

“Going Further”

The Aborted Italian Insurrection of July 1948

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The attempted murder of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) leader Palmiro Togliatti — the *attentato a Togliatti* in Italian — occurred in July 1948, three years after the fall of fascism and the end of the Resistance movement. A spontaneous general strike immediately erupted as soon as the news was heard, and in some northern cities the strike took on insurrectionary proportions.

Given the scale of events it is significant to note that it is an issue which is normally either fleetingly mentioned or completely ignored in most of the standard historiographical works on the period. One of the best books on Italian postwar political history, Paul Ginsborg’s *A History of Contemporary Italy*, an author whose political views are sympathetic to Italian communism, devotes just 1.5 pages out of 350 to it. And despite stating that protesters “in some central and northern provinces actually seized control of local government and key communication points,” in his *A Political History of Italy* Norman Kogan devotes just half a page to these events. Yet another standard English textbook, Martin Clark’s *Modern Italy*, avoids the issue entirely, as does Donald Sassoon, a long-time supporter of the PCI, in his *Contemporary Italy*. This is to be put aside Daniel Horowitz’s *The Italian Labor Movement*, which devotes just one page out of 341, again describing the action thus: “a general strike with insurrectional overtones ... the government was uncertain whether it was faced with a full-scale insurrec-

tion.” The incongruity of this is that Sassoon has long identified with Italian communism, whereas Horowitz was a US diplomat.¹

Italian historiography has gone down the same path of fleeting acknowledgment or total silence. For example a recent “Critical History of the Republic” covering the period 1945-1994 and written by somebody who defines himself on the cover as being “a militant of the Left of Communist opinions” devotes just one page out of 340 to *the attentato a Togliatti*.² Local studies often fare no better: a major book on Milan, which deals with the 1939-51 period, written from a pro-PCI position, devotes just one line out of 300 pages to the event!³ The importance of writers’ Communist sympathies is particularly relevant here, because it was PCI members and local branches that made up the backbone of the movement.

Whilst these omissions should not perhaps be considered surprising as regards conservative or social democrat historians, one might expect that historical works composed under the influence of the PCI would cover this event to a greater extent. The reason for their reluctance is that the working class’ behaviour does not correspond to the PCI’s strategy at the time; in other words, the *attentato a Togliatti* reveals the existence of a massive latent gulf between the PCI leadership and the party rank and file.

- 1 See N. Kogan, *A Political History of Italy: The Postwar Years* (New York 1983), 37; and D. L. Horowitz, *The Italian Labor Movement* (Cambridge 1963), 215. See also M. Clark, *History of Modern Italy, 1870-1983* (London 1986); P. Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (Harmondsworth 1990); D. Sassoon, *Contemporary Italy* (London 1986).
- 2 E. Santarelli, *Storia Critica della Repubblica: L’Italia dal 1945 al 1994* (Milan 1996). The two main specialised texts are that of Togliatti’s personal secretary of the time, M. Caprara, *L’attentato a Togliatti. Il 14 Luglio 1948: il PCI tra Insurrezione e Programma Democratico* (Venice 1978); and W. Tobagi, *La Rivoluzione Impossibile. L’attentato a Togliatti: Violenza Politica e Reazione Popolare* (Milan 1978). Tobagi, a journalist, was later murdered by the Red Brigades.
- 3 L. Ganapini, *Una Città, la Guerra: Lotte di Classe, Ideologie e Forze Politiche a Milano 1939-1951* (Milan 1988).

Some statistics regarding arms seizures might convey the scale of events with some immediacy. The official government figures for weapons seized during 1948, particularly following the July events, is far higher than for both 1946 and 1947 — and for some categories even higher than 1945 — the year of official partisan demobilisation. Police statistics detail the seizure of: 28 cannons; 202 mortars and grenade launchers; 995 machine guns; 6 200 automatic rifles; 27 123 rifles and muskets; 9 445 pistols and revolvers; 49 640 grenades; 564 tons of explosives; 81 radio transmitters; and 5.5 million rounds of ammunition.⁴

The existence of such massive amounts of weaponry held illegally is ample proof of the feeling amongst the working class that the end of the Resistance in 1945 was only the end of the “first half” of armed struggle against the ruling class and that weapons had to be kept in readiness for a decisive “second half” some time in the future. This view was diametrically opposed to that of the PCI, which insisted upon full military demobilisation in 1945 and that a political strategy of “progressive democracy” be followed through parliamentary channels.

