi returned as CLN president, and a split was avoided. Outwardly aimed at uniting the Allied-backed administration in the South with the

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<sup>1</sup> An interview with Pietro di Loreto, quoted in his *Togliatti e la "Doppiezza"* (Di Loreto 1991, p. 33).

<sup>2</sup> 'I fatti di Via Rasella', *Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie*, 29/3/1944, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

Resistance in Wehrmacht-occupied regions, Togliatti's *svolta* also removed any realistic prospect of partisans seizing power by force.

The Salerno Turn has long fuelled controversy among historians. For Togliatti's defenders, this *svolta* reflected the Party's patriotic spirit, sealing a broad alliance able to mobilise Italians against Nazi Germany. More critical interpretations alleged that Stalin had directed the turn. In this view, Togliatti's approach was part of an attempt to entrench spheres of influence, showing that the Communists would not make any bid for power in the West. It was an 'Italian precedent', which sought to deny the Anglo-Americans any pretext for interfering in the Red Army-occupied East.<sup>4</sup> In Italy's own politics, the core of the debate over whether Togliatti decided the *svolta* was the question of the PCI's real autonomy from Moscow. Archives opened in the 1990s showed<sup>5</sup> that Stalin had indeed ordered the turn. Yet this did not simply prove that it had been a concession to the Anglo-Americans. As we shall see in Chapter Seven, in bringing the PCI into government, the *svolta* was partly directed *against* the Western Allies.

This is particularly clear when we look at the discussions among Roman communists in April 1944. Reading the Party press we find a focus on the immediate military purpose of the Turn, strengthening the Italian contribution to the Allied cause. To this end *l'Unità* vaunted the *svolta's* success in ensuring a fuller 'national unity'. Yet *internally* the Turn was also advertised as a means of countering Anglo-American hegemony. As we see in Chapter Seven, at all points throughout the Resistance, PCI cadres knew that their policy had to be *compatible* with Soviet foreign policy. The Salerno Turn was something more than this, for it grounded all PCI strategy in the incipient competition between the Western Allies and USSR. Stalin's move both cut short the strategic debate in the PCI, and galvanised the Party behind a common position. Militants had long worried that the PCI was watering down its historic mission. Yet Stalin's role in the *svolta* allowed cadres to present the Party line to members as part of a Moscow-led revolutionary strategy.

It may seem obvious that the PCI's turn to alliance with the monarchists would encourage dissent in its ranks, particularly when there were already large dissident movements in rebellion against its strategy. This was not the case. Even the sensibilities in the PCI that

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<sup>4</sup> Such is the thesis of e.g. Cortesi 2004. This kind of argument is also well-known due to Djilas's famous reference (1962, p. 90) to Stalin's comment that 'This war is not as in the past: whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system. Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army has the power to do so. It cannot be otherwise'.

<sup>5</sup> Reconstructed in Aga Rossi and Zaslavsky 2007/2011.

expressed most reticence over the turn made no attempt to reverse it; nor was there any exodus of disgruntled members. Those who opposed the CLN strategy were already outside the Party; opposition to the *svolta* from within the CLN came from minorities in the Actionists and Socialists. The Stalinist dissidents to the Left of the PCI were instead disoriented by the Turn. This was particularly true of the MCd'I, which far from identifying the PCI with Stalinism had always insisted that its 'centrist' positions were undermining Moscow's revolutionary agenda. It was precisely this perspective that the Kremlin's diplomatic moves set into crisis in March 1944, for they established an obvious connection between Soviet foreign policy and PCI strategy.

Less apparent in these weeks was the *svolta's* long-term role in shifting the PCI toward an institutional strategy. Even into the postwar period, there persisted among its militants the notion of the ruse, the clever tactical shift, the *doppiezza* through which the Party was building its forces for some later bid for power. Within the Party leadership there were those who considered it a more 'tactical' than 'strategic' turn. The different registers of internal and external Party communication – in particular as related to the Soviet role in the turn – strongly reinforced this belief. The upheavals in Yugoslavia and Greece also suggested that national-front coalitions were hardly permanent. In reality, the *svolta* permanently shifted the centre of Resistance politics from the clandestine movements to national institutions. For the partisans there would be twelve more months of sacrifices, of heroism and martyrdom. But the agreements made at Salerno imposed lasting limits on what their Resistance could achieve politically.

### 7.1. The turn before Salerno

To understand the role of instructions from Moscow in governing PCI policy, it is first necessary to understand the situation that had resulted from 25 July 1943. Cadres on Italian soil were able to receive radio broadcasts from Moscow, but had no direct dialogue with Togliatti, who remained in the Soviet capital. Only with his physical arrival was Moscow's line fully imposed on the Party. Accounts that focus on this reassertion of central control tend to assume that this had disruptive and negative consequences. This encourages the framing of the *svolta* as a political shock<sup>6</sup> that blew apart the Communists' previous 'intransigent' strategy, or fuelled the rise of 'Trotskyist' dissident movements.<sup>7</sup> A closer

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<sup>6</sup> What Pietro Nenni called the '*bomba Ercoli*', in reference to the PCI leader's pseudonym.

<sup>7</sup> *Bandiera Rossa* is consistently and in most Resistance histories (if described at all) described as a 'Trotskyite' current 'opposed to the Salerno Turn', as if this were its origin. This also reflects the confused understanding that the real moment of controversy was the Salerno Turn rather than the



study reveals that the *svolta* in fact strengthened the Party's coherence and sense of common purpose. Both the Rome and Milan leaderships immediately rallied behind the *svolta*, and they were soon followed by their members. An extension of the existing 'national unity' policy, the new Party line was entrenched all the more quickly by the widespread understanding that it had indeed come from Stalin personally.

The speed with which Roman PCI cadres rallied around the *svolta* owed to conclusions that they had already reached in debates over winter 1943. While they were no homogenous bloc, Roman cadres such as Celeste Negarville, Giorgio Amendola and Agostino Novella had in this period accepted the possibility of the PCI joining Badoglio's government. Never before April 1944 did Roman PCI cadres offer *unconditional* support for his administration, and in this sense the Salerno Turn clearly was a novel policy. Yet only by looking back to this earlier period can we explain how they came to accept this new line. While it was Togliatti's arrival on Italian soil that precipitated the *svolta*, a series of less clear-cut cues from Moscow in previous months had already paved the way for the Party's turn toward government. Tracing Roman leaders' debates from autumn 1943 onward, we can see how they came consciously to align their approach with Kremlin strategy.

Roman PCI leaders first confronted this problem at a 4 November 1943 secretariat meeting, at which they discussed Togliatti's recent Radio Moscow broadcasts. Their debate centred on the terms in which the general secretary had described Badoglio's declaration of war against Nazi Germany. Most controversial was his fleeting reference to the need for Italians to 'rally around Badoglio'.<sup>8</sup> This opaque formulation seemed to clash with *l'Unità's* call for a CLN government, and also posed the question of Togliatti's authority to change Party policy by fiat. The 4 November meeting, attended by Novella, Negarville, Amendola and Scoccimarro, was principally remarkable for highlighting the tight limits within which PCI

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initial moment that the PCI joined the CdO/CLN. Typical in this regard Aga-Rossi and Zaslavsky 1997's repeated description of the pre-*svolta* PCI line as 'intransigent'. Appearing in a detailed account in the shifts of PCI cadres' policy toward the King and Badoglio prior to Togliatti's arrival (which would better be described as 'conditional' or 'hesitant' than 'intransigent'), this is also to misuse an adjective widely associated in the Italian Marxist tradition with 'intransigent' commitment to a revolutionary programme. The popular-frontist PCI's commitment to the CLN stood far from this kind of 'intransigence', even looking beyond the fact that this coalition never did declare itself an alternative government to Badoglio's. This misreading is echoed in Trotskyist historian Donny Gluckstein's characterisation of the *svolta* as the PCI's move from a 'class-struggle' policy to one based on 'national unity', disregarding the Party's prior involvement in the CLN. His claim that to fight against both Italian Fascism and German occupation amounted to class struggle makes a particular nonsense of this reading. This would curiously imply that a) Christian Democrats fighting Italian Fascism and German occupation were waging 'class struggle', and b) the PCI ceased to fight Italian Fascism and German occupation once it made the Salerno Turn (Gluckstein 2013, p. 155).

<sup>8</sup> APC/CRM, A/16, 'Verbale riunione segreteria', 4 November 1943.

cadres moved, as they sought to explain their positions in terms compatible with Moscow's line. While their positions did in fact all subtly differ from what Togliatti had said, they were at pains to avoid couching this in terms of political disagreement, and repeatedly imputed their own intentions to Moscow.

The PCI's lead representative on the CLN, Scoccimarro was least willing to take Togliatti's comment as an instruction to support the government. The veteran cadre told his comrades that this represented not Moscow's 'dissent with the Party's line' but an 'error essentially result[ing] from a lack of information'.<sup>9</sup> He emphasised that Badoglio's declaration of war against Germany did not meaningfully change the regime's character as an attempt to save the ruling class from Fascism's collapse, moreover reasoning that Togliatti was unaware how far the 8 September debacle had alienated Italians from the monarchy.<sup>10</sup> Raising the possibility that 'the Moscow comrades' had mistakenly assumed that PCI cadres already supported Badoglio - 'and this is very probably the case, if they trusted information from the BBC' - he argued that 'if they did have a precise knowledge of the situation they would doubtless share the policy we have followed. In such a rapidly-changing and complex situation it is impossible to lead the Party from Moscow'.<sup>11</sup>

Whereas Scoccimarro stressed that the PCI could aid Badoglio militarily while refusing him political support, Novella lent Togliatti's comments a more extensive meaning. It was 'difficult to interpret the broadcast exclusively in terms of military collaboration. Badoglio is the head of government and "rally around B[adoglio]" must necessarily have a political meaning'.<sup>12</sup> For Novella, 'the M[oscow] comrades surely did mean to give directives. We may even reject [their] positions, but first we have to make the effort to understand them'.<sup>13</sup> While Scoccimarro limply declared Togliatti's statement 'surpassed' by the Moscow Conference, Novella speculated that the Soviet party's Central Committee would have informed the PCI leader on the 'conference preparations and the fundamental decisions due to issue from it'.<sup>14</sup> If Stalin had 'taken an even harder anti-Badoglio line than us' after 25 July, he now recognised that Badoglio's declaration of war had rearranged the international chessboard. For Novella, this was a change to which the PCI had to adapt.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., Relazione M.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., Intervento di Giulio.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Novella did not argue that the PCI should support Badoglio, but rather that it should prepare the ground for such a turn. Insisting that the CLN parties' arrival in government would mark a 'capitulation' by Badoglio, he suggested that 'while sticking by our fundamental positions' the PCI 'should begin personal efforts among CLN members to encourage them to move away from exclusivist positions regarding Bad[oglio]'.<sup>15</sup> The call for a constituent assembly need not rule out a more 'elastic approach' to the monarchy; the Moscow broadcast was 'indicative' in this regard. Novella did not mean 'that we have to take what was said on the radio as directives, but that what was said was intended to give directives'; while 'the M[oscow] comrades lack much information and cannot effectively lead the P[arty]' they were 'very well informed on the international situation and the Italian government's general policy', and thus had to be 'taken seriously'.<sup>16</sup> Novella insisted on granting due 'importance to what the M[oscow] comrades said'.<sup>17</sup>

Fellow cadres denied that Moscow had intended to give directives at all. For Negarville, 'particularly unacceptable' was Novella's presentation of 'the relations between the Bolshevik Party and members of foreign parties, contradicting the dissolution of the C[omintern]'.<sup>18</sup> 'Indications from M[oscow] no longer ha[d] the value they did before', and Togliatti was 'not in favourable conditions to determine the Party line'.<sup>19</sup> Amendola argued that they must not allow the Comintern's dissolution to be seen as a mere façade; 'changing our line on the basis of Moscow's broadcasts would give rise to a campaign trying to deny our party's political independence and have people believe that we follow Moscow's orders without discussion'.<sup>20</sup> Yet he simultaneously argued that given Moscow's 'lack of information' 'it is difficult to say that [they] have a "position" as such'.<sup>21</sup> Novella was 'mistaken to believe these positions had not been surpassed by the [Moscow] Conference's decisions, now endorsed by Stalin's speech talking of liberated people's rights to choose their form of government'.<sup>22</sup>

This highlighted the limits of the PCI's real autonomy. Its Italian-based cadres asserted their freedom to make their own decisions, but at the same time could only argue within parameters that assumed that their positions were indeed consistent with Moscow's. The

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., Intervento di Gino.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., Intervento di Palmieri.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

dissolution of the International and Togliatti's absence evidently allowed a certain diversity of approaches within the Secretariat. Yet Soviet blessing remained a crucial test of political legitimacy within the PCI, and as Moscow made increasingly robust interventions in the Italian political scene over early 1944, it became implausible to claim that it was not issuing instructions to the Party at all. The leading Soviet representative in Italy, Vyshinky's contacts with Badoglio over the possibility of recognition from January onward were not the imposition of a PCI line, but did point to Moscow's interest in such a deal. If the Soviet Union did indeed recognise the Badoglio government, it would be senseless for the PCI to remain in opposition.<sup>23</sup>

Thus already in the weeks before Togliatti's return, key Roman cadres had begun a shift away from 'exclusivist' positions regarding Badoglio. As Novella told the PCI secretariat on 25 February, 'given the balance of forces today, it [is] impossible to obtain the two objectives of an extraordinary government and distancing ourselves from Badoglio. We should make our position in relation to the extraordinary [government] and Badoglio personally more elastic'.<sup>24</sup> At the 11 March secretariat Amendola agreed that Badoglio's 'international positions had developed a new constitutional praxis, which we must necessarily take into account'. This meant that 'the formation of a new government' would depend on 'constitutional continuity, also due to international needs, and coexistence with the monarchy as an institution'.<sup>25</sup> Scoccimarro's insistence that 'the popular forces can only be mobilised under a new, fundamentally democratic government'<sup>26</sup> thus left him in a minority faced with this higher international logic.

When news of Togliatti's announcement arrived in Rome in early April, most of the Roman leadership was already well-placed to turn toward government. There is some evidence that other cadres consented to this policy less enthusiastically. Northern leaders also embraced a national-front strategy, but displayed a greater tendency to associate this with continued efforts to build the CLN's 'popular' bases. Scoccimarro was sympathetic to this position. Amendola claimed that when he informed Scoccimarro of the turn, this latter replied 'This policy, that's for you lot to carry out'.<sup>27</sup> However, much of the heat in this debate came only after the Turn was a *fait accompli*, as Novella and Amendola attempted to blame Scoccimarro

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<sup>23</sup> Spriano 1975, p. 301, cites the Rome *l'Unità*'s incongruous response to the Soviet recognition of Badoglio in its 23 March issue, as if it were a recognition of Italy's fighting contribution rather than Badoglio's specific government.

<sup>24</sup> Spriano 1975, p. 302

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p. 314.

for preventing the Party reaching the same conclusions earlier. Togliatti himself had little patience for such bickering and was quick to rally all these leaders behind his own authority. There was some rancour over the *svolta*, and its presentation, but there was no revolt against it. The *svolta* neither split the PCI leadership nor fed the rise of dissident movements to its Left.

## 7.2. Togliatti's return

Party unity was on Togliatti's mind as he made his return to Naples. Criss-crossing Europe since 1926, he had been a Comintern functionary more than a leader of Italian workers; even in building his leadership over the PCI's exile and prison organisations, he was unable to address the mass of militants on Italian soil. But just as dissident movements harked back to the class-war 'intransigence' of the 1920s, it was the antagonists of decades past who most troubled Togliatti's thinking. According to a sympathetic account by one Neapolitan cadre, upon reaching the Southern port city Togliatti immediately asked his comrades what Amadeo Bordiga was up to. Told that the Party founder had in fact fallen out of political activity, Togliatti replied 'impossible! Do try and work out what's going on!'<sup>28</sup> Another PCI cadre in Naples reported a similar concern to settle scores with the renowned expellee, 'We have an account still open with that man, and we have to close it'.<sup>29</sup>

The PCI general secretary immediately imposed Stalin's new line. A special Party congress was held in Naples on 30 March-1 April, at which cadres unanimously voted 'confidence' in the general secretary, without voting on his policy itself.<sup>30</sup> Togliatti had pre-arranged a press conference for the final day of the conference, at which he told media that the PCI was ready to make a deal with Badoglio. Any questions of Italy's future institutions would now be deferred until after Liberation. Togliatti had on his route via Algiers already praised the Soviet recognition of the Badoglio government in PCF press;<sup>31</sup> even on 31 March *The Times* had quoted *Izvestia's* hints that Moscow would push for a widening of the Badoglio government.<sup>32</sup> The London daily's Italy correspondent emphasised Togliatti's ease in

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<sup>28</sup> Valenzi 1995, p. 119, cited in Cortesi (ed.) 1999, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Cacciapuoti 1972, p. 130, cited in Cortesi (ed.) 1999, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> The closest to a collective vote on the *svolta* was at a meeting of the Salerno Communist Party itself, which now fell under the leadership's control: see FGF/Archivio Direzione Napoli/6. At a meeting with Naples leaders Eugenio Reale and Velio Spano on 22.4.1944 (FGF/Archivio Direzione Napoli/8) Togliatti suggested that 'three in four' members supported the *svolta*. There was, however, no organisation among the remaining quarter; Togliatti was emphasising the need to fight remaining 'sectarian' sensibilities.

<sup>31</sup> 'Le rétablissement des relations diplomatiques avec l'Urss', *Liberté*, 23.3.1944, Spriano 1975, p. 283.

<sup>32</sup> 'Soviet Policy in Italy', *The Times*, p. 3, 31/3/1944 noted the 'asperity' implicit in *Izvestia's* comments on Italy, suggesting that the Soviet call for a democratised Badoglio government reflected

imposing this 'Soviet initiative' on his party. He was 'armed with the latest Soviet directives and with high prestige to take over the leadership of the party, and is thus fortunate in not being under the necessity to eat his own words'.<sup>33</sup>

Returning from exile like another Communist during the last war, Togliatti's own 'April Theses' could make little claim to past orthodoxies.<sup>34</sup> His early articles in *l'Unità* nonetheless made extensive reference to the Party's great 'anti-fascist martyr', Antonio Gramsci. The Sardinian's works remained little-known in PCI ranks: while in an article on Gramsci's 'literary inheritance'<sup>35</sup> Togliatti could reveal the existence of the unpublished *Prison Notebooks*, he essentially ventriloquised Gramsci in defence of Stalin's strategy. This required no little distortion. Where Gramsci had emphasised the need to address the 'national-popular', with the Communist-led working class also 'hegemonising' other subaltern layers, Togliatti crudely recast this as the need for 'national' alliances.<sup>36</sup> The Party's own history was also remoulded in order to present an illusion of continuity. Given Italian communism's in fact decidedly 'ultra-Left' origins, Togliatti chose to present Gramsci and not Bordiga as the Party's 'creator'.<sup>37</sup>

The *svolta* did indeed help strengthen 'national unity', putting an end to the crisis in the CLN. Since the fall of the regime the Socialists and Actionists had rejected political collaboration with the royalists, seeking instead to declare a provisional government. The January 1944 split in the Socialist Party, combined with the Actionists' republican tones at the Bari Congress, had helped intensify these tensions in the coalition.<sup>38</sup> After Bonomi's resignation it seemed that the CLN was poised to split, with the Right departing to support the Badoglio government. Yet given the reformist parties' limited base in the country, their hopes of forming a separate republican front also depended on the backing of the far larger PCI. Togliatti's move put a definitive end to any such possibility. The Socialist and Actionists strongly protested the PCI leader's turn, highlighting the injustice that Italian

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Moscow's will to become an independent actor in Italian affairs. See also 'Allied Policy in Italy', p. 4, 1/4/1944 (and the editorial 'The Allies and Italy', p. 5).

<sup>33</sup> 'Party Moves in Italy', *The Times*, p. 4, 3/4/1944.

<sup>34</sup> A contrast noted in 'Due ritorni', *Il Proletario* 16/5/1944. Organ of the 'Left Fraction of the Communists and Socialists of Italy', *Il Proletario* was stridently anti-Stalinist and dominated by Left-Communist positions, unlike *Bandiera Rossa*. See Chapter Nine on the February 1945 'Naples Congress' which failed to unite the dissident movements.

<sup>35</sup> 'L'eredità letteraria di Gramsci' (unsigned), *L'Unità*, Naples, 30.4.1944.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> 'La politica di Antonio Gramsci' (signed Ercoli), *L'Unità*, Naples, 30.4.1944.

<sup>38</sup> See Chapter Five.

anti-fascists were being railroaded by Moscow's decision.<sup>39</sup> Yet this was a reaction of 'resentment, rather than refusal'. Their own alternative now unrealisable, they were railroaded into joining the new government.<sup>40</sup>

Where Bonomi's search for a deal with Badoglio had divided anti-fascists, Togliatti united the CLN behind this policy. <sup>41</sup> The liberal grandee's own enthusiastic response was evident in his 7 April diary entry. '[A] prodigious horseman has arrived from distant shores, a Lohengrin *redivivus*, who has come over to Badoglio, saved him. This horseman arrived from Russia'.<sup>42</sup> Bonomi recognised the Soviet inspiration of Togliatti's position, which was 'evidently interpreting Moscow's thinking, and acting in conformity with the directives for his Party'.<sup>43</sup> This had succeeded in forcing the hand of the other anti-fascist parties, whatever their 'stupor' upon receiving news of the *svolta*.<sup>44</sup> Bonomi doubted that anyone else could have pushed through this policy: 'If .... I had proposed what Togliatti has got them to accept (entering Badoglio's Cabinet, being appointed by the old King and the lack of any precise legislative commitment to the Constituent Assembly) I would have been forced out'.<sup>45</sup> He now returned to the CLN presidency.