The amount of weaponry recovered only tells part of the story however. The fact that for three days in July 1948 millions of workers spontaneously launched a disciplined movement that threatened state power is evidence of how strongly the desire for an insurrectionary seizure of power was felt amongst the working class. Yet according to PCI historiography, by 1948 workers were already fully wedded to the idea of “progressive democracy.”

One of the reasons used to justify this argument is the definitive electoral defeat for the left, which occurred three months earlier during Italy’s first postwar election. But the *attentato a Togliatti* is an interesting political phenomenon in itself because it sheds a different light on what conclusions to draw from the left’s electoral defeat in April.

4 Cited in P. Di Loreto, *Togliatti e la “doppiezza.” Il PCI tra Democrazia e Insurrezione, 1944-49* (Bologna 1991), 320.

In many ways the *attentato a Togliatti* is a good illustration that the political mood of large masses can not be gauged by electoral trends alone. In more general terms it is an excellent illustration of working-class creativity and resourcefulness. However, it is also a sobering example of the need to identify empty radical rhetoric before key moments of struggle, so that a protest movement does not suddenly find itself adrift without any organisational structure, and tactically disarmed due to the impossibility of creating an alternative organisation overnight.

This article is divided into two parts: in the first part there is a broad outline of the major events that occurred between 14-16 July 1948; the second part discusses the underlying causes that contributed to such a mass explosion.

What Happened

On 14 July 1948 Palmiro Togliatti was shot three times as he was leaving Parliament after a rather unimportant debate. His would-be assassin was a twenty-five year old Sicilian student, Antonio Pallante. Although he appeared to have acted alone, Pallante was closely linked to right-wing circles. He was found to have a Liberal Party card in his pocket, as well as an entry pass to Parliament given out by a Christian Democrat MP from his home town of Catania. A copy of *Mein Kampf* was found in his hotel room, together with “a diary full of notes on nationalism”; furthermore the hotel was regularly used by known neo-fascists. At the moment of his arrest he stated that he wanted to eliminate “the most dangerous element in Italian political life, who through his activity as an agent of a foreign power, is impeding the rebirth of the Fatherland.”⁵

5 A. Grillo, *Livorno: Una Rivolta tra Mito e Memoria: 14 Luglio 1948 — Lo Sciopero Generale per L'attentato a Togliatti* (Pisa 1994), 31. The use of the word “Fatherland” (*Patria*) was common to all political parties and was not particularly associated with Nazism.

The news was broadcast over the radio at 1 PM and in most factories workers downed tools and spontaneously went on strike. No time limit was given to the strike and decisions varied as to whether to remain inside the factory or to send delegations outside. In either case, if weapons were hidden within a factory they were often brought out and prepared for use.

Apart from factories, Giorgio Galli has described some of the most common and visible reactions: "trains came to a halt in stations as soon as railway workers heard what had happened, urban transport was paralysed from early in the afternoon."⁶ Such a strong and immediate reaction is clear proof of both the esteem in that Palmiro Togliatti was held by the working class as well as the political tension that was latent in society at that time.

What is particularly important to understand when analysing developments over the next three days is the nature of the movement's leadership, described again by Galli: "With the disappearance of Socialist leaders and the indecision of Communist leaders, the movement, which had arisen spontaneously, ended up being characterised by the most determined and radical elements of the PCI, i.e. those who had joined the party because they believed in something which to Togliatti seemed very odd."⁷ In other words, the established national leaderships did not direct the popular response, particularly during the first day.

Genoa: The Eye of the Storm

Genoa, the maritime city of Italy's industrial triangle, saw the strongest response to Togliatti's shooting. Here is a contemporary account of industrial workers' initial spontaneous response:

50 000 workers, who had mainly come from *Sestri*, had occupied the city centre by early afternoon. Police headquarters ordered a

6 G. Galli, *La Sinistra Italiana nel Dopoguerra* (Milan 1978), 255.

7 *Ibid.*, 240.

patrol of five armoured cars to go out, which the crowd rapidly took possession of; by late afternoon the city — as was the case in most of Liguria — was practically under the control of the masses, led by Communists.⁸

The Prefect of the city — instinctively hostile to the protesters' behaviour — described events rather differently:

numerous ex-partisans and large groups of armed hooligans were busy with acts of violence in various points of the city; immobilising trams and other vehicles, imposing the closure of shops, setting up road blocks, and attacking and disarming all isolated soldiers and policemen. A Lieutenant has been wounded, and 10 *Carabinieri* were captured, disarmed, mistreated, and taken to the headquarters of the PCI and the ex-partisans' association.⁹

Such a rapid and mass unitary response clearly had to have a clear point of reference, and that was the Resistance struggle, both in terms of its military actions and its political motivation of direct democracy exercised by rank and file workers. Yet although the Resistance model was reproduced on a military level in Genoa, the movement did not last long enough to create any lasting political effect. This is how a Communist trade union leader described the military connection with the Resistance:

everything was stopped, the entire city had been divided into sections and was in our hands even more so than in the period of the partisan war. There was only one public authority in Genoa; it was a huge emotional factor which had unleashed the most revolutionary elements which were saying: the time has come to settle accounts. Sectarian comrades dominated over the others.

There was the training of the partisan war, there were all those young people who had fought in the mountains in a complete military environment, they were an army excellently prepared for this kind of war. They passed the word amongst each other — "let's get the armoured cars" and it took them a second because

8 *Ibid.*, 256.

9 W. Tobagi, 22.

they were used to it. They had taken armoured cars and tanks off the Germans for so many years in the same way.¹⁰

The question then needs to be asked, who was leading these people? More than anything else it would appear to be rank and file workers, although local Communist leaders were also outraged by the attack on Togliatti and enthused by the strength shown by such an impressive wave of anger. This is how the Secretary of the PCI's Genoa Federation recalls events:

I went into the Federation, where there was a lot of confusion ... Nobody knew what was happening; we were unable to contact the leadership as the phones weren't working; ... At a branch level everyone had got carried away, even the leading members, until we arrived with our instructions. These were people who had gone through the struggle for Liberation, there were some excellent comrades who had dived into it all, but nobody from the Federal Committee had done that ... as I was Regional Secretary I received an invitation to take part in a meeting to be held outside Genoa on that very day to discuss with other leaders, even though the [national] leadership did not agree, how to coordinate action in the North. I didn't go because I didn't believe a revolution was possible.¹¹

Not only does this quote illustrate the extent of support for an insurrection, it also shows that even important local leaders, as was the case in Milan as we shall see below, were also tempted to support the movement and see where it led.

The Communist trade union leader again takes up the story:

the crowd had taken over from the police and had captured the armoured cars, we were practically in a state of civil war. That evening Genoa was already in the hands of the people, so much so that at eight o'clock, if I remember right, the Chief of Police

10 Cited in M. & P. Pallante, eds., *Dalla ricostruzione alla Crisi del Centrisimo* (Bologna 1975), 86. The original version can be found in P. Rugafiori, "Genova," in F. Levi, P. Rugafiori and S. Vento, *Il Triangolo Industriale tra Ricostruzione e Lotta di Classe, 1945-48* (Milan 1974).