For his part, Badoglio was well-aware that the new PCI line was a child of Soviet diplomacy. He had for some months been seeking bilateral diplomatic ties with Moscow, which would both assert Italy as a diplomatic actor and free it of its total dependency on the Anglo-

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<sup>39</sup> Note in particular 'La politica socialista dopo la crisi governativa', 1.5.1944, reproduced in the Rome *Avanti!* on 6.5.1944 and in Neri Sereni (ed.) 1988, pp. 142-50.

<sup>40</sup> Notable is the mismatch between the hostile tone of *l'Italia Libera*, 19.4.1944, protesting Togliatti's deal with conservative interests, and the approach actually taken by Action Party leaders in the South, who did join the government.

<sup>41</sup> Spriano 1975, p. 310, describes the 'anguish' with which figures like Bonomi and liberal philosopher Benedetto Croce greeted the turn, and further draws on a US State Department report emphasising the damage that the Communists' move might have on the easy introduction of Anglo-American hegemony in Italy. Spriano develops this into an argument that the *svolta* should not be seen in terms of 'renunciation' or a shift to the 'Right'. He is quite right to see that Togliatti's initiative had a certain Machiavellian logic, for it not only allowed the PCI to conquer ground on the institutional stage, but also sidelined left-wing opponents both within and outside the CLN. As we demonstrate in section 7.6, the *svolta* was also an aggressive policy on the international terrain, representing not a capitulation to the Western powers but rather an attempt to drive contradictions between the Badoglio régime and the Allied military authorities. Yet the *svolta* not only occupied 'enemy territory' within the state machine, but also displaced Communist politics onto this terrain; it equally conflicted with any policy (such as the likes of Mauro Scoccimarro and Eugenio Curiel had upheld within the Party) focused on building forms of popular power outside and against that state machine. The PCI continue a policy of mass Resistance *mobilisation*, while also building its party machine across Italy. Yet the forms that this took were now tightly disciplined by its governmental responsibilities, as it sought to recast itself as a party of republican legality.

<sup>42</sup> Bonomi 1947 (7.4.1944), p. 175.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Bonomi 1947 (8.4.1944 entry), p. 176.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

American occupiers. For the Kremlin, this also offered a way into Mediterranean affairs. Badoglio's foreign minister <sup>46</sup> sounded out Andrey Vyshinsky to this effect as early as 11 January, and the pair also discussed the possibility of the PCI joining his government.<sup>47</sup> While cadres in the South continued to place conditions on such a deal, the discussions had given the Kremlin a litmus test of Badoglio's openness. On 14 March Moscow officially recognised his government. Togliatti's turn extended this cooperation into domestic politics, presenting a *fait accompli* to the other anti-fascist parties. As one historian has argued, Togliatti was here 'adopt[ing] Badoglio's old unity proposal as his own, relaunching it as the PCI's proposal'.<sup>48</sup>

Within two weeks of Togliatti's return the CLN announced its support for a 'National Democratic Government', led by Badoglio and committed to stepping up conventional Italian forces' involvement in the war of Liberation. *L'Unità* emphasised this aspect of the Salerno Turn, at the same time presenting Togliatti's move as a means of ending the crisis in the CLN and ending the 'paralysis' that had the King and Badoglio had imposed on 'popular initiative' to fight the Germans.<sup>49</sup> It obliquely referred to the 'already long well-known' Soviet support for the formation of a 'democratic government able to secure Italy's contribution to the war effort against Nazi Germany', noting that 'Eden for the English government and Cordell Hull for the American government' had 'now also pronounced in favour of such a move'.<sup>50</sup> Formed on 22 April, Badoglio's new cabinet mostly aimed at establishing itself as a legitimate Italian leadership, such that the Allied Military Government could hand it control of newly liberated areas. Establishing its links with the Resistance movements, the government also appointed the PCI's own Mauro Scoccimarro as minister for the German-occupied regions.

These developments little-surprised the Roman dissidents. Even *Bandiera Rossa's* very first issue had declared the CLN parties 'destined' to join Badoglio's regime, describing this as the logical conclusion of their 'national unity policy'. In this view, a cross-class coalition defined only by its anti-Nazism would inevitably ally itself to the dominant institutional force. A bulletin reacting to Togliatti's *svolta* sharply criticised this new *union sacrée*. '[W]ith the excuse of national liberation, the left-wing parties in liberated Italy leave the working

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<sup>46</sup> Technically Renato Prunas was 'General Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs'.

<sup>47</sup> See Gori and Pons (eds.) 1998.

<sup>48</sup> Cortesi 2004, p. 295.

<sup>49</sup> 'Una politica italiana', *L'Unità* XX/9, 6.4.1944.

<sup>50</sup> 'Il fronte nazionale unitario', *L'Unità*, 13.4.1944; 'Unanime deliberazione del CLN dell'Italia libera per un Governo Nazionale Democratico', *ibid.*



masses in the hands of apolitical unions, exploiters and ex-fascist speculators'.<sup>51</sup> This was counterposed to a more classically Leninist approach. '[T]he workers' war policy must be: transform the war against Nazism into a war against all capitalism. Our watchword is: as long as there is a single bourgeois [sic] country in the world, there will be neither enough bread nor lasting peace, nor liberty for anyone'.<sup>52</sup> The problem was how to ally this 'war policy' to an effective mobilising strategy.

The bulletin's authors in fact took a downcast view of Italy's military position. Deeming Togliatti's *svolta* 'of dubious political value and of no practical sense', the 8 April issue characterised the turn as 'pointless' even in terms of intensifying the war effort. Given the liberated regions' industrial backwardness and the exhaustion of their populations, it would be 'mad to expect any physical or moral force from them'; they would in any case have to rely on the Allies for weaponry.<sup>53</sup> While these dismissive comments referred to the South, this also expressed a pessimistic view of the movement's own capacities. Triumphalism gave way to weary omniscience. While 'some say that we of the MCd'I are too doctrinaire, they now discover that it is precisely this doctrine that helps us navigate in purity amidst this morass. ... The difference is that we do not want to delude ourselves, or delude anyone, on what we can do, and that we do not want to get mixed up in any political intrigue: not so much out of principle, but because it yields so little'.<sup>54</sup>

This doctrinal purity was held up as a remedy for the prevalent disorientation.<sup>55</sup> Fascism had left 'the rebels against tyranny lost, disorganised, discouraged, losing any social sentiment, any ideal to hold onto'; now Fascism was 'dead', but its opponents continued to show their lack of political bearings. In this sense, 'anti-fascism' – a merely nihilist reaction against Fascism – was to be considered 'the worst illness that we have contracted in these last twenty years'.<sup>56</sup> Holding 'Mussolini alone responsible for Italy's disaster' had served only to 'prepare alibis for capitalism, militarism and the monarchy',<sup>57</sup> thus allowing Communists to join a government built on these same forces. For 'a communist, a builder of tomorrow', this was 'shameful'.<sup>58</sup> 'Anti-fascism rule[d] imperious' yet the task remained

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<sup>51</sup> 'Commentario', *Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie*, 30/4/1944.

<sup>52</sup> 'La nostra tattica', *Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie*, 30/4/1944, p. 3. These same words appear in 'Perche siamo contrari alla collaborazione', *BR*, 11/5/1944.

<sup>53</sup> Untitled, *Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie*, 8/4/1944, p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* My emphasis.

<sup>55</sup> 'Antifascismo', *Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie*, 30.4.1944, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

to 'reject not only fascism but the whole political and economic system that generated it'.<sup>59</sup> Faced with the new consensus, the dissidents could only reaffirm their separateness: 'We are not anti-fascists. We are communists'.<sup>60</sup>

### 7.3. A narrative of betrayal

A further difficult problem in rationalising the turn was its connection to Soviet foreign policy. The Roman dissidents had always understood Moscow's collaboration with London and Washington as a contingent military pact, and not a blueprint for communists' alliances in Italy. However, as the Kremlin stepped up its diplomatic initiatives in March 1944, it was obvious that it was directly intervening in Italian domestic politics. Moscow's recognition of Badoglio two weeks before the *svolta* displayed a clear parallel between Soviet foreign policy and PCI strategy, and gravely undermined the attempt to counterpose Stalin to an 'opportunist' Togliatti. The perception of Soviet influence did cause PCI leaders some discomfort within the CLN as the reformist and liberal parties accused them of deferring to Stalin. However, *within* communist ranks this had an essentially cohesive effect. Even the reticent were compelled to recognise that the PCI line was part of a wider Soviet strategy, and not a mere abandonment of the Party's historic mission.

Already before news of Togliatti's arrival, the dissidents sought to rationalise Moscow's recognition of Badoglio. The 29 March *Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie* attempted to provide its band leaders means of explaining this shift, reconciling Moscow's move with the movement's own agenda. A piece on 'The Official Recognition of the Badoglio government' insisted that Italian militants could still push for change in Kremlin policy. Given that 'in the current moment the USSR has not had precise information from the Italian people' on who should represent it, it was quite legitimate for Moscow 'to remain in doubt between Badoglio and us, and to act without further delay in establishing the relations necessary to its national interests'.<sup>61</sup> This was, however, only a temporary situation, as 'the USSR will recognise more legitimate representatives of the Italian people when this latter makes its strength felt through its will, winning power, showing itself capable of conserving [that power] and establishing fruitful relations with all the world's peoples'.<sup>62</sup>

This optimistic view of Italian communists' capacity to shape Soviet foreign policy concealed a broader shift in MCd'I propaganda in spring 1944, as its triumphalist

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> 'Il riconoscimento ufficiale del governo Badoglio', *Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie*, 29.3.1944.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

predictions became increasingly detached from any real progress in its own organising efforts.<sup>63</sup> Effectively, the subject of the MCd'I's strategic forecasts had become the Communist Party itself. While *Bandiera Rossa* had long portrayed the wartime crisis of the Italian state as the final reckoning for capitalism – with the intensified struggle between proletarian revolution and Fascist reaction dooming all intermediate forces to oblivion – the MCd'I bulletin appearing in spring 1944 turned this analysis on its head. It instead blamed the PCI's approach for having helped save the conservative establishment from the abyss. This was then projected back onto the international terrain, and taken as the reason why the USSR had itself recognised Badoglio. This curiously presented the *svolta* as confounding rather than fulfilling the real intention of Stalin's policy.

Taking over MCd'I press at its gravest moment of defeat, this reasoning echoed a narrative of 'betrayal' characteristic of minoritarian sects throughout history. Deeming the situation 'objectively revolutionary' yet recognising its own lack of 'subjective' strength, it resorted to decrying other, more powerful forces' failure to rise to the occasion. The vehemence of its attacks on Togliatti reflected not only his success in rallying militants around his position, but the dissidents' inability to mobilise for their own alternative. This did not mean simple resignation: to accuse Togliatti of treachery was itself a bid to tear support from the PCI by exposing its supposed malfeasance. Yet this was also an abdication of political responsibility, effectively blaming its political rivals for failing to realise its own predictions. Presenting the PCI line as the decisive factor in Italian politics, this narrative of betrayal projected the very possibility of socialism onto the choices of individual leaders. Togliatti was blamed not only for ignoring the 'inevitability' of revolution, but also for posing insuperable obstacles to it.

The MCd'I's power of attraction over the PCI grassroots was now significantly weakened. Already after the Fosse Ardeatine massacre its press had adopted a downcast tone; regime officials could boast that the movement had been 'torn apart by recent police measures',<sup>64</sup> and the dissidents also made ever rarer appearances in PCI cadres' own reports. In fact, the movement's own members were now flaking away to the Party. In Chapter Four we saw Agostino Novella express his alarm at the dissidents' appeal among the Roman proletariat, also fanning more 'intransigent' elements among his own members. Yet by March 1944 he could portray a quite different picture, as the Lazio Federation now cleared the last traces'

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<sup>63</sup> Or indeed that provided by 'Quando verrà Baffone' in *Scintilla* issue 2.

<sup>64</sup> ACS/MI/RSI (Gabinetto, 10), 'Panorama della situazione dei partiti politici antifascisti', cited in Gremmo 2015, p. 110.

of *Bandiera Rossa's* influence.<sup>65</sup> This situation was more varied in outlying and rural communes harder to submit to central control. A 2 April instruction to the militants of the Viterbo Federation PCI not to read the press of the 'dissidents and deviationists of *Bandiera Rossa*' suggested that this 'mopping up' operation was still ongoing.<sup>66</sup>

Although one of the most significant turning-points in PCI history, the *svolta* did not either split the Party, or feed the dissident movements that had already emerged. This partly owed to internal weaknesses of these latter movements, unable to build a national organisation. In Italy's other great cities as in Rome, dissident movements had emerged at the very beginning of the Resistance, contesting the politics of national unity. As the Party took to the institutional stage, they were unable to react. In the Roman case this partly owed to the repression that had been suffered over the early months of 1944. As we saw in Chapter Six, the military organisation of the Resistance in the capital was weakened in the period immediately preceding these events, and the dissident coalition was also struck hard by the arrest of Carlo Andreoni on 10 March. Confined to Rome, politically disoriented and with its leadership decimated by Nazi violence, the MCd'I was forced into an increasing subaltern position relative to the now-united PCI.

Around Italy there were other movements like the MCd'I who reflected some sort of class-war sensibility. The *Stella Rossa* movement in Turin<sup>67</sup> and the *Organizzazione Comunista Autonoma* in the Alto Milanese were similar cases of underground movements that sought to rebuild the Communist Party. Each of these latter had around a thousand members at the turn of 1944. The Party's efforts to swallow up these movements was, however, making headway, in particular through its domination of the trade union cells in these cities. In the strike at the beginning of March it had finally forced *Stella Rossa* off the strike committees in the Turin factories; unlike the MCd'I it had no armed bands and was thus more easily absorbed into PCI shopfloor organisations. Yet the Party also directly clashed with this movement, labelling its leaders 'fascists'.<sup>68</sup> Taking this claim seriously, on 19 June 1944 members of the PCI would

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<sup>65</sup> APC 7.3.10, 'Fed. PCI, direttive per gli attivisti', 1.3.1944.

<sup>66</sup> 'PCI, Com. Prov. di Viterbo - Zona 3-4, 2.4.1944', APC/7/7/15, p. 5.

<sup>67</sup> Lambert 1979, 1984, Peregalli 1991

<sup>68</sup> As well as Secchia's notorious article on the 'Gestapo's mask', this idea percolated throughout PCI internal missives. This was true even of texts directly aimed at defending the turn, and discrediting dissidents. APC 7.3.17, 'Direzione PCI Italia occupata a i comitati federali, ai tutti i compagni [lettera per Roma]', 10.4.1944, 'sulla svolta'. This sent the following instruction to PCI federal committees: 'There are comrades who already in the past have found our position on the national question and democracy in contradiction with the principles of Marxism-Leninism and our final goals. These comrades generally think that the working class must defend national independence only in the case that the fight for national independence coincides with a fight for a democracy of a popular type or even the proletarian revolution, and thus that the fight that the working class must wage for national independence excludes any alliance with parties or social groups that

murder Temistocle Vaccarella, *Stella Rossa's* most important leader.<sup>69</sup>

The PCI had acted decisively to remove a potential rival. But what was most important was the lack of any nationwide dissident movement before the *svolta*, such as might have rendered the *svolta* perilous for Togliatti in the manner that the Actionists and Socialists had earlier caused problems for the PCI within the CLN. The dissident movements that had emerged around Italy were not only politically incoherent and disunited, but also lacked the technical means that might have stemmed from a common organisation. Government participation now greatly strengthened the PCI in this regard, offering it not only a greater air of authority but massively increased access to radio airtime and column inches, transmitting Allied propaganda from the South to clandestine organisations across the country. This greatly contrasted with the precarious state of the 'unofficial' movements like *Bandiera Rossa* and *Stella Rossa*.

#### 7.4. Tito's alternative

As dissidents sought to challenge Togliatti's authority, they looked to counter-examples from foreign communists. Yugoslavia's KPJ offered a particularly useful point of reference. While since 1941 Tito's party had adopted the Comintern's national-front strategy, building an armed rebellion against the Italian-German Occupation together with non-communists, it had ultimately come into sharp conflict with the Chetnik royalists. This battle reached its conclusion in November 1943 as Tito declared a republican government, which soon won Allied recognition. A further example was Greece's KKE. Not only was its EAM-ELAS front the country's dominant anti-Wehrmacht force, but it also sharply opposed the royalists who had emerged from the pre-war Metaxas regime. From the perspective of the spring 1944 it was far from clear what the results of these strategies would be; Tito's relations with Stalin remained outwardly close, and the KKE appeared to be master of its situation. Togliatti's critics could thus use these examples as reason to doubt that the Communist Parties were indeed bound by a common line.

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are not strictly popular [sic]. The position of these comrades has nothing in common with Marxism-Leninism. In these comrades' positions there are, rather, points of context with the anti-Leninist positions of the traitor Bordiga, chased out of the Party in 1930, who through Leftist phraseology ended up becoming fascism's helper and ally. Toward comrades who think like this we need an immediate work of clarification'. Notable in this comment is the elision of the dispute more proper to the dissident Stalinists (the insistence on an imminent 'proletarian revolution'), Bordiga, and then currents within the PCI itself who agreed that the fight for national independence was a fight for a 'democracy of a new type'.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. Left-Communists Fausto Atti and Mario Acquaviva were also executed in this manner.

*Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie's* discussion on Yugoslavia sought to emphasise this lesson in strategic possibility. It held that the KPJ had shown how partisan movements could change the terms of international politics. Ever since Tito's declaration of a republican government, MCd'I press had portrayed his intransigence as the key factor in shifting the diplomatic chessboard, and they also chose to explain the Soviet recognition of Badoglio by reference to this same positive example. Whereas 'the USSR had recognised the royalist government of Yugoslavia soon before the German invasion, establishing normal diplomatic relations with it, the living, active will of the Yugoslav people made itself felt in the fight against the foreigner and the legitimate representative of the royalist government General Mihailović'.<sup>70</sup> This 'changed the orientation of not only the USSR's diplomatic relations, but those of all the United Nations, who recognised Tito's government'.<sup>71</sup> This argument implied that the Italian communists could shift the diplomatic dynamic by building a counter-power opposed to Badoglio's régime.

Whereas *Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie's* generally downbeat tone reflected the heavy effect of repression, these comparisons with the KPJ were wildly over-optimistic. Tito's party was ten times larger than the entire Italian Resistance at its height relative to population, and by spring 1944 the forces it commanded had already liberated most of Yugoslavia. The partisans did not achieve these successes alone, for they benefitted from both Allied air support and the wider setbacks for Axis forces. Yet they had also captured these areas without any direct Anglo-American presence. This afforded them much greater freedom to shape their country's future than Italian partisans operating just miles ahead of the Allied front-lines. Also misleading was the implicit comparison between the Roman dissidents' anti-Badoglian positions and the KPJ's republicanism. The Roman dissidents had raised armed forces independently of the royalist government, with a view to ultimate insurrection, but never frontally clashed with it; across the border, tens of thousands of Communists died fighting the Serb-monarchist Chetniks.

In this sense, to invoke the Yugoslav example was more a moral condemnation of the PCI leadership than an assertion of a strategy to be followed in Italy. Comparing the Party to this much more successful foreign example, *Bandiera Rossa* cheaply derided Togliatti's strategy. A 2 June editorial concluded with a sharp counterposition of the two approaches, noting, 'It is hardly worth saying how much we would have preferred to have a Tito with his 300,000 partisans than a Badoglian government with the Secretary of the PCI as a minister without

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<sup>70</sup> 'Il riconoscimento ufficiale del governo Badoglio', *Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie*, 29.3.1944.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

portfolio'.<sup>72</sup> Drawing on the same considerations advanced in issue 2 of *Scintilla* and 'Buldog', it recognised the dissolution of the Third International as something that had 'really happened', a 'just recognition of the political and revolutionary maturity of the proletariat of each and every country'. This implied a focus on self-organisation, the need to build a movement particular to each situation. Yet it merely schematically condemned the PCI in the mirror of an idealised KPJ.

The further irony of this reading was that Stalin was not simply happy to allow Tito to follow his own strategy. The Soviet leadership was dismissive of the possibility of revolution in Yugoslavia, and once this was achieved it sought to impose its control over it. The KPJ had taken too seriously the Soviet promise of world revolution, assuming that the 'workers' fatherland' would support rather than suppress their initiative. Where the Yugoslavs looked naively on the good faith of their Soviet 'brother party',<sup>73</sup> the Roman dissidents went one step further by using an idolised view of the Yugoslav experience as a means of critiquing the policy which Stalin imposed on Togliatti. For the KPJ the only solution to this clash was a break, the recognition that their own revolution would require a split from the discipline of Soviet foreign policy. Some Italian militants, yet to see the effects of the *svolta* play out in full, found this recognition rather harder to achieve.