11 Cited in *ibid.*, 86-7.

phoned the ex-partisans' association and said: "Send me a group of partisans to defend the police headquarters, because I'm completely isolated here." All the police had fled, the whole lot, it was a terrifying situation.¹²

Public order was now in the hands of members of the Communist Party, and the Prefect made an interesting political comment on the leadership of the movement in the city:

In the meantime the situation was deteriorating, so it was thought opportune for the *Questore* to make strong warnings to Socialist and Communist party leaders, making them aware of their grave responsibilities. Promises were made but one had, and continues to have, the clear sensation that the leaders of these parties are no longer in control of the situation.¹³

The reality of the situation soon became clear to PCI leaders in the major cities: they either had to launch an insurrection or stop one. And apart from a few isolated cases in small towns, they decided to stop moves towards insurrection. In the case of Genoa, the Federation Secretary makes it clear that even by early afternoon they had arrived at the following decisions: "to get rid of the road blocks, eliminate them, or if that wasn't possible deactivate them, and not enter into conflict with the police; go back home in groups to the party branches and calmly wait." Given the strength of feeling which clearly existed, it is not surprising to learn of the following response: "We all did what we could to make people go away, I almost got attacked by demonstrators armed with sticks."¹⁴

Any insurrectionary movement reaches a crucial moment at which it must either take a risk and try to seize power, or otherwise retreat to avoid senseless bloodshed. But given the political differences within the working class, and the sheer speed and spontaneity

12 *Ibid.*, 85.

13 Cited in Tobagi, 23. The *Questore* is the local police chief, or the direct local representative of the Ministry of the Interior. The Prefect is the direct representative of central government, and therefore takes responsibility for the *Questore*.

14 Cited in M. & P. Pallante, 86.

of the movement, it was impossible for the PCI leaders who consistently opposed an insurrection to get their positions accepted quickly.

Nevertheless, one of the first key setbacks suffered by the potential insurrectionary wave was the arrival and speech of the PCI Mayor of Genoa, Adamoli, who made a speech where the armoured cars had been captured, stressing the symbolic nature of the action and the need to remain within the law.¹⁵ Yet it was fitting that the major role appears to have been played by the Federation Secretary, who after refusing to attend a meeting which would have discussed the prospects for a revolution, went to see the city's Prefect:

The Prefect wanted me to speak to the people from the balcony of the Prefecture, something I refused to do. I had told the Prefect: "you must withdraw the police because if you let them run around there could be some clashes. We have given out instructions, and we're continuing to give out instructions, we are keeping the situation under control. You withdraw everything, and we'll tell people to go back to their party branches."

He had been in contact with Rome, where Scelba was in control; it was hard for him, much harder than for us. It is not surprising that he lost his authority, he had to accept; he saw that we had told people to go away. There would have been hell to pay if we hadn't made that decision, we did a really good job.¹⁶

What had happened in Genoa was that a mass movement had spontaneously seized power in a major Italian city. Although this movement had arisen spontaneously, in order to have taken power, a high level of political agreement and cohesion amongst the large numbers of people taking part must have existed. The demonstrators clearly had a "common purpose" in a broad political sense. Yet this cohesion was not brought about by Communist leaders, it was

15 Galli, 260.

16 Pallante, 87. Mario Scelba was the hard line Christian Democrat Minister of the Interior.

largely the work of the Communist rank and file and ex-partisans, brought together not only by their sudden anger but also by the model of the Resistance struggle and the successful insurrections of April 1945.

But the situation in Genoa was far closer to insurrection than it was in other northern towns and cities. We shall only look at one other city of the industrial triangle, Milan, as space precludes the possibility of presenting a detailed national panorama. Yet although the movement was strongest in northern cities, according to official figures between 14-16 July a total of eighteen people were killed and 204 wounded in clashes between police and demonstrators, and the clashes ranged from Taranto in the deep South to Porto Marghera just outside Venice.

The First Day in Milan

Although Milan may not have had such an immediately strong insurrectionary upsurge as Genoa, particularly as a result of PCI leaders' ambiguous behaviour, the protest movement here ended on perhaps a higher or more militant note than in Genoa. Another factor which helped to push events along was a kind of united front between the PCI, the Socialist Party (PSI), and the CGIL, the main trade union federation, dominated by Communists.

Furthermore, in Milan there was an even more recent military precedent than the 1943-45 Resistance struggle, namely the occupation of the Prefecture for two days in November 1947 in protest of the sacking of the last Italian Prefect who had been an active partisan fighter.¹⁷

At *Sesto San Giovanni*, the area with the greatest concentration of industrial workers, a mass meeting of 40 000 workers was held in the early afternoon, and in accordance with initial instructions,

17 See T. Behan, *The Long Awaited Moment: The Working Class and the Italian Communist Party in Milan, 1943-1948* (New York 1997), 205-10.

workers returned and occupied their factories. Yet on a broader level, the Milan edition of the PCI's daily newspaper *l'Unità*, distributed that afternoon, struck a strident tone demanding: "Down with this murderers' government!"¹⁸

The situation began to significantly change in the course of a mass rally held in the city's main square, *Piazza del Duomo*, during the early evening. These mass rallies, compared to those which occur today, were far more important due to the lack of television and the perceived untrustworthiness of radio bulletins. They were occasions when workers could glean the precise nature of an organisation's suggestions and respond in a unified manner. Here is an eyewitness account:

at 5 PM tens of thousands of workers filled *Piazza del Duomo*, the Social Democrat Mayor Greppi tried in vain to speak, whilst the PSI Secretary of the Trades Council Mariani, and the PCI Federation Secretary Alberganti, invited the crowd to "occupy the factories, fortresses of the working class"; Alberganti added: "this is not a strike that will finish like others."¹⁹

Another account confirms this last phrase, and also adds a reference made by Alberganti concerning the left's electoral defeat three months earlier: "In Italy on 18 April we were all counted, today we are being weighed. This strike will not finish either today or tomorrow."²⁰ Such extreme language could only encourage radical elements, and on Alberganti's part, his choice of words seemed to suggest sympathy with the latent insurrectionary tendencies.

In individual factories the response was similar to that of Genoa, although the same kind of spontaneous move towards outright insurrection was largely lacking. Here is an example from a light engineering factory, in which a Communist worker outlines the immediate response to the shooting and also admits to the existence

18 See G. Galli, *Storia del PCI* (Milan 1976), 319.

19 Galli, 1978, 257.

20 G. Bocca, *Palmiro Togliatti* (Rome-Bari 1973), 513.

of two tendencies within the party; those who wanted to wait for the “line” and those who wanted “to go further”:

straight away there was a ferment in the factory, everybody stopped work. It was a kind of uprising; everyone downed tools, an immediate strike and so on ... There was some resistance within the party: there were those who wanted to go beyond a strike and a demonstration, which they agreed with in any case, they wanted to go further.²¹

Another worker illustrates a quite well thought-out approach to the question of insurrection. Whilst light weapons held within a factory were probably sufficient for defensive purposes, a successful insurrection would involve the seizure of important positions within a major city, and so it was essential to at least possess heavy weapons: “we wanted to go to the *Carabinieri* barracks in *via Lamarmora* and get their armoured cars and tanks. But our leaders were there, who advised us not to take that course of action ... otherwise our intention was to get into the barracks, take their armoured vehicles, and then drive them around the city.”²²

Once again, their intentions were clear, but it is interesting to note that they did not carry their plans through because of the intervention of local Communist cadres. Indeed to a significant degree it would appear that local PCI cadres were far more moderate in Milan than in Genoa, where many local cadres actively supported the moves towards an insurrection. In Milan it appears that the flames of radicalism were temporarily stoked by major leaders. In any case, it is now time to look at the response of the PCI’s national leadership in Rome.

21 Interview with Gianni Ottolini conducted by the author, 1988. Ottolini was born in 1926 and joined the PCI in 1944.

22 Interview with Luigi Moretti conducted by the author, 1988. A Socialist, Moretti was born in 1923.

Political crisis in Rome

Throughout this first day of the crisis the initiative was clearly with the demonstrators in the major cities and towns. The government's only role was that of deciding what action the police and army should take; whereas, the PCI leadership faced what was arguably the greatest crisis in its history. With Togliatti hovering between life and death, leadership passed to Pietro Secchia, and to a lesser extent Luigi Longo. Secchia was the hard man of the Resistance, and was universally recognised to be the PCI leader with the closest relationship with the Kremlin. Yet with Togliatti incapacitated, and an unexpected and unpredictable mass movement in progress, leaders of over twenty years' standing failed to provide leadership in any real sense.