### 7.5. *Doppiezza* and Soviet foreign policy

Already in this study we have explored the emergence of a 'movement-Stalinism', the aspirations projected onto the Soviet Union inconsistent with the political instructions which emanated from Moscow. The MCD'I's attempts to justify the Kremlin's recognition of Badoglio, so strikingly at odds with its own strategy, were a case of such *doppiezza*. Also present within layers of the PCI membership, *doppiezza* was the attempt to justify Soviet or Party strategy as a 'ruse' or a 'double-game', where outer appearances did not conform to real intent. This was notably expressed in the idea that democratic politics was merely the prelude to an ultimate seizure of power. This separation of means and ends allowed the faithful to reconcile themselves to decisions like the *svolta* that would otherwise have merely offended sensibilities. *Doppiezza* was less a Party strategy than a militant culture, which internalised the tension between the revolutionary end goal and reformist practice.

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<sup>72</sup> 'Parole e fatti', *BR*, 2.6.1944.

<sup>73</sup> Djilas 1963, p. 15; in his own words, the Yugoslav Communists fell into the same trap as 'everyone in the long history of man who has ever subordinated his individual fate and the fate of mankind exclusively to one idea: unconsciously they described the Soviet Union and Stalin in terms required by their own struggle and its justification''

Roman PCI cadres indulged militants' belief in *doppiezza* in order to rally them behind the new line. This was strikingly apparent in a 16 April 1944 justification of the turn by Rome PCI cadres Fabrizio Onofri and Antonello Trombadori. Whereas *l'Unità* emphasised the tactical necessity of the Salerno Turn in mobilising all possible forces against Nazi Germany, this internal justification of the *svolta* explained its place in a wider revolutionary project. Posed as an explanation of the recent 'correction of the P[arty]'s political line', this purported to use 'Marxist-Leninist theory' to justify what was, at face value, a pact with reactionary forces.<sup>74</sup> More than Togliatti's own public statements on the need for national unity, this argument allowed cadres to set the *svolta* in a broad historical context, and indeed the wider international situation. Looking beyond the demands of partisan mobilisation, Trombadori and Onofri's text presented the *svolta* as part of a global strategy directed by what they called 'Soviet foreign (read: revolutionary) policy'.<sup>75</sup>

This first meant explaining why the Party was now collaborating with élites it had earlier presented as merely reactionary. This proceeded via emphasis on the need to defend Italy from the Western Allies' domination. Fascism had emerged from Italy's unfavourable position following World War I, with 'working-class defeat opening the way to reaction in those same countries where bourgeois discontent with the peace treaties was strongest'.<sup>76</sup> The royalists and the 'financial oligarchy' had embraced Fascism in search of 'real economic independence', but abandoned it once the Anglo-Americans began to threaten the peninsula. The coup against Mussolini was an effect of the élite's need to defend its international position: if the 'whole Italian people was tired of war' and 'the popular masses made a parallel contribution to weakening the régime', 'without the conspiracy within the corridors of power and the palace the Italian people would certainly not have torn down Fascism on 25 July'.<sup>77</sup> Not to recognise these élites' role in overthrowing Fascism was 'abstract political moralism'; worse, to allow Italy to remain divided in the face of the new occupying power was merely to 'play the Anglo-Saxons' game'.<sup>78</sup>

The need to assert Italy's independence was explicitly tied to the Soviet foreign policy interest of blocking Anglo-American hegemony in the Mediterranean.<sup>79</sup> In this sense, '[the Kremlin's] recognition of the Badoglio government's cobelligerent status represented the

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<sup>74</sup> 'Il fascismo e il movimento rivoluzionario in Italia', 16.4.44, APC/7/10/1.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.



first move in the “Italian round” of the diplomatic offensive conducted by the USSR against the conservative Anglo-American policy’.<sup>80</sup> To empower the ‘living forces’ of the nation was also to pose obstacles to the Western’ Allies ‘imperialist designs’ on Italy.<sup>81</sup> The pair portrayed this as a Soviet foreign policy goal, for ‘the USSR, the revolutionary movement, has no interest in a formally, juridically independent Italy which is in reality subjected to Anglo-American imperialism through its own internal economic structure’.<sup>82</sup> They recognised that the Kremlin had already given ‘indications’ of its policy through the Moscow Conference and Tehran Declaration, Togliatti’s radio broadcasts and the diplomatic recognition of Badoglio.<sup>83</sup> The PCI had, alas, remained ‘deaf’ to these indications; fortunately, they ‘had in practice opened up a path for [the Party] to retreat down, however intransigent its formulas’.<sup>84</sup>

The PCI cadres baldly identified ‘the USSR, the revolutionary movement’, and the Salerno Turn. The *svolta* was a move on the ‘international chessboard’ not only compatible with Soviet foreign policy, but integral to and determined by it. This justification of the *svolta* emphasised the unity of Soviet and Italian communist strategy, portraying Togliatti as the instrument of Moscow’s initiative. The Roman PCI cadres even framed the timing of the *svolta* within this Soviet foreign-policy perspective:

After resolving the Polish and Yugoslav questions, and strengthened by its military victories, the USSR could now address the Italian question. The diplomatic accreditation of the Badoglio government and Ercoli’s [Togliatti’s] declaration a few days after arriving in Naples put the opposition parties’ policy back on track. If [Togliatti] only intervened 7 months after the armistice was declared and 6 months after [Italy] was recognised as a cobelligerent, in our view this was not so much because it took the Bari Congress to show that the Italian situation was blocked (it already had been, to varying degrees). It was more that his arrival from Moscow would too obviously appear as a card played by the USSR, and it thus had to be delayed until Russian policy – tied up in the Polish and Yugoslav questions – had brought these two operations to their conclusion.<sup>85</sup>

This presentation of the *svolta* strongly foregrounded the antagonism among the Allies. While the ‘Anglo-Saxons planned to have Italy in their hands upon the war’s conclusion’,

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

the USSR's 'foreign (read: revolutionary) policy' had 'thwarted their manoeuvre'.<sup>86</sup> This interpretation closely reflected Stalin's own rationalisation of the turn. As the Soviet leader had told Togliatti at their 4 March meeting, 'The existence of two camps (Badoglio-King and the antifascist parties) is weakening the Ital[ian] people. This is to the advantage of the English, who would like to have a weak Italy on the Mediterranean. If the struggle between these camps continues, it will mean disaster for the Italian people. The interests of the Ital[ian] people dictate that Italy be strong and possess a strong army'.<sup>87</sup> Ordering the turn toward Badoglio, Stalin emphasised the need for 'outwardly loyal'<sup>88</sup> relations with the British, and *l'Unita* did indeed present the *svolta* as an effort to secure the maximum possible unity against Nazi Germany. Yet PCI cadres were well-aware that the policy was also an aggressive diplomatic move.

The Soviet-foreign policy dimension of the *svolta* inevitably introduced a lasting tension within PCI strategy. Insofar as Togliatti's 'new party' sought to rally Italians around short-term democratic goals, the Salerno Turn built on Popular Frontism's tendency to reroute anti-capitalism into anti-fascism. It continued the Communists' efforts to place themselves at the heart of broad alliances that united democrats and patriots of all stripes. This also helped the Party to project the image of a national communism, dispensing with narrow class particularism and putschist visions of the seizure of power. Yet viewed in light of international politics, the *svolta* had a more definite sectarian edge, governed by the unsustainability of the Grand Alliance. Like Moscow's recognition of Badoglio, it was less a concession to the Western Allies' hegemony, as an attempt to counteract it, ensuring Soviet diplomacy some locus of support on Italian soil. In the short term, the pact with Badoglio prevented the Anglo-Americans from creating a government that excluded the PCI. Yet it also presaged the likelihood of future conflict.

This tension allowed the PCI to hold opposite sensibilities together in one party. Its broad alliance strategy had led it into government, affording it the prestige of a force for national Resistance and democratic reconstruction. Yet militants could also rationalise its policy in terms of *doppiezza*. This meant imagining that after a first period of institutional alliances the Party would eventually signal the *ora X* of insurrection. Togliatti himself never planned such an end goal,<sup>89</sup> and other cadres pointed to the harmful effects that such a mindset

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>87</sup> Cited in Aga-Rossi and Zaslavsky 1997, p. 72 (2011, p. 66; Dimitrov 2003, p. 304)

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> See Di Loreto 1991.

could have: Turin organiser Arturo Colombi lamented that militants conceiving national unity in terms of *doppiezza* would 'surely fall into passivity, if they thought they should instead await 'the "real" struggle against the bourgeoisie'.<sup>90</sup> Yet whatever the PCI's gradualist practice, notions of the 'ruse' flowered in a party which never explicitly renounced its revolutionary end goal, and thousands of whose militants held on to their weapons even after 1945.<sup>91</sup> Roman PCI cadres' discussion of the Soviet foreign policy chicanery behind the *svolta* could only encourage this notion.

Such a vision was also implicit in the way the Party spoke about class. As Pavone notes in his analysis of the civil, class, and national wars taking place in the Resistance period, the combination of these three terms could lead them to have different meanings simultaneously.<sup>92</sup> In his view, the hostility directed against the adjective could not but redound on the noun, such as to present all industrialists as collaborationist, or the police as ex-Fascist. Yet the same time, this was a language which allowed the Party to speak to different sensibilities, since one could either surmise that the problem to be fought was either the police, the industrialists and the capitalists, or else the fascist presence within each of these layers. Even where the Party's explicit strategy was for national-unity and capitalist reconstruction, the rerouting of class radicalism through these compounds allowed it to speak to a more militant audience.

For their part, Soviet officials in Italy did not think that the *svolta* meant a permanent acceptance of national unity and non-fascist industrialists. Indicative in this regard are the writings of Soviet diplomat Alexander Bogomolov, who had recently replaced Andrey Vyshinsky on the Allied Advisory Council for Italy. Writing to Vyshinsky on 6 April in reaction to the *svolta*, Bogomolov noted the likely future conflict with British interests in the Mediterranean, and indeed 'an internal situation becoming increasingly favourable for us'. He could 'not see any possibility of Italy avoiding a revolutionary situation'.<sup>93</sup> As Pons notes, while Bogomolov did not as such represent a Kremlin point of view, his reading does at least reflect Soviet leaders' conception of spheres of influence as mobile and unstable. It equally reflected the understanding that Soviet policy and the PCI's fate were closely

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<sup>90</sup> 'Lettera di Luca alla direzione', 25.1.1944, IPRAC/3..

<sup>91</sup> Zaslavsky 2004 presents evidence for the PCI having had paramilitary structures into the postwar period. While it is possible that some outside event or shock may have forced the Party into renewed armed activity, including to defend itself against repression, the demobilisation of the armed demonstrations of July 1948 showed that Togliatti's strategy was premised on democratic advance rather than any attempted coup.

<sup>92</sup> Pavone 2014, p. 382.

<sup>93</sup> Cited in Gori and Pons (eds.) 1998, p. 42.

interlinked: Bogomolov worried that the Party was not really preparing itself for the ultimate clash with reactionary forces.<sup>94</sup>

Postponing that struggle to an undefined future, the *svolta's* immediate effect was, indeed, to displace Resistance politics onto the institutional terrain. With the CLN parties now in government, the clandestine movements in occupied Italy could have little effect on party leaders' political choices. The partisan campaign in the North was still intensifying, and was already mobilising far greater numbers of Italians than anything that had taken place in the South or Centre. Yet the agreements reached at Salerno set the political limits of what these partisans could achieve.<sup>95</sup> Involvement in government greatly strengthened the CLN parties relative to other anti-fascists, allowing them a platform to expand their influence and shape national reconstruction. Yet as they joined forces with the central state, these parties also became responsible for maintaining social stability in liberated regions. It was this that shaped their approach at the end of spring 1944, as the Allies made their final march toward Rome.

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<sup>94</sup> As Pons relates in *ibid.*, pp. 48–52.

<sup>95</sup> See section 8.5.

## Chapter Eight

### The missing insurrection

Since the Anzio landings the frontlines had been close to static. For over three months, the Allies remained agonisingly close to the capital. The forces holding the coastal salient at Anzio were cut off from the armies assaulting Monte Cassino, who failed in three offensives to cut the Wehrmacht's Gustav Line. The breakthrough finally came at the end of spring. On 11 May the Allies launched a fourth assault on Monte Cassino, finally capturing the mountain citadel on 18 May. This opened the way for the Fifth and Eighth Armies to advance north through the now-divided Gustav Line. Five days later the Canadians and Poles launched a renewed offensive at Anzio. Fearing encirclement, Field Marshal Kesselring mounted a tactical retreat in order to preserve the Wehrmacht's Tenth Army. The Allies were now poised to overrun the capital itself.

The German High Command had little intention of defending Rome. Over the last nine months this had been an 'open city' in name only; it remained a Wehrmacht supply base, and was thus subject to Allied bombing deep into the spring. But the German leadership considered impossible any fighting defence through city streets, and began withdrawing its forces in March. The Wehrmacht ran down its food and fuel reserves as it prepared to fall back to a defensive line north of Florence.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, the Fifth Army's turn toward the capital at the end of May was of dubious military merit, for it allowed the German forces north of Anzio to retreat in good order and continue the Italian Campaign. Yet the fall of the first Axis capital was of obvious symbolic importance: as Roosevelt told Americans, they were 'One up, two to go'.

The prospect of Wehrmacht withdrawal had long excited spectres of social unrest. Italian police, Vatican officials and Allied planners were each concerned that the fall of the regime could produce a dangerous vacuum of authority.<sup>2</sup> Their fears particularly focused on the

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<sup>1</sup> 'Food situation in Rome', 21.3.1944, NA/WO204/2452/46/150/5, shows AMG fears that they would arrive to find a starving population. Sir D'Arcy even suggested that flour be delivered to the Pope in order to alleviate the popular suffering (see e.g. FO 371/43870/5055), though this was ruled out on the grounds that it would indirectly aid the Germans.

<sup>2</sup> Bocca 1966 contradicts Battaglia's argument that the lack of insurrection in Rome was a 'masterpiece of Vatican diplomacy', instead rightly drawing attention to the weakness of the Resistance as well as the fact that ecclesiastical pressure was insufficient to preventing insurrections in the Northern cities. Missing from this analysis however are the Resistance forces outside the CLN (Bocca refers to the 'loss of the Roman Resistance's only effective armed force, the *gappisti*', notwithstanding its tiny numbers even prior to the Fosse Ardeatine massacre forced its militants to flight; p. 342), as well as the PCI's own different attitude toward what insurrection would entail in these other cities: see section 8.5.

possibility of rival armed groups attempting *coups de main*, or even a descent into chaos, before the Allies could assert their own control. Even if this did not mean partisans actually trying to seize power, there was also the prospect of looting, should police control and the food supply not be rapidly restored. The CLN president's diary spoke of the 'many people around [him] worried by Rome's handover from the Germans to the Allies'. They, the partisans, the Vatican and the Allies all asked one same question: 'Who can ensure public order'?<sup>3</sup>

There were in fact no upheavals. As American and British tanks rolled into Rome on the afternoon of 4 June, the city was largely quiet. The retreating Wehrmacht sought above all to protect its forces from attack, and there were only isolated skirmishes between partisans and the retreating German columns. In previous days the Allies had warned Resistance leaders against 'adventurist' attacks, telling them not to mount any uprising before they received a codeword. The call for action never came. The Allied armies rapidly established their own control of strategic points around the city, from the Colosseum roundabout to the Altare della Patria, stations, bridges and government buildings. Their only use for the partisans was as an interim police force, charged with preventing looting. The capital had changed hands without any popular uprising.

This also allowed a change of government. The King and Badoglio had committed to withdraw from the political stage once the Allies reached the capital, and they immediately fulfilled these engagements. On 5 June, Vittorio Emanuele III named his son Umberto as *Luogotenente*, establishing a Regency that effectively took over the Crown powers. Three days later Badoglio resigned as Prime Minister, handing over the reins to Ivanoe Bonomi. The royalists' honouring of these commitments was conditional on the behaviour of the anti-fascist parties, who had to show their respect for constitutional order. This was a carefully orchestrated change of government; any attempt at a *coup de main* in the capital, or even widespread disorder, threatened to undermine the institutional pact and turn the royalists against their CLN partners.

The generally weak state of Resistance organisation also undermined the possibility of any such uprising. As we saw in Chapter Six, Nazi repression had broken the back of the most significant partisan movements, and the Fosse Ardeatine massacre in particular served to discourage armed actions. This bloodshed also had a demobilising effect on the wider population, which had proven poorly prepared to take part in strikes and protest actions.

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<sup>3</sup> Bonomi 1947, p. 191 (4.6.1944 diary entry).

This is not to say that the Resistance had died away completely; partisan units remained active on the city periphery, and there were still militants who planned an armed uprising. Yet any such action would now have to be conducted against the express instructions of the CLN. Even dissident movements not bound by this coalition's discipline were little able to mount an uprising in open defiance of the other anti-fascist parties.

As we see in Chapter Eight, the dissidents were also restrained by Allied pressure. Across the spring, AMG officials worked to head off the threat of 'subversive organisations' attempting a *coup de main* at the moment of German withdrawal. Without doubt, the most lurid of such fears were based on exaggerated estimates of these movements' military strength. Yet Allied pressure was necessary to hold back the most adventurist bands, who remained a destabilising presence even after the capital was liberated.<sup>4</sup> Armed assaults on the last Fascist holdouts, the storming of government buildings, and the spike in recruitment for the 'Red Army', all indicated that dissidents planned to continue extending their armed organisations. The AMG did not long tolerate this threat to public order. Over the Occupation period militants had suffered grave sacrifices in the name of building armed organisation. They would now be demobilised.

### 8.1. A peaceful takeover

The prospect of insurrection was a key element of partisans' imaginary. It offered the hope of actively helping to liberate their city, rather than await outside aid. They could eliminate the vestiges of Fascism, and perhaps even assert their own control. Despite the low level of popular mobilisation in Rome, examples from elsewhere in Italy hinted that this might be possible. Naples had at the end of September 1943 seen soldiers and civilian insurgents push out the Wehrmacht even before the Allies arrived. Despite Rome's very different social profile, strikes in the Northern cities had also convinced PCI cadres that such actions could help build toward an insurrection, galvanising a mood of mass mobilisation. In late January, the Party prepared a call for an 'insurrectionary general strike' in the capital, only to cancel it as the Allied advance stalled. It now developed the plan to organise a general strike through the CLN, as a step toward this ultimate uprising.

After repeated delays, the CLN called the general strike for 3 May. The action sought to shut down the city by paralysing its transport network. This could help give the impression of a truly collective action, and galvanise a mood of revolt. However, the Germans easily

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter Nine.

foiled the strike. Occupying the tram depots on the night of 2 May, they forced the workers already on-shift to keep the service running into the next day. Some walkouts were more successful, from the state cigarette factory to the Testaccio slaughterhouse and *Il Messaggero* newspaper. Yet the few thousand strikers had little impact on the city as a whole. *L'Unità* issued a short article on locations where strikes had taken place, but was unable to present this as any kind of breakthrough in popular mobilisation. Internal dossiers recognised that it had been a grave failure,<sup>5</sup> accusing the other CLN parties of 'boycotting' the strike. This augured poorly for trying to organise an armed uprising in concert.

The AMG feared infighting among partisan forces. Already in the build-up to their arrival, the Vatican and the British Ambassador strongly pressed for measures to prevent fighting in city streets. In his missives to the War Cabinet from Rome, Sir D'Arcy Osborne expressed his fears about the moment of Wehrmacht withdrawal, which threatened to leave a vacuum of authority. He explained that for want of 'any obviously indicated and universally respected figure to take charge and issue orders on German evacuation and pending [sic] the installation of Allied authority',<sup>6</sup> clashes could emerge between rival leaderships. Seeking to stave off this threat, he advocated the creation of an Italian military body that could immediately assert its authority. Sir D'Arcy Osborne saw portrayed a risk of 'confusion and possible conflict involved in a scramble to secure control of the city for the ostensible purpose of protecting it, between Badoglio representatives, the political party chiefs, and possibly the dissident communists'.<sup>7</sup>

These latter were a danger because they were an unknown quantity. Officials had an only diffuse awareness of the dissidents' intentions, an understanding also clouded by alarmist intelligence. Indicative of this climate was a *carabinieri* report on 8 May, emphasising the dangers to police control. It claimed that the MCD'I had 'the secret aim, together with the other extreme-Left parties, of seizing control of the city, overthrowing the monarchy and government and implementing a full communist programme while the other parties are preoccupied with chasing out the Germans'.<sup>8</sup> The British Ambassador offered the War

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<sup>5</sup> APC/Comitati Dirigenti/62/Roma/1235-1245. Idem, 1257-1259, the Catholic-Communists likewise complained of 'four of the six' other CLN parties' non-participation in the strike.

<sup>6</sup> NA/FO37/43873/8769, 2.6.1944.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. A 27.4.1944 report from AMG to ACC (in NA/WO204/2452) aptly noted the reconciliation of political and military leadership thanks to the new government, thus identifying the real threat not in 'civil war' between the CLN parties and the royalists, but rather 'anarchy' owing to the desperate food situation.

<sup>8</sup> 'Notizie sui partiti della concentrazione di sinistra', 8.5.1944, copy in FGPCI/62/1362-4.



Cabinet a rather more tempered assessment.<sup>9</sup> Sir D'Arcy reported while the 'population in general' presented no danger, there remained the threat of 'looting by hooligans if all forces of order disappear'.<sup>10</sup> This combined with the possible 'danger of anti-German demonstrations and disturbances from a small dissident communist party which disavows instructions of [the] official Italian communist party'.<sup>11</sup>

Preparations to avert this threat were already underway. On the same day as Sir D'Arcy's report to the War Cabinet, the Allied Chiefs of Staff relayed to General Wilson the Vatican's hope for a 'despatch of small Allied force to show itself at central point of town', which could 'demonstrate impending Allied control and administration and serve to avert disorders'.<sup>12</sup> This force was organised, together with measures designed to keep the partisan movements under control. Particularly important in this regard was Roberto Bencivenga, whom the Badoglio government had already in March appointed as military commander in Rome. His authority owed to his role in the monarchist Resistance, which allowed him to straddle the divide between the partisan movements and the Royal Army. He was entrusted with ensuring civil order.<sup>13</sup>

Bencivenga also imposed his control over the MCD'I. His influence in part owed to his personal connections to Antonino Poce, with whom he had spent time in *confino*. Yet he also exerted more direct pressure. At the end of May, Bencivenga organised an encounter between a British major and Poce in the grounds of Villa Borghese, where Poce was told he would be arrested if the forces under his command were guilty of 'disorders'. Poce angrily protested this restriction in a 2 June letter to Bencivenga, insisting that his men would 'go to the police stations and eliminate whomever we do not find suitable'.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, he did agree to wait until he was issued with a codeword before he issued the call for action, and then in turn passed this information on to band leaders. Instructions issued on the same day as his letter to Bencivenga stated that militants should not launch the insurrection until the codeword was received. If there was a popular uprising they should join it, but they should not themselves provoke it.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The report arrived too late for the Cabinet to act on it. Similar themes were present in Vatican communications to the AMG, and D'Arcy's views likely influenced by the Holy See's own.

<sup>10</sup> NA/FO37/43873/8769, 2.6.1944.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> NA/WO204/2452/2879, 1.6.1944.

<sup>13</sup> See 27.4.1944 report in NA/WO204/2452.

<sup>14</sup> Poce to Bencivenga, 2.6.1944, in MSdL/FSC/91.

<sup>15</sup> Kurzman 1975, p. 374, highlights Poce's role in dampening any idea of insurrection, following the meeting with the British major.

Bencivenga's call to action never came. Togliatti sent a radio message advising against insurrection.<sup>16</sup> Poce also preached caution. Mucci remonstrated with his comrade. He argued that it would still be worth taking over public buildings and declaring a Republic. This could have a propaganda effect in publicly displaying the opposition to the Badoglio regime. But in reality the movement was powerless to act alone. As one *Armata Rossa* commander recalled, militants still marked 'by [their] opposition to the GAP action at Via Rasella', were unwilling to get in the way of the 'two great armies in battle'.<sup>17</sup> It would have been impossible 'to protect the Roman population from fighting through the streets and squares of the capital'.<sup>18</sup> They could, at most, join together with the Allied forces on their final advance. There was to be no general uprising.

## 8.2. The moment of liberation

After the twin breakthroughs at Anzio and Monte Cassino, on 2 June the Allies reached the edges of the capital. They faced German opposition to the South of the city, but this was above all a means of protecting the other forces in retreat. On the evening of 3 June Sir D'Arcy could write with content of the Wehrmacht's abandonment of the city, as tanks rumbled through the northern outskirts of the capital. The Allies had ignored German communications seeking a reciprocal promise to avoid fighting, and the Wehrmacht instead attempted to flee Rome in good order. For the more ideologically fanatical, the desire to punish the Resistance went beyond the actual Wehrmacht concern to retain control over the city. On 4 June, the SS loaded fourteen prisoners from Via Tasso into a truck, before then shooting them at La Storta, ten miles north-west of the capital.

In some areas of the capital anti-fascists did fight alongside the Allied troops. From the eastern outskirts of the Via Casalina and Tuscolana to Porta Maggiore, militants of the *Armata Rossa's* thirteenth concentration joined with Allied troops and other partisans in attacking the German convoys. These roads surrounded the area including Torpignattara and Centocelle, the most important centre of MCD'I organisation, and both Dantin Pepe's comrades and independent armed bands like those led by Franco Napoli joined in this

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<sup>16</sup> Secchia (ed.) 1974, p. 441. Secchia notes the the fact that 'at a certain moment in Rome unity had to take a lead over every other consideration', remarking that Bonomi's diary shows 'how in those days the CLN was thinking about anything other than popular insurrection'. 'In the North, too, there were no lack of manoeuvres to impede the insurrection, but [t]here unity was not considered a fetish, an inviolable taboo (pp. 440-41). In his reconstruction he uses a 10 April 1945 instruction from the PCI leadership in the North to highlight the Party's strong stance against whoever would block an insurrection.

<sup>17</sup> Otello Terzani, letter to Silverio Corvisieri, 8.8.1979.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

fighting. In this effort they took around sixty German soldiers prisoner. Four of the MCd'I's members were killed in the fighting, with Pietro Principato the last of those to die fighting in the Roman Resistance. There were tragic scenes in Soriano nel Cimino, north of the capital, where at least 11 Resistance fighters were killed by bombings on the very day of Liberation, as the US Air Force sought to block the Germans' retreat.<sup>19</sup>

For most of militants Liberation took on more the character of a triumphal parade, by the side of the Allied troops. Felice and Viviana Chilanti rode through city streets on a truck, surrounded by armed militants, leading chants of 'Viva Stalin'. At 3am on 5 June Antonino Poce was able to hold a public rally of *Armata Rossa* fighters at the Piazza del Collegio Romano, indeed a 'baptism' of this 'Red Army'.<sup>20</sup> In his speech he emphasised that after the sacrifices of recent months, this was not a return to 'tranquility, peace and goodwill', but the beginning of a fresh struggle. Deriding those who would rush to 'ingratiate themselves with the new boss', he emphasised the need for the building of an *Armata Rossa* to ensure 'capitalism [would] not return to Italian soil'.<sup>21</sup> After the rally, armed fighters paraded through Roman streets.

While the collapse of the Italian authorities in September 1943 had occasioned widespread looting, the Germans' withdrawal did not produce similar social unrest. The partisans did take over public buildings. Notable was Alfredo Paccara's band, which occupied the Navy Ministry after a battle in the Piazzale delle Belle Arti. This was however a policing operation, carried out with the explicit authorisation of the Allied forces. There were, however, some clashes between partisans and Fascists. On 6 June was a fight at a vintner's in Via Aurelia where 22-year-old Giulio Torsani accused the owner of hoarding. The wine merchant fatally stabbed the young man, a member of the MCd'I.<sup>22</sup> In towns to the north of Rome, including Viterbo, partisans took over public buildings without any apparent clashes with local Fascists.

The overriding atmosphere was one of social peace, and an untroubled transfer of power. Flying to the capital on 5 June, the King immediately handed over his powers to his son. Three days later, Badoglio resigned and the Prince Regent appointed Bonomi as the new *Presidente del Consiglio*. Having last left office in 1921, the liberal grandee formed a new civilian government, based on the same cabinet inherited from the institutional pact in

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<sup>19</sup> Zolla 1972, p. 40.

<sup>20</sup> 'Il comizio di Piazza del Collegio Romano', *BR*, 6.6.1944.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> 'Un delitto della V colonna fascista', *Armata Rossa*, 14/6/1944.

April. This coalition of the CLN parties declared itself a 'government of national unity'. There would be ministerial crises, and divisions within its ranks. Bonomi was succeeded in June 1945 by the Actionist Francesco Parri, and that December by Alcide de Gasperi. Yet the principle of a 'government of national unity' would endure into the postwar period, as the Allies and the Resistance fought to free the rest of Italian territory from German Occupation.

### 8.3. Open organisation

As the Fascists fled with the Germans, the dissident communists were able to set up bases of their own around the city. These allowed them to expand their public profile, recruit new militants, as well as set up centres for popular relief efforts. Already the day before the Allies' arrival militants occupied a *Polizia dell'Africa Italiana* station in the south-western Garbatella district, and in subsequent days they also took over two abandoned schools as well as apartments on the central Via Nazionale. These latter now served as the MCd'I's headquarters, from where it produced its newspaper and organised the activity of its local sections. A further notable site occupied by its militants was the building of the Fascist Large Families Union on the Corso Vittorio Emanuele which now became the seat of the movement's women's group.

These sections provided the basis for expanded 'Red Aid' efforts.<sup>23</sup> The 'finance and assistance' work run from the women's group headquarters included the provision of basic healthcare, food distribution and advice services. A 'political school' engaged in the study of Marx and Engels' doctrines on women, family and childhood', Soviet legislation on these matters, as well as the history of women communists and the role women could play in the communist movement.<sup>24</sup> Money for welfare initiatives was raised through dances, held as often as three times a week in each MCd'I section. Frequented by the movement's own sympathisers as well as Allied soldiers, these events raised the hackles of Agostino Novella. The PCI organiser characterised the 'free entry' for 'loose women' at such occasions an example of this movement's 'dubious morals'.<sup>25</sup> Boxing matches and gambling were further sources of funding.

The Nazi-Fascists' disappearance from Roman streets also allowed an intensified propaganda operation. All anti-fascist movements issued special editions of their

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<sup>23</sup> See report in ACS/Comando Generale dell'Arma dei CCRR/Ufficio Servizio Situazione e Collegamenti/ 3779/2441/3.12.1944.

<sup>24</sup> See 9.10.1944 report in ACS/MI/Gabinetto/Partiti Politici/181/3212

<sup>25</sup> 'Informazioni sul Movimento Comunista', 26.2.1945, FGFM/275/47.

newspapers hailing the new climate of freedom. Since the SS raid on its printshop in January, the MCd'I organ had appeared only twice, in a small format edition. By 6 June the Roman militants had produced their first freely distributed paper. *Bandiera Rossa* paid homage to the Allied liberators and stressed the role of the 'Red Army' in both the Liberation of Rome and in the future fight to free the rest of the Italian soil. This conciliatory note after the tensions of previous weeks was also reflected in the 14 June issue, with its 'Salute to Bencivenga'.<sup>26</sup> This homage to a 'guarantor of freedom' doubtless reflected a certain gratitude for the fact that he had allowed the movement to hold onto its weapons, notwithstanding his role in restraining its insurrectionist plans.

There were, however, to be just two legal editions of *Bandiera Rossa*. The Psychological Warfare Branch had taken over the old Ministry of Popular Culture building, and now introduced its own press controls. Such major dailies as *Il Messaggero* and *Il Tempo* were pulled off sale until they carried out an internal 'epuration'<sup>27</sup> of Fascist-loyalist employees. The shortage of newsprint also imposed further political choices. The six CLN parties were authorised to issue dailies, with *Avanti!* and *l'Unità* becoming the biggest 'political' papers. The PWB also allowed some non-CLN parties to produce weeklies, but these did not include *Bandiera Rossa*. Unable to get its paper onto the newsstands, it now had to limit its print media to internal bulletins. The PWB also imposed similar limits on the airwaves. A programme called *La Voce dei partiti* allowed the six CLN parties to broadcast their views by radio. The MCd'I's own requests were denied.

Both decisions reflected the PWB's hostility toward so-called 'subversive organisations'. Forces who fomented social unrest and opposed the 'national-unity' government were undeserving recipients of the limited available radio airtime and newsprint. The PWB's conservative approach was however also exploited by PCI leaders, who pursued their own distinct agenda of discrediting and breaking up the MCd'I. As Agostino Novella had put it, the Party had to 'liquidate *Bandiera Rossa* from the local political scene'. In this effort the AMG and the Italian police were both important allies; the PCI campaign against the MCd'I also included such measures as inserting undercover Party agents into the movement's local sections, as well as a broader political effort to play on its internal tensions. A particular coup was the PCI's success in organising the break up of the *Armata Rossa*. As we shall see in section 8.4., this brought a deep crisis in the MCd'I.

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<sup>26</sup> 'Saluto a Bencivenga', *BR*, 14.6.1944.

<sup>27</sup> This inelegant translation of *epurazione* [purges] was commonly used by Allied officials.

#### 8.4. The 'Red Army'

As the partisan war in the capital reached its conclusion, plans were made to build the Italian contribution to the wider Allied campaign. For the CLN parties now in government this meant rallying Italians into the Royal Army. The dissident communists focused on expanding the *Armata Rossa* into a broader force. Their stated goal was to pursue the Resistance struggle beyond the city, deploying a communist-led army to fight alongside Allied troops. Recruitment offices were set up around the Lazio region and local sections constituted in 38 sub-district areas. Wall posters and newspapers advertised the call to mobilise. The numbers who signed up to this 'Red Army' were vastly greater than those who had participated in the Resistance proper. Allied officials estimated its recruits at around twenty thousand by late June;<sup>28</sup> a poster issued by the *Armata Rossa* claimed to have reached twice this count within just three days.<sup>29</sup> These militants set up camps north of the capital in order to train the mass of new recruits.

In June 1944 building the *Armata Rossa* was the central focus of MCd'I activity. It had not been able to mount an insurrection in the capital, but hoped nonetheless to continue extending its military might. This would also help break the movement out of its geographic isolation. Poce and Sbardella sought to form a communist army, which could continue the Resistance into central and northern Italy. The Roman partisans had played a small auxiliary role alongside the Allied troops during the Liberation, and the Red Army sought massively to expand this cooperation while maintaining the autonomy of communist organisation. This differed from the stance of the PCI leadership, whose approach to military organisation in liberated regions reflected its new role as a party of government. Dissolving the PCI's armed bands in Rome, Togliatti called on partisans to join the regular armed forces.

*Armata Rossa* propaganda connected the need to liberate Italian territory to the need to replace the *Regio Esercito*. This was the message of an eponymous newspaper appearing on 6 and 14 June, printed recto-verso with *Bandiera Rossa*. It emphasised its interest in the 'most cordial relations with the Allies' and its focus on liberating Italian territory. Yet a 'people's army' would also have to reject the traditions of Italian militarism.<sup>30</sup> It dismissed the reactionary codes of the Royal Army, from its aristocratic command structure to its officer

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<sup>28</sup> ACS, ACC, 1082C/230, letter to Pollock from Major A.W. Nattersbey, 18.7.1944, cited in Gremmo 2015, p. 149.

<sup>29</sup> In Fondo Otello Terzani, Biblioteca Comunale di Follonica.

<sup>30</sup> 'L'esercito del popolo', *Armata Rossa*, 14.6.1944.

schools and the obligation for officers to be married. It related the 'brutal treatment of the troops' to the army's institutional role of 'preserving reaction in power'. Workers must fight alongside the Allies, but for their own interests: whereas 'in the normally organised [sic] bourgeois army you will give your life for a class that is not your own, in the Red Army you, proletarians, will be fighting for yourselves'.<sup>31</sup>

Alarmed by this unauthorised initiative, the Allies quickly moved to shut it down. A report by a British major to Colonel Pollock spoke of a situation 'developing very fast when bad characters and others posing as communist patriots were committing many outrages' in the Red Army's name.<sup>32</sup> He reported shopkeepers complaints of being forced by 'Reds' to advertise its recruitment. It was thus 'felt desirable in the interests of public order to stamp these acts out and firstly to eliminate the source of the soi-disant "Armata Rossa"'.<sup>33</sup> This source was Antonino Poce, who was arrested together with two of his comrades. Hauled before the Allied Military Court on 17 June, Poce was sentenced to three months' imprisonment, suspended. By Terzani's account, further Allied pressure came from a Soviet official, who insisted that the *Armata Rossa* stop 'abusively' using a name which belonged to his own country's army.<sup>34</sup>

The Red Army was thus banned from further recruitment. The PCI now exerted pressure for it to be dissolved entirely. Already in a May 1944 circular the Party had ordered members not to join demonstrations against the monarchy, affirming its opposition to 'extremists'. But its work to break up the *Armata Rossa* from within relied on instrumentalising its non-MCd'I leaders. Particularly useful in this regard was Amidani, as he sought his own path back into the Party. He wrote to Novella stressing the *Armata Rossa's* work fighting 'the common German enemy' and 'keeping public order following Liberation' 'regardless of any ideological or tactical differences'.<sup>35</sup> This was a clear attempt by the expellee to show his loyalty to the Party, emphasising – even in a letter to the PCI leadership – that his relations with it had remained 'uninterrupted' and (in contradiction with this) that he had made contact with its official organisation as soon as it was possible to emerge from clandestine conditions.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> ACS, ACC, 1082C/230, letter to Pollock from Major A.W. Nattersbey, 18 July, cited in Gremmo 2015, p. 149.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 149-150.

<sup>34</sup> 'Programma politico-economico', May 1944, FGF/275/1

<sup>35</sup> 'Relazione al comitato esecutivo del PCI', [n.d./June 1944?] FGF/275/18.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

Amidani, in turn, was a means of influencing Terzani. Novella had little time for this Left-Communist, writing in a 17 June 1944 report that this 'extremely vain' 'Trotskyist [sic]' had 'very close links with agents provocateurs'.<sup>37</sup> Yet his help was also necessary in winding down the *Armata Rossa*. This became possible after the AMG ban on recruitment - and Poce's sentencing - convinced Terzani that the militia was doomed. On 2 July Terzani thus joined Amidani and Avico in issuing a statement on behalf of the *Armata Rossa* leadership. They announced the dissolution of this body and 'invited' its adherents to 'support with all their strength the political activity of the PCI'.<sup>38</sup> Poce and Sbardella outwardly opposed this. Poce issued a blustering statement protesting *l'Unità* reports of *Armata Rossa*'s demise despite 'never having helped with money, men, action or supplies', and insisting that the militia's status was a purely internal matter.<sup>39</sup>

Meeting with Novella, they took a rather different tone. Sbardella said that he 'favoured the dissolution [of *Armata Rossa*] but could not sign the collective statement due to his *Bandiera Rossa* commitments'.<sup>40</sup> Poce protested that 'delay is necessary as [dissolution] will alienate the best *Bandiera Rossa* elements', pending a congress where the MCd'I could make a firm decision on its relations with the PCI. Novella noted Poce's lack of room for manoeuvre: 'the nature of his proposals gave me the feeling that I had a man in front of me who had been left behind by the march of events march of events within *Armata Rossa* and *Bandiera Rossa*, who sought to buy time by giving the impression of assuredness'.<sup>41</sup> The split became acrimonious: asserting the PCI's claim to *Armata Rossa*'s assets, Amidani and Avico alleged that the MCd'I had abducted 100,000 lire of its funds and warned PCI leaders that those implicated in this 'blackmail' might try to infiltrate the party.<sup>42</sup>

The collapse of this initiative also produced recriminations within the MCd'I. Together with the lack of a press license, it threatened to paralyse the movement's activity. Accusing Poce and Sbardella of having too easily folded in the face of PCI pressure, Mucci and De Luca mounted a coup within the organisation. This soon led to the formation of two rival leaderships each of which produced its own 'internal bulletin' and declared the other to have been expelled. Maintaining control of *Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie*, Mucci and De Luca declared the MCd'I 'the PCI's number-one enemy' and bewailed the attempt by the

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<sup>37</sup> 'Noti sui dirigenti dell'"Armata Rossa" ', 17 June 1944, FGF/275/7.

<sup>38</sup> 'Discorso sulla liquidazione dell'Armata Rossa', 2 July 1944, FGF/275/16.

<sup>39</sup> 'Brevi note su "Bandiera Rossa" ', 15 July 1944, FGPCI/63/1344.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> [Untitled], 26.7.1944, FGF/275/14



'expelled Poce and Sbardella' to fuse the Movement into the Party.<sup>43</sup> In a letter to the PCI leadership they defended their autonomy and denied these latter's right to speak on the movement's behalf.<sup>44</sup>

This infighting reflected the collapse in the movement's morale after the folding of *Armata Rossa*, rather than lasting orientations toward the PCI. Disillusioned rather than defiant, De Luca met with the Communists' Giacomo Pellegrini, whom he told that he would 'stand aside from all political activity, exclusively working to learn Marxist-Leninist theory', without 'interfering with the PCI'.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, given that the Party was itself unwilling to let either 'extremist' leadership join its ranks,<sup>46</sup> the De Luca and Poce groups were reconciled by September. There was an ongoing dialogue between the two sets of leaders, and there is no sign of splits within the group's local branches.<sup>47</sup> Novella could, however, boast of 'the hard blow we were able to strike against the MCd'I by breaking up *Armata Rossa*, with many of its sections and members joining us'.<sup>48</sup>

### 8.5. From Resistance to insurrection

Rome was liberated but the Resistance continued. In central and northern Italy strikes and guerrilla warfare spread. Having already liberated pockets of rural territory, on 25 April 1945 the CLN could declare the general uprising in the Northern cities. The insurgents chased the Wehrmacht out of Milan, Turin and Bologna even before the Allies arrived. Partisans could boast of their role in liberating their cities, and an iconography developed of a Resistance triumphant. This also cast a harsh light on the lack of such an uprising in Rome, capital city yet poor relation of the national Resistance. As we have seen, political pressures helped an already weak partisan movement decide against an uprising. Yet it is also worth noting that the insurrections that did take place in the Northern cities were very different in character to that which the Allies had feared in Rome.

This principally owed to the fact that these latter uprisings reinforced the government's authority rather than to challenge it. This was clear in the instructions that Togliatti issued to PCI branches. He sought not to advocate a general policy against insurrection, on the Roman example, but rather to determine the political objectives of such actions. This was

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<sup>43</sup> 'Carte in Tavola', Disposizioni Rivoluzionarie, 27.7.1944.

<sup>44</sup> [Untitled], 31.7.1944, FGPCI 63/1357.

<sup>45</sup> 'Colloquio con De Luca del Movimento Comunista', 22.7.1944, FGPCI/63/1346.

<sup>46</sup> 'Relazione riservata', 29.9.1945, FGFM/275/56.

<sup>47</sup> Corvisieri 1967.

<sup>48</sup> Dal rapporto del compagno Novella', 24.3.1945, FGAN/87/311-318.

first notable in an appeal to PCI militants two days after the Liberation of Rome, to 'remember that the insurrection we want does not have the goal of imposing social and political changes in a socialist or communist sense'.<sup>49</sup>This was followed in the Northern cities even in parallel with a policy to argue 'with the greatest energy' for insurrection in each locality, and to mount the insurrection alone and in the name of the CLN even if the other parties refused support'.<sup>50</sup> Just as the lack of insurrection in Rome had helped the CLN into government, uprisings in other cities would also bind militants to this coalition.

Togliatti venerated anti-fascist militancy while also emphasising the need to respect the Party's sense of 'governmental responsibility'. His call to arms was thus designed to discipline his members' more sectarian mores, while also allowing a settling of scores with the Nazi-Fascists. This also acted as a pressure valve within the PCI, for it satisfied militants desire to play an active role in Liberation, even without destabilising the government pact. In this sense, the use of superficially militant tactics in the fight against the Nazi-Fascists was an instrument of the politics of 'national unity'. Its only danger came when dissident forces used these same tactics, in a manner that could provoke clashes with the Allied authorities or the other anti-fascist parties. The peaceful transfer of power in Rome had, however, allowed the Party to display its own ability to rein in these elements in accordance with the deal reached at Salerno.

Allied reticence over the Resistance's destabilising potential was, in this sense, ill-founded. Such statements as the General Alexander's 13 November 1944 call on partisans to demobilise over the winter could drive a certain diffidence toward the liberators in Resistance ranks, moreover pointing to the lack of weight the Anglo-Americans placed on their military contribution. Yet the PCI leadership guarded against any behaviour that might produce conflict with the Allies. The uprisings in the Northern cities created no lasting threat to social peace, and in each case were followed by an immediate call for partisans to hand in their weapons. Briefly seizing control of towns and cities before handing control to the AMG, these insurrections showed the Italian role in the war of liberation as well as the CLN's respect for Allied authority.

In the weeks before the Allies arrived in Rome, military planners had effectively forestalled any disturbances. The fourth day of June had seen a peaceful transfer of power, as the Wehrmacht retreated without major resistance and partisans shied from

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<sup>49</sup> Cited in Secchia 1974, p. 509. Lambert 1985 presents the PCI's use of insurrection as a pressure valve for militancy, which would also demonstrate the Party's ability to rein in disorder.

<sup>50</sup> Cited in Secchia 1974, p. 441.

any attempt at a *coup de main*. The capital had seen street parties, and not street fighting. Yet the social conflict that had simmered in Rome over recent months did not simply disappear with the Allies' arrival. The new government had taken over a capital city ruined by war, and a state stacked with former Fascists; even in rebuilding the liberated regions, it presided over continuing shortages and massive unemployment. The armed bands circulating in the *borgate* were no contender for political power. Yet there was no rapid return to public order. As we shall see in Chapter Nine, the violence of the Resistance period would also spill over into the new Italy.

## Chapter Nine

### The constitutional arch

On the first anniversary of the Fosse Ardeatine massacre, a service was held at the Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels. Italian and Allied officials convened to pay tribute to the partisan dead. As the military orderly was about to begin the ceremony, a crowd of several dozen women burst into the Basilica.<sup>1</sup> These widows of partisans killed at the caves had not been invited to attend. They had instead come of their own initiative, in order to protest the presence of former regime officials. Vittoria Tarantini<sup>2</sup> headed straight toward the Prince Regent, demanding that he be escorted from the Basilica; another woman buttonholed the chief of police, attacking his 'nerve' in attending.<sup>3</sup> The women were quickly removed, lest they further disrupt the proceedings. They however received a concession the following week, in the form of an audience with Palmiro Togliatti.<sup>4</sup>

This controversy at the end of March 1945 encapsulated wider political realities. The CLN parties had been in government for almost a year, but within the old institutional order. There remained social tumult and disquiet at the slow pace of change. The Bonomi cabinet sat atop the state machine, but still faced a long fight to assert the central government's authority. This was, in part, a defascistisation policy, as it purged regime officials and suppressed the last Mussolini loyalists. But the government also had to win Italians' loyalties, through economic reconstruction and the renovation of the state machine. The capital remained a social powder-keg, as the circulation of weaponry threatened to light the touch-paper of mass unemployment, crippled infrastructure and absent institutions. Allied and Italian officials lay top priority on restoring social peace.

This also meant a fight to subdue the remaining armed bands. These included a range of groups on the sometimes indistinct spectrum between 'subversive' politics and organised crime. The Allies' arrival in Rome had not simply brought an end to partisans' armed activity. Some militants who had taken up arms under the Occupation continued to traffic in fuel and weaponry, expropriate from farms and grocers, take over land and buildings and carry out political reprisals. Police treated all such bands as a common threat to civil

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<sup>1</sup> The *Pubblica Sicurezza* report 27.3.1944, in ACS/DGPS/AGR/442/3490, reports that sixty women were involved.

<sup>2</sup> Widow of Umberto Scattoni, a militant of both the GAP and *Bandiera Rossa*, killed at the Fosse Ardeatine.

<sup>3</sup> Reported by *Pubblica Sicurezza* to have been the widow of Fernando Norma, an Actionist militant also killed at the caves.

<sup>4</sup> ACS/DGPS/AGR/442/3490.

peace, whatever their claimed political status. Former partisan groups could even be considered a catalyst to criminality, insofar as they gave cohesion and legitimacy to what might otherwise be considered mere banditry. At the beginning of 1945 troops raided the city periphery, where armed bands were most active.

The wave of arrests and trials splintered the MCd'I. This was nothing like the bloodletting of the Occupation period. Yet it more deeply wounded the movement's internal solidarity. Nazi atrocities had spread death and demoralisation, but never undermined militants' common sense of justice. This was precisely the effect of the postwar trials, which distinguished 'idealists' from those who had used partisan activity as a mere 'cover for common criminality'. This divide had not always been evident during the clandestine period; it was particularly nonsensical as applied to crimes against property committed during the Occupation. But militants who wanted to defend their own legitimacy bowed to this same logic. This led to the spectacle of partisans disowning their comrades before the courts, claiming that the 'criminals' had never belonged to the movement at all.

As we shall see in Chapter Nine, this criminalisation fed wider organisational woes. The suppression of the *Armata Rossa* posed serious limits to the MCd'I's growth, and this was compounded by its destructive infighting, its lack of a press license, and defections to other parties. Even in the first months following Liberation, it had declined sharply relative to Rome's other political forces. One plausible intelligence estimate rated its membership in December 1944 at 13,400; a five-fold increase on its clandestine numbers, but a poor reflection of its greater freedom to organise. This same estimate set the PCI's Rome membership at 51,260 and the Socialists' at 22,525; the dissident communists still counted more members than Bonomi's Labour-Democrats (10,150) and the Action Party (12,748), but lagged behind both the Monarchist Party (41,500) and Christian-Democrats (47,172).<sup>5</sup> And while these latter were building their forces nationwide, the MCd'I had little organisation beyond the Lazio region.

The obvious way out of this isolation was to organise a merger with similarly-inspired forces. However, militants were divided on whether they should attempt to join the Socialists or Communists, or else collaborate with other dissident currents. Since its origins *Bandiera Rossa* had advocated a united workers' party,<sup>6</sup> often highlighting the need for a congress that could resolve its differences with the 'official Party'. But with the PCI now a

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<sup>5</sup> 'Political situation in Rome', NA/WO204/12612/1-10.10.1944

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Verso il partito unico del proletariato', *Bandiera Rossa*, 15.10.1943.

party of government and by far the numerically superior force, the dissidents were forced to contemplate a merger on terms not of their own choosing. Since the Salerno Turn it had become difficult to insist that the political organisations of the Left were merely provisional in character, or that the MCd'I was the pole of attraction around which others should rally. Its members instead looked for new political homes.

### 9.1. The anger of crowds

Defascistisation was the central issue facing the new government. To remove the officials responsible for Fascism effectively meant establishing an arbitrary dividing line between 'those truly responsible for Fascist dominion and the great mass drawn along in their wake'.<sup>7</sup> While state institutions sought a measure of stability, critics accused them of failing to conduct an effective purge, protecting top officials while settling scores against less important figures. The entire *epurazione* process led to the removal of just 1,476 of 143,781 officials examined. Popular disquiet at the 'failed purge' was particularly concentrated in the perception that war criminals had gone unpunished. While the spectre of unofficial 'people's tribunals' soon died down,<sup>8</sup> armed reprisals against Fascists continued into 1945. Both Allied and government officials identified the role of 'subversive organisations' in exploiting this resentment, whipping up mobs and carrying out political assassinations in the name of punishing Fascist crimes. Across the first months after Liberation, a series of explosive incidents highlighted the unrest that this could cause.

The events surrounding the trial of Pietro Caruso dramatically evidenced the tension between state and popular justice. Rome's police chief during the Occupation, Caruso had played a central role in organising the Fosse Ardeatine massacre, and in September 1944 faced a capital case. In the days before the trial the words 'Death to Caruso' appeared in red paint on walls around Rome, and on the opening morning a crowd including victims' relatives formed outside the Palace of Justice. Overpowering *carabinieri*, the crowd burst into the courtroom where proceedings were due to begin. Finding Caruso absent, they turned their anger on Donato Carretta, former director of the Regina Coeli prison. While

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<sup>7</sup> Andreotti 2007, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Priest Libero Raganella (2000, p. 311), relates how he convinced MCd'I militant Renato Gentilezza of the pointlessness of individual revenge against a Fascist he had himself given refuge after 4 June: 'We did not risk so much to set up a people's tribunal and condemn a single Fascist in the whole neighbourhood. If you are not able to bring all the fascists in the neighbourhood before a people's tribunal, it is better not to set it up for just one'. 'Azione militare' (in MSdL/FSC/91), a set of instructions to MCd'I bands for the moment of the Allies' arrival, advocates taking Fascists prisoner and then putting them before such tribunals, rather than killing them outright. MCd'I dossiers in MSdL/FSC however report that they handed German and Fascist prisoners directly to the Allies.

Carretta was a witness for the prosecution against Caruso, the crowd angrily set upon him. Police and Allied officials were powerless to restrain the assailants, as they beat the prison director bloody. Dragging Carretta from the courthouse, his attackers unsuccessfully tried to tie him to a tram, before dumping him in the Tiber, where he drowned.

This violent retribution foreshadowed the scenes surrounding the botched trial of General Mario Roatta. He faced criminal charges for his actions as general and Army Chief of Staff under both Mussolini and Badoglio. He was first arrested in November 1944, as a commission of inquiry investigated his failure to defend Rome from Wehrmacht invasion. Further charges came from Tito's government in Yugoslavia - which sought Roatta's extradition for war crimes committed on its territory - as well as from a separate commission of inquiry investigating his role in the Fascist-era secret services. The first body to bring him to trial, this latter commission's focus included his involvement in the assassination of the Rosselli brothers, anti-fascists murdered in France in 1937. The proceedings against the disgraced general did not however deliver justice. On 4 March, as the commission was due to report, Roatta escaped from the military hospital where he was being held. Aided by his army comrades, he fled to Franco's Spain.

The suspicion that the authorities had turned a blind eye to Roatta's escape drove a storm of protest. Conspiracy theories abounded, blaming Bonomi, the Vatican or even British intelligence for assisting his flight. Such sentiments were strongly expressed at a protest rally on the evening of 6 March. Given the level of popular resentment, even parties which supported the government chose to participate. Speakers addressing the 20,000 people outside the Colosseum included not only Filiberto Sbardella but also representatives of the Actionist and Socialist parties, the CGIL union and the Union of Italian Women, and the PCI's Velio Spano. The initial rally was orderly, but some placards suggested an angrier mood. PWB officials noted with alarm such slogans as 'death to Roatta and his accomplices', 'We want a Committee of Public Safety instead of the High Court of Justice', and 'do you want another Carretta case? Throughout the speeches, voices in the crowd called for a march on the Quirinale palace, and as the rally broke up a section of the protestors headed in this direction.<sup>9</sup>

The advance on the seat of the monarchy led to violent clashes. As the thousands-strong crowd pushed toward the entrance, mounted troops intervened to block their path. Protestors began hurling stones at police, and one militant pulled out a grenade. A fellow

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<sup>9</sup> NA/WO204/6353/'Routine Report for the Week ending March 9 1945'

demonstrator tried to stop him, only for the would-be assailant to trigger the device by mistake. He was killed instantly. Word spread among protestors that the police had thrown the bomb. Shrouding their 'martyr' in a red flag, militants carried his corpse aloft as they proceeded toward the Viminale, home of the Interior Ministry. Finding it guarded by only a handful of State Police, they soon overran the building. Protestors occupied offices and hung red flags flown from the balcony. They also left a grim calling-card for the police chief deemed responsible for the 'attack', depositing the dead man's body on a table in front of his office. Some of those present attempted to find and confront prime minister Bonomi, but palace officials managed to block their path.

PCI cadres arriving on the scene sought to defuse the situation. As the crowd clamoured for Bonomi's resignation, *l'Unità* editor Spano insisted that his comrades would indeed confront the premier: unless there was a 'change of atmosphere', they would force him from office. But he also appealed for calm; 'We have waited twenty years, we can wait a few more days'.<sup>10</sup> This promise of action succeeded in dispersing the crowd, but the Party immediately rowed back from this stance. The following day's *l'Unità* made no reference to police or government wrongdoing; interviewed by PWB officials the following week, Spano instead praised the *carabinieri* for their restraint.<sup>11</sup> He damned the MCd'I, the *Movimento Partigiano* and Fascists for having organised a 'provocation' against the government.<sup>12</sup> Embarrassingly for the PCI, it soon transpired that the man who died at the Quirinale was in fact one of their own members.

The dissidents had themselves worked to fuel rather than dampen the anti-government mood, from their slogans at the initial rally to their active role in the Viminale occupation. *Bandiera Rossa* reported on the riot in enthusiastic terms, repeating the incendiary claim that a protestor had been killed by the police. It presented Roatta's escape as the work of a state machine still dominated by Fascists, which the government did nothing to remove. One Allied operative responsible for watching 'subversive organisations' noted the increasingly 'extreme' tone of Antonino Poce's comments on this subject. According to the 5 April 1945 PWB report, Poce had claimed that 'if he were in charge of the epuration the citizens of Rome would see every day some collaborators hanged'.<sup>13</sup> Like the riot at the Interior

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<sup>10</sup> NA/WO/204/6353/'Routine Report for the Week ending March 15 1945'

<sup>11</sup> NA/WO/204/6353/'Routine Report for the Week ending March 9 1945'

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> NA/WO/204/6353/'Routine Report for the Week ending April 5 1945'



Ministry, such sentiments expressed the anger at the slow pace of change, and a sense of injustice that Resistance fighters were bearing the brunt of the postwar trials.

The trials of postwar months had struck at both Fascist war criminals and the partisans accused of 'common crimes' during the Occupation period. The events of the Resistance period were being judged by a legal order inherited from before Liberation. In Rome this was well-illustrated by a case where the partisans who had killed Quadraro's fascist police commissar in March 1944 were charged with murder, before being absolved on the grounds that he had been a collaborationist. Here the judge had used a basically arbitrary political judgement in place of any clear legal rationale. From May 1945 the cabinet began to discuss a means of bracketing off the mass of claims and counter-claims for wartime crimes. This problem was ultimately resolved, if in rather blunt fashion, by the general amnesty announced by justice minister Togliatti in June 1946. Explicitly aimed at 'rapidly pushing the country toward conditions of political and social peace',<sup>14</sup> this policy epitomised the government's attempts to pacify social tensions in the name of national unity .

## 9.2. Holdout partisans

The other key aspect of restoring social peace was the disarming of holdout partisans. One of the tools of this effort was the *Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia* (ANPI) established two days after the liberation of Rome, on the model of the British Legion.<sup>15</sup> Like that association formed in the wake of World War I, ANPI was created as an 'official', state-recognised veterans' body that would replace the fighters' own organisations.<sup>16</sup> Given that ANPI emerged not simply as a means of representing the veterans, but also of registering and disarming them, it had an ongoing dispute with the *Movimento Partigiano*, which instead sought to galvanise the disbanded fighters in a new political force. An AMG report in December 1944 pointed to this latter's subversive character, describing the 'well-known' dissident-communist takeover of this body.<sup>17</sup> While the CLN parties had made 'an attempt to counter-balance this' by sponsoring the official Association', ANPI had 'made little

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<sup>14</sup> Cited in Canosa and Federico 1974, p. 138.

<sup>15</sup> Harris 1957. The AMG also offered former partisans some employment opportunities, by the official historian's account largely low-paid and menial.

<sup>16</sup> On the soldiers' movement in Britain after the end of World War I, and the use of the British Legion as a means of subduing it, see Ward 1977.

<sup>17</sup> 'Subversive Movements', 8.12.1944, ACS/ACC/245A/50/SD/280.

progress beyond setting up a head office at the Campidoglio'.<sup>18</sup> The central government thus instructed local prefects to form ANPI branches.<sup>19</sup>

The difficulties of demobilising the armed bands also reflected the reasons why they had first been created. In the Occupation period the social revolt of draft resisters and the unemployed had created the bedrock of the partisan movement in the capital, and a mass base for its political organisations. The Allies' arrival alleviated the social despair behind this mobilisation, but economic drives to political activity remained. Some Romans could be employed with the aid of parties and unions, whose resources and influence were rapidly expanding in this period. For their part, partisans' associations were plagued by the phenomenon of 'thirteenth-hour' partisans, Italians of thin or non-existent partisan credentials who sought the benefits and prestige conferred on Resistance fighters. The small benefits for demobilisation – 1,000 lire, at June 1944 black market prices equivalent to the price of a litre of cooking oil – were however rather less incentive to those who really had risked their lives in the armed struggle.

As the war continued in Northern Italy, there was still widespread scarcity in the capital. Rations were delivered with greater consistency than under Occupation, but remained at mere survival levels. A May 1945 police report strikingly illustrated the continuing lack of food. A city of over a million people was supplied just 15 heads of cattle per day;<sup>20</sup> hence 'meat is distributed only among the ill. Butter is nowhere to be found. The sugar ration often "jumps" to the next month. The capital's citizens have to live with a monthly ration of 2,360g of pasta, 200ml of oil, 100g of soup, 300g of fish and 200g of dry legumes. The great food shortages are barely touched by the 141,000 soup rations distributed daily. It would take 750,000 *lire* of annual spending to serve the most basic requirements, but few can allow themselves this much. Inflation reduces workers on fixed incomes to the blackest misery'.<sup>21</sup> Allied sources painted a similar picture of mass unemployment and ongoing food shortages.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.; this was later confirmed in ACS/ACS/248/51, 'Extract from Routine Report, 5 Feb. to 11 Feb. 1945'. Other partisan veterans' associations were also formed, before merging into ANPI at its founding congress in Rome at the end of 1947. It then became a charitable association which also acts as a political pressure group, promoting Resistance memories and values.

<sup>20</sup> Di Loreto 1991, p. 70

<sup>21</sup> ACS, PS 1944-46, b. 24 (Relazioni dei prefetti, Roma, 'Relazione mensile sulla situazione politico-economica e sull'ordine pubblico'), May 1945, Rome, cited in *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Harris 1957.

This also fed a different kind of 'thirteen-hour partisan' activity. Armed bands continued to operate in the peripheral *borgate* as well as neighbourhoods like San Lorenzo and Testaccio. They continued a campaign of robberies, armed expropriations and blackmail in order to extort resources from Fascists, industrialists and landowners. The distribution of part of the proceeds among a wider base of sympathisers, including through such means as 'popular dinners', allowed these bands to extend their political influence.<sup>23</sup> AMG officials bewailed the impunity of these militants, faced with the absent or complicit Italian police.<sup>24</sup> Most emblematic of this ongoing 'social banditry' was 'Il Gobbo', the sixteen-year-old gang leader who worked closely with the dissident communists. After the Allies' arrival his band had gradually extended its control over the *borgata* of Quarticciolo, for six months keeping out police through military force.<sup>25</sup> Alarming for the AMG, Il Gobbo even used contacts with Canadian troops to receive Allied arms, ammunition and food.<sup>26</sup>

These bands had little interest in handing in their weapons. As one PWB report reasoned, the left-wing parties' involvement in government ought to have allowed 'the collection of weapons from armed partisans' to 'be solved by the simple expedient of an appeal to the party leaders rather than by police measures on the German model',<sup>27</sup> and in August 1944 Socialist and Communist leaders echoed the AMG's call for partisans to hand in their weapons. Yet this was ignored both by those militants who still expected some future moment of insurrection<sup>28</sup> or who continued their armed activities. An 8 December PWB report on the MCd'I and *Movimento Partigiano* emphasised that it was 'extremely doubtful

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<sup>23</sup> See the 3 December 1944 letter from *carabinieri* chief Taddeo Orlando to the Interior Minister in ACS/MI/Gabinetto/Partiti Politici/181/3212. He reports that the MCd'I 'extended to its members subsidies and benefits, perhaps with means - according to what is said - deriving from political reprisals against ex-fascists.

<sup>24</sup> ACS/ACC/B245A/S50/Extract from file No. 636/3/23/281-9. The rest of the report exemplified the distance between officials' alarm at these groups' activity and their interest in the vagaries of their politics. According to the anonymous author, 'the Movimento Comunista has recently absorbed two other groups of the left, the Sinistra Proletaria and the Comunisti Libertari. The latter is an anarchist group of Trotskyist tendencies. In his 3 December letter to the Interior Minister, Orlando characterised the MCd'I as 'atheo-internationalist' [sic]. A report from 13 October 1945 included in the same file speculated that the dissident movement's decline from '60,000 to 4,000 members' owed to the 'decline of the moral and financial aid coming from the Moscow government'. One AMG official reasoned, on the contrary, that the movement was part of plans by 'Armando [sic] Bordiga' to unite the extremist Socialist and Communist factions, reasoning that 'Bordiga is regarded as a man who is very popular amongst masses [sic] and especially amongst workmen'.

<sup>25</sup> AMG officials reported that 'The band installed machine gun nests in strategic spots and successfully repelled sporadic efforts of the police to dislodge them'. ACS/ACC/B245A/S50/149.20/17.2.45

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> NA/WO/FO371/43874/R10258/'Harold Caccia (ACC) to Mr Dixon', 21.6.1944.

<sup>28</sup> See sections 7.6, 10.1.

whether they gave up their arms under AMG proclamation'.<sup>29</sup> As well as threatening law-and-order, this also served as a pretext for far-Right 'subversives' to hold onto their weapons. Allied officials expressed fears that 'opposed extremisms' would fuel each others' growth as at the end of World War I.<sup>30</sup>

With the majority of the population unemployed and the state slow to reassert its authority, subversive organisation remained intertwined with social banditry. The *carabinieri's* general commander spoke of an MCd'I which now united 'criminals, the unemployed and black market traffickers as well as elements of the old communist tendencies';<sup>31</sup> police and intelligence reports consistently emphasised the distinction between 'idealists' of the Resistance period and those who now joined bands as a 'cloak' for criminal activities. In practice this divide was rarely so simple, not least given militants' general lack of concern for the illegality of expropriating Fascists, and the fact that social bandits like Il Gobbo, Franco Napoli and Costantino Rossi were widely recognised Resistance leaders. What united the more politicised and latter was a common disdain for state authority and desire to represent and lead the *borgate* populations. This brought them into conflict with those who saw these latter only as 'criminal classes'<sup>32</sup> and sought to assert state control.

### 9.3. Criminalisation

By the end of 1944 the state commission for epuration was the subject of sharp political wrangling. The removal that month of PCI cadre Mauro Scoccimarro as this commission's director emboldened the forces in the state who sought to restrain this process. At the same time, the most explosive confrontations in the *borgate*, including the mysterious killing of a British corporal in Quarticciolo,<sup>33</sup> alerted police and AMG officials to the need to restore order over holdout partisans. The first month of 1945 thus marked the beginning of a police

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<sup>29</sup> Subversive Movements', 8.12.1944, ACS/ACC/245A/50/SD/280.

<sup>30</sup> NA/WO/204/12612/'Political situation in Rome, August 1945; WO/204/6346/'Report on conditions in Central Italy (north of Rome)', 13.10.1944. This latter further noted: 'Lastly there is the question of Patriots. Undoubtedly many of those who claim to have fought in the ranks of Partisans have not done so. But hundreds of others have endured terrible suffering and faced the gravest risks, and now find themselves unemployed and almost helpless in the various towns of this region. It is true that they have been offered manual labour which many of them refused as they considered it beneath their dignity. ... Undoubtedly these patriots are discontented, and this discontent may be a source of real trouble in the future. It will be remembered that the bands of Fascists and Communists, who caused so much disturbance after the last war, were demobilised soldiers who were unable to find employment'.

<sup>31</sup> ACS/Comando Generale dell'Arma dei CCRR/Ufficio Servizio Situazione e Collegamenti/3779/2441/3.12.1944.

<sup>32</sup> 'Extremist Political Parties and Movements', 9.2.1945, ACS/ACC/248A/51, SD/150; ACS/ACC/B245A/S50/149.20, 17.2.1945, 'The "Gobbo" and Salvarezza Affair'.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

campaign to subdue the 'subversive' organisations on the city periphery. With the wave of arrests and trials that followed, militants were charged not only with their illegal actions after Liberation, but even for common crimes under the Occupation. Rome's largest Resistance movement was particularly hard hit. Its militants were torn between standing by their accused comrades, or else attempting to distance themselves from their more disreputable associations. This question was complicated by the figures who aggregated around the movement in the months following Liberation.

A particularly harmful associate was Umberto Salvarezza, one of the most prominent Roman 'subversives' in this post-Liberation period. While he had not been active in any clandestine formation, after the Allies' arrival in June 1944 he founded a movement of so-called 'Gracchist communists'.<sup>34</sup> Writing to Colonel Pollock, the *carabinieri chief* highlighted the kind of problems this movement posed to law-and-order, speaking of 'irregular and Gracchist communists who acted 'outside the law, committing crimes against citizens' personal freedoms [and] carrying out true and proper police actions by arresting people and confiscating their assets'.<sup>35</sup> These armed bands forming after Liberation, and even members of the 'recognised parties', could 'secretly hide large quantities of arms that came into their possession ... following the distribution made to citizens in order to resist the Germans'.<sup>36</sup> Salvarezza was also a close contact of Il Gobbo's band in Quarticciolo, in both black market and weapons-trafficking activities.

Allied pressure had over the summer helped weaken the dissident communists relative to the 'recognised parties', especially by disbanding the *Armata Rossa*. In June 1944 they nonetheless authorised Salvarezza to publish the newspaper *l'Unione Proletaria*, a weekly of apparent communist stamp.<sup>37</sup> Harsh in its attacks on the Allies as well as the government, it soon became clear that this was a front for a group of former Fascists, who sustained themselves through organised crime. This *Unione Proletaria* which had seemed like a complement to the 'subversive' organisations,<sup>38</sup> by January 1945 revealed itself to be

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<sup>34</sup> A seeming reference to the Gracchus brothers, Roman popular tribunes of the second century BC, or else (adopting his own name from these predecessors) the great socialist of the French Revolution, Gracchus Babeuf.

<sup>35</sup> ACS/DGPS/AGR/I 441/2956, DGPS to Commissione Alleata di Controllo - Sottocommissione per la Pubblica Sicurezza, 4.9.1944, 'Attività di alcuni movimenti politici'.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> NA/WO/204/6284 lists this among the papers authorised by PWB.

<sup>38</sup> The *Museo Storico della Liberazione* ignorantly presents *l'Unione Proletaria* as well as similar fake communist newspaper *Spartaco* (produced in colour under German occupation!) without comment in a display of Resistance press.

their deadliest rival.<sup>39</sup> Funded by monarchists and Fascists, it had built up an armed structure in order to resist the new democratic authorities, and also struck hard against the holdout partisan movement. On 15 January, Il Gobbo was killed by an unknown assailant as he came out of the *Unione Proletaria* office. Alarmed by this as well as the killing of a British corporal in this same district, police launched a counter-offensive.

The next two days saw a concerted attempt to disarm all 'subversive' organisations. In some districts this took on the aspect of a military siege, as *carabinieri* established their control over previous no-go areas. Surrounding the *borgate* on 17 January before invading them the next day, the police arrested 97 people in Gordiani and 300 (among a population of twenty thousand) in the district previously controlled by Il Gobbo's band.<sup>40</sup> Stolen Allied weaponry, uniforms and ammunition were found in partisans' homes. Largely concentrated in the *borgate*, the raids also struck at dissident-communist organisation across Rome. Even in the city centre, at one closed-down school on Via Giubbonari used as an MCd'I section office, *carabinieri* found 44 guns, 100 grenades and over 30,000 bullets hidden within the walls.<sup>41</sup> Only the subsequent week was the *Unione Proletaria* office itself raided. Salvarezza was tipped off by his own police contacts before the raid could take place, but was finally arrested on 4 February.

This Salvarezza affair also illustrated the barriers to the defascistisation process. It is necessarily difficult to judge the true importance to this affair of organised resistance by the former officials of the Fascist regime. Any such claims have to rely on speculative links between the Salvarezza group, the monarchy, and sections of the police.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, Salvarezza's own intention clearly was to destroy the remaining partisan movement from within, by way of the influence he could exert over Il Gobbo. This was particularly illustrated by his attempt to induce the sixteen-year-old to conduct a bomb attack on a Communist-Socialist rally. It seems that the ultimate killing of Il Gobbo was the result of his refusal to carry out this instruction, now that he was aware of Salvarezza's true intentions and yet unwilling to obey his orders. Having inserted himself into the police even during the Occupation period, Salvarezza was protected by officials and never brought to trial, despite having been exposed as a violent Fascist in the Roman press.

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<sup>39</sup> Corvisieri 1999 and Recchioni and Parrella 2015 reconstruct this history in great detail.

<sup>40</sup> ACS/ACC/B245A/S50/149.20, 17.2.1945, 'The "Gobbo" and Salvarezza Affair'.

<sup>41</sup> ACS/Comando Generale dell'Arma dei CCRR/Ufficio Servizio Situazione e Collegamenti, to MinInt Gabinetto 142/3, 25.1.1945, signed Taddeo Orlando.

<sup>42</sup> Corvisieri 1999 elaborates a detailed analysis of this kind. This is, however, an essentially speculative narrative, of a conspiracy to restore Badoglio to power that was not in fact fulfilled.

Amidst the atmosphere of repression, parts of the MCd'I sought to disassociate themselves from allegations of criminality. Already in October 1944, a financial dispute had led the Poce-Sbardella group to declare Costantino Rossi's expulsion. As he came to trial in June 1945, charged with armed robberies in both the Occupation and the post-Liberation periods, his former comrades cut him loose, claiming that he had never been part of their movement. Rossi and seven of his Quadraro band proudly defended the political character of their actions, arguing that they had conducted expropriations in order to feed the wider population. This ultimately proved a successful defence under the terms of the 'Togliatti amnesty', although in a further trial in March 1949 the judge refused this defence of robbery from a known Fascist's home. The case instead collapsed on a technicality. In this latter case the crime had in fact been reported by Communists, Socialists and even a former MCd'I member, a reflection of Rossi's lasting split from this movement.

These episodes severely weakened the MCd'I's morale and collective identity. This first of all owed to the fact that the wave of arrests had allowed police to discover its arms stores and impose control in previously no-go areas, subduing the holdout partisan movement. Yet these events had also exposed its leaders' poor judgement. Poce in particular had veered wildly between naïve collaboration with figures who were nothing short of Fascist gangleaders, and then repudiation of the 'criminality' of the militants who were absolved even by the courts. Under conditions of Nazi repression, it had been easy to reconcile expropriations and robbery with more properly political conceptions of the movement's activity. This came unstuck as the movement became bogged down in the organised crime of the post-Liberation period. It had internalised the police's distinction between 'idealists' and 'criminals', dissolving the solidarity between its militants most involved in the social revolt of the *borgate* and those who sought a path to legitimacy.

#### 9.4. Unity projects

The difficulty for those who wanted to free the MCd'I from such 'subversive' connections was their lack of a common political strategy. From its origins the movement had united a variety of clandestine milieux, from Marxists to anarchists and less politicised partisan forces. This diversity had initially helped it become a leading actor in the Roman Resistance, rallying an armed force greater even than the traditional workers' parties. However, the disappointment of its insurrectionary hopes upon Liberation raised questions over its future purpose. Its armed strength had been weakened, and it now lacked influence on the democratic process. Proposals for a way out of the impasse varied from joining the Communists or Socialists to uniting with other dissident currents. Yet it was difficult for

its militants to act as a coherent bloc, when they favoured such incompatible solutions. As the movement swerved between rival unity projects, it continued to fragment.

This most of all owed to the movement's difficult relations with the PCI. As we saw in section 8.4., this problem had already raised its head in the split following the dissolution of the *Armata Rossa*. This dispute had displayed the different approach of the likes of Poce and Sbardella, who accepted the possibility of folding the movement into the PCI, and those militants like Cretara and Mucci who more firmly defended its independent standing. This was not, however, concentrated in a clash between different political theses, or even a split within MCD'I branches. Both groups continued to insist on their own 'Stalinist' orthodoxy, although the latter group sometimes made reference the 'particularity' of Italian conditions and need to avoid following Moscow 'blindly'. They were ultimately bound together by the fact that the PCI would not accept the movement entering its ranks *en bloc*, unwilling to accept a destabilising 'extremist' force.

After the dissolution of the *Armata Rossa*, Poce had attempted to establish ties with Amadeo Bordiga. Absent from organised politics since 1926 and expelled by the Togliattians in 1930, Bordiga nonetheless enjoyed prestige among certain layers of militants on account of his role in founding the Communist Party. Poce had in fact been expelled from the PCI together with Bordiga, and approached the Neapolitan engineer with a view to reconstituting a new force to the Left of the PCI. However, aside from their common hostility toward the Togliatti leadership, the positions developed by Bordiga had little in common with the Roman dissidents. This mostly owed to Bordiga's extreme pessimism about the prospects of a revolutionary movement in the immediate future. After a long spell out of political activity, upon his return in the immediate postwar period he emphasised the gravity of the defeat suffered at the hands of 'democratic' politics, and the need to re-establish the programmatic bases of Marxism.<sup>43</sup>

Already in the Resistance period, the Left-Communists, whose tradition stemmed from Bordiga's battle in the 1920s Communist Party, had sharply criticised the MCD'I's positions. Poce and Viviana Chilanti visited Milan in March 1944 to establish contacts with Bordiga's comrade Onorato Damen, only for this latter to term them 'Stalinists' whose proper place was in the Communist Party.<sup>44</sup> This Milanese organisation was strongly critical of the USSR, the vision of socialism it represented, and its international alliances. This also extended to

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<sup>43</sup> See Saggiaro 2010.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



a hostility toward the partisan war in general, deemed nothing but a nationalist deviation from the class struggle.<sup>45</sup> Even in its less passive variants, the Left-Communist approach placed an absolute priority on programmatic unity and coherence. Assessing the eclectic Roman dissident movement by such standards, Damen and then Bordiga each dismissed Poce out of hand.

The MCd'I's veneration of the USSR set it at odds with the anti-Stalinist currents now forming propaganda groups around Italy. This was evident in the conference held by the Naples Left-Communists in February 1945, also attended by Trotskyists, Carlo Andreoni, the anarchists and Poce, Cretara and Sbardella for the MCd'I. In his own San Lorenzo district Mucci had entertained friendly relations with the *Comunisti Libertari*. These latter together with the Left-Communists however used the Naples congress to push a strongly anti-Stalinist agenda, connecting their rejection of the PCI's strategy with a general critique of the Soviet social system and role in the 'imperialist war'. This provoked an angry reaction from Sbardella. He furiously attacked the pretensions of those who criticised the Soviet war effort, condemning this as a betrayal of the sacrifices made for the anti-fascist cause.<sup>46</sup> There was no basis for unity with these other dissident circles.

Mucci and Sbardella also travelled around Italy in the effort to create local sections in other cities. This had some success, in the sense that the MCd'I could indeed extend its organisation across the national territory, with particularly notable sections in Venice and Brindisi. Epitomising the contradiction in the movement's outlook, the Venice group<sup>47</sup> was led by former members of the *Partito d'Azione* who themselves sought a merger with the PCI. Since the movement's Resistance operations had been limited to the central Italian regions of Lazio and to a far lesser extent Abruzzo and Umbria, these other sections lacked

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<sup>45</sup> *L'insidia del partigianismo*, Prometeo, 1.11.1943.

<sup>46</sup> See reports in FG/AN/63/135-6.

<sup>47</sup> Enrico Borin and around twenty of his comrades formed an 'Association of Sympathisers with Communism'. His *Qual è il mio partito?* ['What's my party?'] was written in December 1943 but published only in abridged form in 1945. It presented a sensibility similar to that of *Scintilla*, praising the theories of Marx, Lenin and Stalin while connecting these latter to a maximalist perspective. It 'sympathised with communism but did not want to participate in the Communist Party before it could more serenely judge its behaviour, and disinterestedly make basic and simple propaganda for communist principles without letting itself be influenced by party *arrivismo*, opportunism and ambition and by demagogic systems'. The text was also notable for its attempt to counterpose the Church and the Christian religion, as it attacked 'the priests who abuse the weapon of religion ardently to defend the current capitalist institutions, taking sides against communism and thus also ignoring the communist principles of St. Paul who said "Whoever works eats and whoever does not work shall not eat [sic]'. 'All this contrasts with the Christian religion, because Christ himself preached and practiced a life in common with the humble and destitute. St Paul, true founder of the Christian religion, deprived of means, honoured himself on not living off the backs of those among whom he evangelised, and everywhere he went exerted his craft as a weaver' (ibid., p. 20).

the social weight the movement had built in the partisan mobilisation. Indeed, while by the time of the Constituent Assembly elections the Roman MCd'I considered itself too weak to put up candidates, a tiny Milanese group that gravitated to the movement after Liberation went ahead regardless, scoring utterly derisory results.

The movement's difficulties in establishing local sections also owed to the PCI's energetic efforts to suppress its activity. Novella's approach was most of all governed by the attempt to detach 'healthy' elements from the 'extremist' and 'criminal'. It was 'necessary to strike on the basis of their delinquent social base and their louche' activities, also by reporting their arms stocks and anti-democratic ends to the police.<sup>48</sup> Just as the PCI had instrumentalised Amidani, Avico and Terzani in its efforts to break up the *Armata Rossa*, the Party also sent its own militants into the MCd'I in order to help draw sections of its membership into its own ranks. In Viterbo, it recruited a former MCd'I leader Attilio Vagnoni, who then brought this local group into the Party's own ranks.<sup>49</sup> So, too, did it enjoy the spontaneous adhesion of other MCd'I members who worked to organise ad hoc mergers of their own local branches.<sup>50</sup> At a more indirect level, the Party also secured a coup against the MCd'I by registering the name *Bandiera Rossa* with the press distributor, thus preventing the dissidents getting their own title onto the newsstands.

In February 1945 the MCd'I nonetheless issued an 'internal bulletin' of this name, breaking the eight-month gap since *Bandiera Rossa's* last appearance. This strikingly illustrated the dispersal of the movement's leadership among more coherent forces. There were those who had departed for the Socialists, from 'the Matteotti brothers [who] are no longer with us', to Pietro Battara, who had 'left with good reason'. Even '[Raffaele] de Luca no longer sees us as he would like to', and was instead turning toward the Communist Party. 'Palmidoro, Guzzo, Pappalardo, [Gino] Paris and so many others disappointed by incomprehension

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<sup>48</sup> 'Dal rapporto del compagno Novella', 24.3.1945, FGAN/87/311-318. The Brindisi section leadership of the MCd'I, expelled from the PCI, were arrested at the beginning of June 1945 after a report on their weapons stocks. Sbardella accused the local PCI federation of having been at the source of the report ('Una protesta del Mov. Comunista d'Italia', *Il Partigiano*, 18.6.1945). The PCI insisted that the victims of these militants' blackmail efforts had in fact reported them ('Da Brindisi nota Informazioni', FGAN/87/53), but repeated the claim that these were 'adventurers' embarking on 'criminal actions'. Both Novella's explicit approach and police reports from this period do suggest a certain sharing of information. Note in particular ACS/DGPS/AGR/Sez I/441/04884 (Capo della Polizia a Gabinetto Min Int, 14.6.45), describing the PCI's effort to infiltrate its own members into the MCd'I. In fact, after Constantino Rossi's expulsion from the movement, local members of the PCI, PSI and even one former MCd'I member joined together in reporting him to police. Rossi's own attempts to join the Party after his expulsion from the MCd'I were rebuffed.

<sup>49</sup> See Attilio Vagnoni's reminiscences in Galli (ed.) 1984.

<sup>50</sup> E.g. FGFM/275/56.

and conscious of their good faith have left us'.<sup>51</sup> At the conference at the end of that month, Filiberto Sbardella tried to reassure militants that their hard work was not in vain: 'we can compare Communism to a cyclopean wall, which we build taking gigantic boulders one by one till we reach the right height'.<sup>52</sup> Less clear was that the movement was still building toward this end.

### 9.5. The communist idea

Faced with charges of criminality, elements of the MCd'I leadership pushed for the movement to regularise its position. This included the effort to expel elements in its ranks linked to the world of organised crime, measures of which Antonio Poce informed the Interior Ministry.<sup>53</sup> From September the movement was finally able to circulate a newspaper via legal channels.<sup>54</sup> To this end it was, however, forced to abandon its historic masthead, and instead took the new title *l'Idea Comunista*. Appearing every Sunday, the four-page broadsheet was edited by Francesco Cretara. This paper tried to reposition the movement on a more solid political footing, while also publishing numerous articles in homage to its Resistance 'martyrs'. This was accompanied by pamphlets setting out the bases of Marxist politics, in the movement's own idiosyncratic style.<sup>55</sup>

Above all the newspaper illustrated the difficulties that militants like Poce, Mucci and Cretara faced in turning what had been a clandestine and armed movement into one which issued propaganda at the fringes of a democratic society. There were articles that aptly pointed to the kind of difficulties that persisted under the first postwar governments, with such pieces as 'Enough with Reconstruction!' and 'On the Threshold of Winter'<sup>56</sup> highlighting the conditions of Roman tenants and labourers whose conditions remained dismal. Yet what the paper notably lacked was a common political line or perspective that gave a sense of collective strategy. Given the movement's longstanding embrace of Stalinism it could, at least, be said to be pluralist in its consistent positive references to the meetings of the Italian Anarchist Federation. But the movement's leaders seem not to have

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<sup>51</sup> 'A testa alta', *Bandiera Rossa*, I/1, 1.2.45.

<sup>52</sup> Cited in Perrotta 2016, p. 294.

<sup>53</sup> Reported in ACS/DGPS/AGR/Sez I/ 441/03562, Capo della Polizia to Gabinetto del Consiglio dei Ministri, 16.3.1946.

<sup>54</sup> Antonino Poce personally corresponded with prime minister Ferruccio Parri and Ivanoe Bonomi in order to seek permission to publish. ACS/Gabinetto/Archivio Generale/Fascicoli Permanenti, Partiti politici/Poce to Parri, 25.7.1945

<sup>55</sup> Including Francesco Cretara's *L'ABC del Proletario* and the Turin group's *Repubblica Socialcomunista d'Italia*. Poce 1947.

<sup>56</sup> Sulla soglia dell'inverno – idem, 13.9.1946, Orfeo Mucci

drawn any clear political lessons from their experience, and in particular remained attached to the insistence that the PCI stood at odds with Moscow.

This was particularly concretised in a debate on the present relevance of Lenin's *Left-Wing Communism*, one of many texts that had recently reappeared as part of *l'Unità's* own publishing efforts. An editorial preface to the opening piece in this debate noted the 'highly delicate questions confronted in [its] final part', described as 'personal views'.<sup>57</sup> The reason for sensitivity was that here, for the first time, the movement's press published an article suggesting that Stalin was not the direct heir and continuator of Lenin's work. Gabriele dell'Edera insisted that Lenin's critique of ultra-Leftism did not justify the kind of compromises made by Stalin, and highlighted that the Russian revolutionary had like Amadeo Bordiga also been a stern critic of 'opportunism'. The article was most of all a polemic against the PCI's misuse of Lenin's own text; it made no attempt to explain why the USSR had departed from the Russian revolutionary's approach. Yet scattered references to the need for 'great reservations' about the 'social actions in Eastern Europe', as well as the danger of 'Stalinist conformism' for 'the whole world's proletariat', suggested a half-formed critique of Stalinism.<sup>58</sup>

The editor's reply showed how far *l'Idea Comunista* stood from other dissident-Left currents. Cretara distinguished between the 'two Stalins', governed by *Realpolitik* and revolution respectively. This unusual analysis combined elements of past Leninist defences of NEP with a recognition of the limits inevitable to any 'socialism in one country'. Internal backwardness had compelled the Soviet leader to make unfortunate compromises, from the USSR's 'social stratification' to its reliance on importing Western expertise. This could only 'weigh on the stomachs of all idealists'.<sup>59</sup> But 'if Stalin the organiser has had to accept the hardest, most tortuous compromises with bourgeois politics and morality, Stalin the revolutionary has never ceased to feel that the end goal of the USSR's current defensive force and domestic and foreign policy is world revolution'. He could achieve this only with the aid of foreign peoples, which must 'break with an integrating [sic] progressive democracy and follow revolutionary principles', thus replacing 'capitalist encirclement' with a 'Union of Worldwide Socialist Republics [sic]'.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> 'Leninismo sospetto', *l'Idea Comunista*, 20.1.1946.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> 'I due Stalin', *l'Idea Comunista*, 27.1.1946.

<sup>60</sup> *Unione di Repubbliche Sovietiche Mondiali*; an idiosyncratic rewriting of the name of the USSR, replacing the plural adjective 'Socialist' with the plural of 'Worldwide'.

The MCd'I could in this sense draw hope from a shift of tone in the Communist Parties. This particularly owed to the offensive against 'Browderism', the 'liquidationist' course taken by the American Communist leadership. Earl Browder had in June 1944 dissolved his party into a looser association in the name of helping to keep the New Deal coalition alive, and the sharp reproach from Moscow energised a leftist sensibility within the Communist Parties. A piece on the PCF theoretical review, taken as representing Stalin's thinking, denied that the Popular Front was a permanent break with the communist end goal and reproached any exaggerated optimism regarding the permanence of the anti-fascist alliance. The Roman dissidents themselves termed the PCI 'Browderist', as they attempted to identify with the mainstream in the world Communist movement. As the fascist enemy disappeared, *L'Idea Comunista* looked for signs that the Communist Parties were stepping back from the wartime alliance strategy.<sup>61</sup>

### 9.6. A Cold War Republic

By the end of 1945 little remained of the wartime dissident movements, and the PCI was still strongly growing. Committed to the policy it had followed since the Salerno Turn, the Party was a consistent member of all the anti-fascist coalition governments. Through their different party combinations, these democratic cabinets oversaw a return to peace and the formation of a new institutional order in Italy. As part of the ruling coalition the PCI played a decisive role in creating a new Republic and writing a progressive-spirited constitution. To its lasting pride, this document declared Italy a 'democratic republic founded on labour' and promised sweeping social rights, job protection and civil liberties. The Party had made an imprint on the Republic, which would long survive its own direct involvement in government. At the electoral level, the Party was rather less able to impose itself. Its popular support, greatly swollen by its protagonist role in the Resistance, was sufficient to claim it a central role throughout the constituent process. However, it would soon be forced into opposition, as the Grand Alliance came to an end.

The first postwar elections on 2 June 1946 illustrated a political imbalance between the Resistance and the population. The institutional referendum was a victory for the Left. The anti-fascist parties were all for the Republic, except the neutral Christian Democrats, and secured a 54 percent vote to abolish the monarchy. The strong regional divide also reflected how far the parties had been able to build influence through the Resistance: while in the

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<sup>61</sup> It referred to the PCI as governed by 'Browderist' positions in 'La differenza: Partito e Movimento', *DR*, 27.7.1944.

industrial North the republican vote topped two-thirds, in Lazio the monarchists won a two percent majority and in Campania over eighty percent of the poll. The strength of conservative feeling was also evident in the constituent assembly vote that same day. The PCI's 4.4 million votes marked a major advance on its scores in all pre-Fascist elections. Yet this still amounted to less than a fifth of all voters; it stood 400,000 votes behind the Socialists and over 3.7 million behind the Christian Democrats. The second most important force within partisan ranks, the *azionisti* secured just 1.5%.

The Assembly thus elected embarked on composing a new constitution. The document passed in December 1947 established a parliamentary democracy with strong limits on the executive, and guaranteed far-reaching freedoms. Designed to prevent the recrudescence of authoritarianism, it forbade offensive military action and the reconstitution of the Fascist Party. The text was also notable for its references to labour's special role in Italian society, though these were general affirmations of principle more than binding legal provisions. This was particularly notable in Article 1, declaring the state a 'democratic republic founded on labour', as well as Article 4's assertion of a 'right to work'. These were each compromise formulas between the CLN parties, after Togliatti had attempted to assert a more ambitious reference to 'a democratic republic of the workers'. The constitution's progressive rhetoric and the space it guaranteed opposition parties made it among the PCI's surest points of identification.

The constitutional arch was no longer a government alliance. Alcide de Gasperi had visited the United States in January 1947, and after the signing of the postwar peace treaties he was convinced that his Christian-Democrats no longer needed Communist support. Pledging a more robust strategy for containing Soviet influence, in March 1947 new US president Harry Truman told Congress of his plans for financial aid for states resisting the rise of Communism. The enhanced US role in European affairs emboldened anti-communist forces, at the expense of unity based on anti-fascism. In May 1947, both the PCI and PCF were thrown out of government. PCI ministers were forced from office and ex-partisans removed from roles in the police and army command. Continuing to work in the constitutional panels, the PCI now became a party of opposition, resuming the labour strikes and protest actions it had put on hold during the national-unity government.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> This did not, however, mean any kind of turn away from democratic politics. See Chapter Ten. Note also the Troilo affair at the end of November 1947, discussed in Cooke 2011. A partisan appointed prefect was removed from office, unlike many former Fascists. Local leader Giancarlo Pajetta organised a brief occupation of the prefecture by partisans: informing Togliatti of his move

This sharpened bloc binary also closed down space for the dissident Left. The MCd'I's remaining militants were those who had resisted the rush to join the PCI after Liberation, maintaining their opposition to the anti-fascist alliance. Their organisation had continued to aggregate dissident currents, forming new branches across Italy. Yet these had never included the propaganda groups of the anti-Stalinist Left, and nor could the MCd'I itself become such an organisation. Having never developed any theorised rejection of the Soviet model in the manner of left-communists or Trotskyists, these dissidents could now see signs of a hardening in the Moscow-led world communist movement. These militants had always sought a reconciliation with the official Party, on condition that it break with its bourgeois partners. Their enfeebled movement was in no condition to lay down terms to the much mightier Party. But the PCI's new position made it easier for them to accept its discipline, and by the end of summer 1947 the Roman organisation ceased to exist.

The PCI was not a political home for all of the dissidents. Some of the MCd'I's leaders joined no new party, or retreated from public life; others paused for reflection, later to embrace different political identities. The Party itself had no open door policy. It had always sought to incorporate the 'healthy part of the movement', and its cadres now took over its local sections. Yet the animosities of the Resistance period had not simply disappeared, and the PCI remained distrustful of those who threatened internal opposition. It had been forced out of government against its will, and was not now prepared to embrace an image of extremism. Recognising their defeat after 1945, Antonino Poce and Raffaele de Luca swallowed their pride, presenting their applications to join the 'official Party'. Neither was accepted. As the bulk of their comrades flocked into the PCI, the movement's founders were cast into the political wilderness.

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by telephone, Togliatti is said to have sarcastically replied 'and what do you intend to do with it?' The occupation was soon lifted.

## Chapter Ten

### The 'Red Resistance' and its myths

Marxists are given to writing their own histories. The red thread of tradition establishes a teleology between acquired experience and the imagined future. It is most importantly a source of legitimation: it relates both the sacrifices to be redeemed through ultimate victory, and the past lessons that guide action in the present. The leaders of the Italian Communist Party were prolific in producing this kind of literature. More difficult was reflection when the end goal itself drifted out of view. The cadres who dissolved the Party in 1991 were little moved to explain where it had gone wrong.<sup>1</sup> They had given up not just a name, but the very idea of a future that they were working toward.<sup>2</sup>

The scale of the collapse impeded a serious assessment of the Party's record. Ever since Togliatti's time the PCI had boasted of its specifically 'national' road to socialism. It had vaunted its 'differentness', the democratic mores that rooted it in a world apart from the Eastern Bloc. Yet the 'Italian road' stopped at the rubble of the Berlin Wall. The dominant mood was resignation, the sense that an illusion had passed. Some recast its old leaders to suit their new politics; others sought a 'Refoundation',<sup>3</sup> or to continue as before. Few questioned what linked their past icons to the final collapse. The most serious assessments came from those who had always remained at the Party's margins.

Confronted with their own defeat, the militants of the MCD'I faced similar barriers to reflection. They had long portrayed their struggle in grand historical terms, the final vindication of apostles and martyrs past.<sup>4</sup> They had presented their activity not just as part of a national Resistance, but as the culmination of a hundred-year dream.<sup>5</sup> These autodidacts spoke in a language of faith and redemption. But with the tie to the end goal broken, they could only frame their record in much narrower terms. There were tributes to

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<sup>1</sup> Aside from historians once linked to the Party, the political figures who wrote works reflecting on the PCI were overwhelmingly either dissidents who had always stood apart from the Party mainstream (most notably Magri 2012) or else opposed its dissolution. This thus set the final generation of leaders apart from the likes of Togliatti, Amendola, Secchia and Longo, who each wrote extensive works of Party history.

<sup>2</sup> See Traverso 2016 for useful reflection on this theme.

<sup>3</sup> On the history of *Rifondazione Comunista* see Favilli 2011 and Broder 2015.

<sup>4</sup> 'Bandiera Rossa', *BR*, 5.10.1943.

<sup>5</sup> 'Chiarificazione', *BR*, 5.10.1943: 'Whoever cannot in the current moment see the revolutionary situation which the European proletariat has been awaiting for a hundred years is either blind or betrays the workers' cause.'



the dead, and memoirs boasting of wartime feats. Yet their teleology had hit a dead end, and no attempt was made to explain its failure.<sup>6</sup>

There were medals for leading partisans, and plaques to remember the dead. Even the Italian state could commemorate Tigrino Sabatini, victim of Nazism. This in no way lessened the oblivion for the movement he had built. The CLN parties had founded a Republic in their own image; Sabatini's comrades were defeated and dispersed. His movement had not helped found the new institutions, but attempted to resist their control. It had no place in any mythology built on the constitutional arch. Its defeated struggle was the repressed of the Italian Republic: the thwarted hopes, and arms stocks, that the new democracy could not integrate.

The institutional compromise sealed at Salerno in 1944 would cast a long shadow over the postwar Left. The Resistance had seen unparalleled levels of mass militancy, with tens of thousands of Italians engaged in armed struggle, and millions in general strikes. It was also a breakthrough for the Communist Party, which had established itself as Italy's second party. Yet Togliatti's *partito nuovo* was also a party of republican order, which had channelled the militancy of the war period into a democratic reform process. The Resistance thus stood in Party folklore as the moment when the masses had asserted their role at the centre of institutional life.

In the postwar period the PCI vaunted the Resistance's success in helping to found a new democracy. From its election rallies to trade union protests and peace campaigning, the Party also invoked the aspirations of the Resistance that still remained to be fulfilled. This

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<sup>6</sup> Militants produced remarkably little history of their movement, in which sense Corvisieri 1967 was a totally original contribution. Short texts produced in the immediate wake of Liberation such as *Il Comandante del Trionfale* (on Romolo Iacopini) or the collective obituary *I nostri martiri* (MCd'I 1944c) were largely apolitical and personal portraits. In postwar interviews Orfeo Mucci defended his comrades' contribution to the Resistance as well as their distinct class-war agenda. He did not however provide any account of the movement in the post-Liberation period, and thus its defeat.

The most critical analysis from a figure in the MCd'I's orbit (if not actually a member) is Periccioli 2001. This volume is an interview with Otello Terzani, who discusses the movement's Stalinist politics from his own Left-Communist standpoint. Chilanti's accounts of this are highly fragmentary, although are bound by a common tendency to portray the MCd'I as loosely held together by maximalist sentiments rather than political organisation. Pepe n.d. is a catalogue of bold claims and invective, but sympathetically portrays several of the movement's key figures. Its most striking political edge, beyond its veneration of Joseph Stalin, is its bitter criticism of the CLN leaders (and not the GAP or PCI specifically) as the organisers of the Via Rasella attack, which led to such bloodshed. Guzzo 1945 and 1964 offer a highly tendentious account of the movement's history, governed by this curious figure's embrace of right-wing and nationalist politics. This extends even to changing its name so that the 'C' stands for 'clandestine' rather than 'communist'; the second of these volumes is dedicated to the Christian-Democratic prime minister Antonio Segni, and little-disposed to question why the revolution did not succeed.

was notable in the Party's reverence for the 1947 constitution, with its promise of a 'democratic republic founded on labour'. Across subsequent decades the PCI's attachment to this document remained undimmed, taking its rhetoric as an ideal to be realised in the present. This served as a 'national-popular' reference point, linking Italian democracy to the PCI-led working class and its traditions.

Forces to the PCI's Left took a more critical view of the Republic 'founded on labour'. Workers had indeed rebuilt Italy, but they had not assumed ownership over it. The Christian-Democrats' dominance of the postwar state emboldened critics of the institutional compromise from which the Republic had emerged. There were those, like left-communists, who criticised the Resistance as a mere nationalist displacement of class struggle. Yet the new movements of the 1960s above all emphasised the potential that had gone unfulfilled. They pointed to a 'Red Resistance', embodying the class-war militancy that had somehow been defeated, or betrayed.

The mythology of the 'missed opportunity' also fed a cult of armed struggle. After Liberation, thousands of militants had held onto their weapons.<sup>7</sup> Despite the PCI leadership's commitment to the democratic process, the dream of insurrection repeatedly resurfaced. This was particularly evident in July 1948, as PCI members staged armed demonstrations in response to the attempt on Togliatti's life. At the end of the 1960s some former partisans joined with younger militants in armed-struggle groups like the *Brigate Rosse* and the *Gruppi d'Azione Partigiana*. They drew inspiration both from Third World guerrillas and the lost militancy of Italy's own 'Red Resistance'.

Neo-fascist terrorism and police repression of the militant Left also helped fuel these tactics, earning them a measure of sympathy among the wider extra-parliamentary milieu. Yet the spike in such tactics after the contestation of 1977 also reflected the defeat of broader-based social movements. The terrorist groups saw themselves in the role of a new underground, and drew heavily on the imagery of the war period. They took the Republic as the spearhead of 'fascism' and the United States for an 'occupying power'. Frontally clashing with the Italian state, they sought to explode the constitutional arch and prevent a fresh institutional compromise in the present.

This concluding chapter focuses on the longer-term effect of the repression of Resistance radicalism. It argues that this history left a reservoir of disappointed hopes that continued

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<sup>7</sup> See Di Loreto 1991 and Zaslavsky 2004.

to destabilise the new Republic. After the war the new state succeeded in marginalising the dissident Left, which was unable to maintain lasting organisation or hand down any enduring political tradition. But the limits to defascistisation created a sense of 'unfinished business' which time and again returned to the centre of Italian public life. The political violence put on hold in 1945 continued to resurface throughout the postwar decades, as militants sought to fight the Resistance's battles anew.

### **10.1. The *ora X* of *insurrection***

The return of armed struggle first emerged from within PCI ranks. In government in 1944-47 the Party had asserted its institutional mores, helping write the Republic's democratic constitution. Yet the international context soon blocked further democratic advance. The end of the war disbanded the Grand Alliance, and this quickly unravelled the pact between Europe's Communists and their liberal, Gaullist and Christian-Democratic partners. As the Communists took power in the Red Army-controlled East, anti-communists ejected them from office in the West. Both the French and Italian parties were thrown out of government in May 1947. The US pressure behind these moves was soon followed by Marshall Aid dollars aimed at strengthening Europe's capitalist economies. The PCI would never govern the Republic it had helped to create.

The institutional compromise laid the basis of a new democracy, but not for further advance for the PCI. The Salerno Turn had aimed to guarantee the Party a role in Italy's future governance, preventing the hardening of US hegemony. Togliatti combined this approach with his own more general conception of 'progressive democracy', a gradualist vision that replaced a classic Leninist divide between the 'bourgeois' and 'workers' states'. This vision of advancing toward socialism by degrees however tended to underestimate the effect of the Cold War on the other anti-fascist parties, and the difficulties of keeping Italy outside of the binary bloc system. Postwar elections not only showed the Christian Democrats to be far more popular in the country than in the Resistance period, but also more governed by anti-communism than Togliatti had anticipated.

The May 1947 crisis thus marked a clear setback for the PCI's strategy of advance through democratic channels. This defeat was a key subject of the first postwar conference of Communist Parties, held at Szklarska Poreba that September. The congress saw a confrontation between the PCF and PCI and their central-eastern European counterparts, who accused the French and Italians of a naïve approach to the new bloc politics. Both Andrei Zhdanov and the Yugoslavs bitterly criticised PCI leaders for their over-reliance on

parliamentary tactics.<sup>8</sup> While all Communist Parties had taken part in popular-front alliances and moderated their anti-capitalist radicalism, this did not mean that it was possible to follow a consensual and peaceful road to socialism. The institutional turn had been just one part of a dual-track strategy, which ought also to prepare for the possibility of taking power by force.

While Togliatti himself rejected such *doppiezza*, it was an enduring strain of the Party's militant culture. This was particularly apparent in the political crisis of summer 1948. Already in April the Republic's first parliamentary elections had marked a setback for the PCI's strategy. While the Christian Democrats won a resounding victory with close to half of all votes, the combined Communist-Socialist list won only thirty percent of the total. This exposed a vast gulf between the political balance of the Resistance and the feeling among the Italian population as a whole. The voters had rewarded a sharply anti-communist Christian-Democratic campaign with an emphatic mandate. It was becoming apparent that the dream of a 'progressive democracy' was slipping away. When a lone fanatic shot Togliatti outside parliament on 14 July, militants took it as evidence of a hardening reactionary mood. Their reaction was fierce.

The unrest hinted at what could have happened if the Resistance had not headed into institutional compromise.<sup>9</sup> Partisans who had laid down their weapons now again took to the streets. Communications and transport were halted; armed militants occupied police stations, and workers at FIAT in Turin took the managing director hostage. Police moved to repress the unrest, and within three days 30 people lay dead. A general descent into violence loomed. Still fresh in the memory were recent events in Prague, where a Communist Party risking its own electoral defeat had seized power by force. Yet PCI leaders stepped back from the brink. Unprepared for fresh civil war, cadres made clear to militants that there would be no '*ora X*' of insurrection against the democratic government. Copying the Czechoslovak example was not so simple in a country without a Red Army presence. As Togliatti's condition stabilised, the revolt dissipated.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See the conference minutes: Procacci et al. (eds.) 1994. Zhdanov's cutting reproach of the PCI appears from p. 195.

<sup>9</sup> On this episode see Behan 1996. Teenage MCD'I member Osvaldo Schiavoni (interview with DB, 28.11.2012), reports that upon disinterring his weapon buried after Liberation, his father found it no longer functioned.

<sup>10</sup> Notable was the playing down of the military aspect of this episode in later PCI communications to party members on the success of the strike that followed: see the article '*Esperienze di un grande sciopero*', from *Quaderno dell'Attivista*, August 1948 (published in book form by Mazzotta in 1976). Novella's report on Milan emphasises that 'where the police maintained a correct attitude there were no clashes with it and there were

This crisis was more an echo of Resistance militancy than a possible bid for power. As PCI cadres at Togliatti's bedside discussed their response, there were those who entertained the idea of insurrection. This was particularly true of Pietro Secchia, partisan commander in Spain and the Milanese Resistance. He was esteemed in Party folklore as the 'man who dreamed of the armed struggle' who sought to settle the 'unfinished business' of the Resistance. Yet he also recognised that the PCI was unprepared for civil war. Accepting the need to defuse the situation, he himself ordered militants to lay down their weapons. Already in the Resistance period Secchia had held firm to the Party line, supporting the Salerno Turn and vehemently attacking the dissident Left. Again in July 1948, he accepted Party discipline. The militant culture of *doppiezza* had again raised its head. Yet it found no leadership among the cadres of the PCI.

## 10.2. The new anti-fascism<sup>11</sup>

The sense of a 'missed opportunity' endured into subsequent decades, notably in the culture of the 1960s new Left. To point to the gap between Resistance radicalism and institutional compromise was a crucial challenge to the PCI's self-narration. Most new Left historiography was a reaction against the Party's own, which also built on its assumption that the Resistance had played a key role in liberating national territory. This was turned inside-out to present a situation in which the PCI had enjoyed a protagonist role in Italian politics which it had then squandered. Rather less apparent in this narrative were the broader structural limits to the Resistance. The malign role of the Allies was foregrounded; rather less so, the gap between the Left's involvement in the partisan struggle and its actual social weight. Faced with a new era of Christian-Democratic dominance, the new Left condemned the PCI for its excessive compromises.

The advance of a new Left also reflected the faded lustre of the Moscow-centred Communist movement. Even at the moment of the July 1948 crisis, 'People's Democracy' had been making headway in Eastern Europe and the PCI was a rapidly expanding force. Yet the following decade saw a series of shocks to the pro-Soviet movement. Khrushchev's

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no notable incidents of concern'. The Turin report in the same issue notes, in a set of 'self-critical considerations', that 'a quite large group of workers, in part ex-partisans', 'bitterly opposed the call to go back to work, with clashes of some note'.

<sup>11</sup> Wright 1998 offers particularly interesting reflection in this regard, including on the role of the armed struggle in the imaginary even of non-terrorist groups. Bermani 1997 emphasises that the New Left began with the cycle of struggle at the end of the 1960s rather than the beginning. From a workerist reading, Tronti 2013 (p. 90) labels the Turin workers at Piazza Statuto in 1962 as the 'children of the generation of 1943-45), and Del Carria similarly focuses the turning point on workplace struggles rather than the revival of anti-fascism in 1960.

denunciation of Stalin at the Twentieth Congress, followed by the national uprisings in Hungary and Poland, each damaged the Communists' unity and idealism. The rise of socialist states autonomous of Soviet leadership (China, Cuba, Vietnam) moreover encouraged hopes in less bureaucratic, more radical alternatives to Eastern Bloc socialism. Intersecting with the libertarian cultural atmosphere of the 1960s, this Third Worldist Marxism allowed New Left currents to damn the PCI for its conservatism while themselves maintaining the fundamentals of Leninist politics.

Key to the new Left's formation was the rise of a new anti-fascism. This particularly owed to the March 1960 formation of the Tambroni government, reliant on the neo-fascist MSI's parliamentary backing. This Christian-Democratic cabinet oversaw four months of explosive confrontations, driven by the apparent resurgence of the far-Right. The biggest flashpoint came in early July with the *fatti di Genova*, when the government authorised the MSI to hold its congress in the northern port city. This provoked a strong local anti-fascist feeling, and protests in the city were soon followed by rioting and clashes with police around Italy. In the capital, police broke up a rally at the Porta San Paolo held in solidarity with the Genoese anti-fascists. The over one-hundred arrestees included even PCI MPs laying a wreath to the martyrs of 8 September 1943. This and similar police disruption of left-wing activity fuelled the spectre of rising fascist influence within the state.

The result of the unrest was in fact to harden the Republic against the MSI. The climate under the Tambroni government demonstrated this party's toxicity, and by the end of July the premier was forced to resign. The impossibility of maintaining a government even passively reliant on the MSI doomed the party's bid for the mainstream. With small centrist forces lacking the numbers to give the Christian Democrats a majority, the Catholic centre instead made an opening to the Socialists, forming the first 'centre-Left' government in 1962. Yet this tumult had revived two forces that would continue to undermine the Republic. The *cordon sanitaire* against the MSI was strengthened, but this also emboldened radical forces within that party, less committed to democratic politics. The mobilisation that developed through summer 1960 in turn encouraged the rise of a militant anti-fascism, seeking to close down the MSI's street presence.

This radicalisation was also the context for other forms of social conflict, as Italy's febrile politics and strong economic growth fed a rise in militant shopfloor movements. This also challenged the PCI's dominance on this terrain, as new layers mobilised who did not belong to its traditional Northern-industrial base. The young proletariat central to the *fatti di Genova*, including migrant workers from the South, stood at an economic and cultural

remove from the PCI-led working class with which they now combined. Their age, the lower industrial concentration in their home regions, and the South's only brief experience of Occupation, made the Resistance legacy a weaker element of their class identity. Less assimilated into the Party and its union structures than their Northern counterparts, these layers were in the 1960s the bedrock of a rising extra-parliamentary Left. This latter cast the PCI as a bureaucratic and conservative force, and rejected both its identification with the Republic and its patriotic mythology.

The extra-parliamentary Left exalted Resistance militancy as it criticised the institutional compromise in which it had concluded. With no red thread to link them to the wartime dissident movements, these 1960s currents were little-compelled to examine where these latter had failed. Libertarian socialist Lelio Basso sought to bridge this divide, and in a 1965 polemic challenged the new Left attempt to cast the Resistance as a 'missed revolutionary opportunity'. He highlighted the reasons why the Left's dominance of Resistance mobilisation did not allow it to seize power, given both the international context and the Resistance's weak social base. In this he departed from the PCI's own veneration of its Resistance record. However, his focus on structural barriers to change also jarred with leftists' attempts to portray the PCI as a destructive counter-revolutionary force. These latter could cite the dissident movements as a foil for PCI 'reformism', but showed little interest in examining their capacity to transform Italy.

There also emerged a distinct workerist historiography, counterposing shopfloor rebellion to the Resistance alliance. Such histories ranged from Guido Quazza's emphasis on the class-war drive to anti-fascism to Liliana Lanzardi's study of the PCI's role at FIAT in 1944–47, showing how it had imposed wage restraint for the sake of national reconstruction. Her *operaismo* challenged the notion of the 'democratic republic founded on labour', highlighting the contrast between the state's symbolic valorisation of work and the actual conditions of workers. A more ambitious approach came from Romolo Gobbi, who denied that wartime industrial militancy was governed by identification with the Resistance. He portrayed the strikes and absenteeism in the Northern factories as an expression of proletarian self-preservation, driven by the 'refusal of work' rather than patriotic sentiments. This projected the workerists' sense of 'class autonomy' back on to the same struggles which the PCI vaunted as a 'national-popular' reference point.

A more conventionally Leninist approach came from Silverio Corvisieri, editor of *Avanguardia Operaia*. His 1967 essay on the MCd'I sought to overcome the oblivion into which this movement had fallen, asserting its central role in the Roman Resistance. In so

doing, Corvisieri robustly challenged the PCI's cavalier regard for historical truth. His effort to retrace the Roman militants' history relied heavily on the testimony of Orfeo Mucci, a former MCd'Ier himself active in the San Lorenzo autonomist milieu. His work expressed themes typical among all extra-parliamentary Left discussion of the Resistance. Most important among these was the veneration of armed struggle as a privileged form of political action. This was implicit in exaggerated claims regarding *Bandiera Rossa's* military prowess, but also its repeated comparisons between the Resistance and Third World guerrilla movements. Corvisieri's work tended to present the dissidents' military prowess as a form of justification for their political mores, as if this itself gave them the authority with which to pass judgement on other Resistance forces.

Extra-parliamentary Left readings of the Resistance were thus torn between veneration of militant anti-fascism, and the attempt to free class struggles from the Resistance's political encrustation of nationalism and popular-frontism. This in turn reflected a tension between insurrectionary forces who took inspiration from guerrilla struggles, and those *operaista* currents less focused on the arena of party organisation. This was not an absolute barrier between the shopfloor and the political sphere: Corvisieri himself emphasised the value of workplace mobilisation as a catalyst to party-building, while *operaismo* and in particular its Marxist-feminist strand offered an expansive conception of the 'social' worker and the class struggle outwith the factory gates. But this latter position also implied a certain critical attitude toward militant anti-fascism. In highlighting the totalising character of capitalist social relations, it diverged from any tendency to identify a discrete set of individuals as the 'enemy'. Weapons, and the killing of particular fascists, could not uproot and replace the social relations from which Fascism emerged.<sup>12</sup>

### 10.3. The Years of Lead

The dangers of this tendency within militant anti-fascism were well illustrated by the experience of the armed-struggle Left, an 'underground' at the edges of the much larger extra-parliamentary milieu. The physical elimination of fascists and industrialists, as well as the taking of hostages, reflected these militants' inspiration from the methods of guerrilla and national-liberation movements from M-26-7 to the Provisional IRA and PFLP. However, their imaginary also drew on Italy's own Resistance experience, the 'red thread

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<sup>12</sup> Wright 1998, p. 87, cites a letter sent by one woman to *Lotta Continua* after the killing of a comrade: 'Altogether, comrades, if we are communists and not just anti-fascists, I believe it's because we don't struggle against the hand of capital but against capital itself. It's capital's headquarters that must be blown up, not just those of the fascists, to revenge the death of comrade Rossi'.



of unfinished revolution that continued to exist after the end of the war'.<sup>13</sup> Telling in this regard was their attempt to revive partisan iconography, not least Giangiacomo Feltrinelli's *Gruppi di Azione Partigiana* (subtly differing from the name of the *Gruppi di Azione Patriottica*) and the Milan *Senza Tregua* group (named after *gappista* Giovanni Pesce's memoir). These groups also labelled their political opponents using the language of the Resistance period, considering that reactionary elements never removed from the Italian state and capitalist class were driving a new form of fascism.

These groups' actions extended from a reaction against the organised far-Right, to a much wider spectrum of forces. The impulse for the creation of Feltrinelli's GAP was a neo-Fascist terrorist attack in Milan in December 1969. This Piazza Fontana bombing was the beginning of the so-called Years of Lead, triggering a wave of fascist violence and leftist armed-struggle movements that would last across the 1970s. The GAP itself only lasted until 1972, but the more decisive current in the new 'underground' was the *Brigate Rosse*, formed in 1970 and continuing for over a decade. The *Brigate Rosse* together with the *XXII Ottobre* group, *Senza Tregua/Prima Linea*, and the *Nuclei Armati Proletari* each conducted bank raids and armed robberies, and kidnapped and killed industrialists, judges and military officials. The *Brigate Rosse* even murdered a 'social-fascist' PCI trade unionist it accused of informing on its own clandestine organisation, which it glorified as the centre of revolutionary activity in Italy.

These groups attacked the PCI for a complacent attitude toward US hegemony in Italy after World War II. They instead venerated the polarisation strategy adopted by Third World guerrillas, which had allowed them to overcome the established bloc dynamics. Cuba and Vietnam provided recent examples of victory through confrontation; Chile, an example of the dangers to peaceful reform. The *Brigate Rosse's* strategy for polarising the Italian situation also included the active effort to undermine attempts to reform the Republic from within. This was starkly illustrated in March 1978 as its commandoes kidnapped former premier Aldo Moro. The liberal Christian Democrat was chosen as hostage precisely because of his openness to a

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<sup>13</sup> In this interview with Nicola Lofoco, *Brigate Rosse* founder Alberto Franceschini describes its emergence in the following terms: 'The BR were born above all of a cultural patrimony that derived from communist culture, from the partisan and resistance struggle. The anti-fascist struggle was seen as a moment of "passage"; once fascism was defeated, the primary objective was the fight against capitalism. The true revolution was against the form of government that came after the authoritarian and capitalist liberation'. Franceschini 2001. 'Franceschini: Le Brigate Rosse usarono armi dei partigiani', *La Repubblica*, 5.9.1990, describes his revelations on the use of partisan arms stocks in the 1970s.

coalition involving the PCI. This in turn emboldened politicians on the anti-communist wing of Moro's party in justifying a firmer stance against any deal. Killing their hostage after an eight-week standoff, the *Brigate Rosse* had destroyed the last hope of a 'Historic Compromise'.

Producing no distinct historiography, these circles were interested less in the political dynamics of the Resistance than the military tactics which it had deployed, as they stoked their own cult of armed action. This was particularly notable in their plundering of the history of the PCI's GAP. Groups like the *Brigate Rosse* sought to reproduce the polarising effect of GAP terrorist tactics, while detaching this from PCI strategy. Seeing themselves, like the GAP, as an underground group faced with a 'fascist' regime and a passive working class, their strategy was similarly premised on spectacular feats that would stir the masses to action. Their understanding of the Resistance thus showed no trace of the dissidents' critique of military adventurism. The *Brigate Rosse* embraced the elitist voluntarism which the GAP's critics had so rejected, prioritising clamorous 'sparks' to mass mobilisation over the building of political, class consciousness. *Avanguardia Operaia* itself emphasised how in the Resistance period intensified anti-fascism had not itself driven the formation of a revolutionary subject.<sup>14</sup>

The extension of this new 'underground' in fact closely corresponded to the weakening of the extra-parliamentary Left. In the post-'68 period movements like *Lotta Continua* and *Potere Operaio* had never identified with the armed cells. Even in resisting Fascist street movements and police repression, they had not embraced a strategy of escalating military force, at most showing a diffuse sympathy for these circles. Yet after the dissolution of these movements and the end of the contestation of 1977, several hundred of their militants did turn to the 'underground'. As one slogan proclaimed, 'Enough with speechifying groups, let's put guns in the workers' hands!' This meant trying to make up for the decline of the social movements through a militarised anti-fascism. The results were disastrous. Hundreds of killings between 1978 and 1982 fuelled repression even against activists distant from this milieu. To embark down the path of terrorism was to doom themselves to perpetual exclusion from democratic politics, and a long run from the law.

#### 10.4. The passing of an illusion

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<sup>14</sup> In his memoir, Alberto Franceschini notes that *Avanguardia Operaia* were the first group to condemn his group's actions.

Togliatti's *partito nuovo* survived into the 1980s. The militants and legends of the Resistance period continued to tie the PCI to a specifically communist tradition. Yet conditions were converging in which the Party could contemplate a break from this identity. The breakdown of the Historic Compromise pushed it into a stronger oppositional stance, but the defeat of the FIAT unions in 1980 and the rise of the Socialists also suggested that the industrial working class was waning as a political force. A further social change was the ageing of the PCI's formative generation. With Berlinguer's death in 1984, the cadres trained in the Resistance period no longer headed the Party. The final blow came with the failure of *perestroika* in the Eastern Bloc. Party leaders had long invested their hopes in the Soviet reformers, a last tie to their dream of a pluralist communism. But as Gorbachev failed to stem the crisis, they raced to distance themselves from the failed experiment.

The end of the PCI spelled the end of the constitutional arch which had emerged from the Resistance. The Communists had always occupied an ambiguous place in the Republic, a party central to the democratic order yet never able to enter national government. This bore the seeds of further ills, for the lack of a regulating exchange of power fed the extension of vast links of patronage and corruption within the state. When its loyal opposition collapsed, the rotten system crumbled. Its historic rivals now sank into the mutual recriminations of 'Bribesville'. After two years of court cases and journalistic exposés, none of the constitutional arch parties remained. Silvio Berlusconi appealed once more to the spectre of 'communism' as he sought again to unite the Right. Dispensing with the old *cordon sanitaire*, his party now welcomed redeemed 'post-Fascists' into government.

Former Communists now distanced themselves from the Party's traditions. In the postmodern climate of Second Republic Italy, their new reference point was not so much social democracy, as liberalism. There was a belated rerun of the Historic Compromise, on a smaller scale, as former elements of the Christian Democrats joined with ex-Socialists and ex-Communists in *l'Ulivo*, and then the Democratic Party. But this was a means of breaking with Berlinguer's Party, rather than fulfilling its ambitions. The new coalition of the *centrosinistra* was not only pro-business or pro-European, but from Massimo D'Alema onward drew away from its remaining links to trade union and social movements. Such a party could embrace a view of the Resistance based on national unity. More difficult was any defence of the PCI's own record.

Becoming Italy's first ex-Communist president in 2006, Giorgio Napolitano illustrated what the new political times meant for the Resistance legacy. A new identity as a republican centrist demanded a break with the old Party's presentation of its formative struggle. As

president Napolitano excoriated the PCI's 'ideological blindness', and blamed its moral certainties for its defence of partisan crimes and apologies for Eastern-Bloc socialism. Positions of governmental responsibility also distanced him from any focus on the Resistance's enduring social aspirations. This was particularly evident in the ex-Communist president's address to mark Liberation Day 2013, as he orchestrated a grand coalition government. Napolitano preached the Resistance's example of 'national unity' even as he brokered a deal between the Democrats and Silvio Berlusconi.

Seven decades after the Russian Revolution, hope in the communist future crumbled with the Berlin Wall. Today, seven decades since the victory over Fascism, the aspirations of the Italian Republic seem barely less dilapidated. The propulsive force that began with the Resistance is now exhausted, and the Republic's capacity to reform itself far from certain. In the postwar period Resistance history was soon institutionalised, becoming a claim to legitimacy for the republican parties. This was a means of resolving Italy's identity crisis, insofar as it helped galvanise different classes, regions and parties behind a promise of progress. This myth had limited effect even under the First Republic: the new Italy was home to not just the 'economic miracle', but also a blocked democracy and ongoing political violence. Yet with the collapse of the 1990s, even the promise disappeared.

Myths do sometimes mobilise historical forces, but they do not well explain history. Narrow in its social base and divided in its politics, it is not true that the Resistance united Italians. The narrative of 'national unity' attempted to staunch the wounds the war had left open; the myth of the Red Resistance emphasised how little they had healed. Amidst the violence of the 1970s, the *Resistenza rossa* provided inspiration for those who still believed in the revolution; it provided a vision of what the partisans might have achieved, and what remained to be fought for. Yet those who tried to fight its battles anew reached only a historical dead end. An unreflective imitation of anti-fascist militancy could never achieve what had not been possible in the Resistance; worse, it doomed those who embarked down this path to a war of attrition without end.

Like them, the militants of the MCd'I were driven more by the belief in what they were fighting for than a clear idea of how to get there. These Roman proletarians dreamed of the sun of the future, the movement of history, of a victory not just worth fighting for, but inevitable. This faith provided a coherence that their ramshackle organisation would otherwise have lacked, a teleology to make sense of their terrible sacrifices. Yet once the end point had disappeared from view, they had no tradition left to defend. Some altered their politics to meet the mood of the times; more simply turned their hopes away from

politics. There was to be no happy ending, no redemption, not even a newspaper article to state why the last disciples had given up. They could claim no vindication and point to no wrong turn. Theirs was but a history of faith in the future, and its defeat.

**Archival sources**

ACS/CPC - Archivio Centrale dello Stato (Rome), Casellario Politico

Centrale ACS/PS - Archivio Centrale dello Stato (Rome), Pubblica Sicurezza

ANPI - Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia, biographical database

APC - Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Archivio Partito Comunista

APC/CRM - Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Archivio Partito Comunista, Corrispondenza  
Roma/Milano

ASR/CAS - Archivio di Stato di Roma, Corte d'Assise Speciale

ASS/FRB - Archivio storico del Senato, Fondo Rosario Bentivegna

ASV/FAB - Archivio di Stato di Viterbo, Fondo Angelo la Bella

BCF/FOT - Biblioteca Comunale di Follonica, Fondo Otello Terzani

CGB/FAP - Circolo Gianni Bosio (Rome), Fondo Alessandro Portelli

FB/FGB - Fondazione Basso, Fondo Gerardo Bruni

FGAN - Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Fondo Agostino Novella

FGFM - Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Fondo Mosca

MSdL/FSC - Museo Storico della Liberazione (Rome), Fondo Silverio Corvisieri

IPR/AC - Istituto Piemontese per la Storia della Resistenza e della Società (Turin), Fondo  
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ISEC/V - Istituto per la Storia dell'età contemporanea (Sesto San Giovanni), fondo  
Venegoni

NA - National Archives, Kew

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