The first meeting of the leadership ended with the decision to publish an appeal to all Italians, which was printed in the emergency editions of the party's daily *l'Unità*, part of which read: "For internal peace, for Republican legality, for the freedom of citizens: for the resignation of this government of hunger, division and civil war!"²³

The leadership's first main response, therefore, was to call for the government to resign. Yet at the same time as issuing a call to action, they specified that any activity must stay within the law. The demand for either the government's or the Minister of the Interior's resignation was officially made by Gian Carlo Pajetta in Parliament during a late afternoon sitting: "not only as Communist MPs, but also as representatives of millions of Italian workers, we say to you: enough is enough — go away! Resign from government, you have done too much damage. Do not murder the Fatherland."²⁴ In the ensuing debate another PCI leader, Giorgio Amendola, compared Togliatti's shooting to the murder of the Socialist MP Giacomo

23 Cited in Galli, 1978, 254.

24 Camera dei Deputati, *Atti Parlamentari Anno 1948, Discussioni*, Vol. 1, (Rome 1948), 1 244.

Matteotti during the fascist period: "Murderers! Mussolini denied everything as well."²⁵ The response of the Christian Democrat Prime Minister, Alcide De Gasperi, both in Parliament and in the press, was to declare that the government would not resign. This effectively put the ball back in the PCI's court.

At this point it would appear that the CGIL union federation decided to place itself at the head of the movement by belatedly calling a general strike in the late afternoon. Such a move was important for the PCI, as it decreased its own responsibility for the strike. But a crucial mistake was made in the sense that no other demands were raised, so that the protest movement possessed no secondary fall-back demands, such as calling for an end to the wave of redundancies which were taking place at that time, or demands to stop the rise in the cost of living, or further insistence on the legal recognition of Management Councils — all issues which were keenly felt by many workers.

The PCI leadership, meanwhile, was in permanent session throughout the day. By early evening it must have known that the country was paralysed, with cities cordoned off with road blocks, factories under armed occupation, and widespread attempts to occupy telephone exchanges, power and radio stations. Togliatti's secretary, a witness to the leadership's meetings, has written that both Secchia and Longo were explicitly rejecting an insurrection by the late evening, although they had heard direct confirmation of its support from Edoardo D'Onofrio, Secretary of the Rome Federation, who reported that many people in the capital were asking him to "give the signal" to launch an insurrection.²⁶

Late in the evening, Pietro Secchia sent his brother Matteo to the Soviet Embassy, who soon returned with news that the Soviets would not support any illegal action, i.e. an insurrection. Although the leadership had said nothing publicly since early afternoon, they had to make some decisions internally. Shortly before midnight it

25 *Ibid.*, 1 248.

26 Caprara, 28.

was decided to send the most experienced members to the major trouble spots. Togliatti's secretary recalls the following advice which Longo gave Ilio Barontini, which characterised the leadership's role throughout the crisis: "If the movement increases let it grow, if it decreases suffocate it completely."²⁷ Whilst the leadership may have felt unable to disown the protest movement, they were even less enthusiastic about encouraging it and giving it a sense of purpose and direction.

However the PCI leadership also found itself dangerously exposed in the sense that the government was aware of its desire to bring the wave of protest to a close, but was also thankful that the PCI had not developed any secondary demands. De Gasperi, in a meeting held with the leader of the CGIL, Giuseppe Di Vittorio, on the afternoon of the second day, had "received the impression above all that the Communists want to bring the strike to an end, but they are waiting for a pretext so as to not lose face."²⁸

At this point the government decided to apply more pressure on the PCI, in the shape of a clear warning made by Mario Scelba, Minister of the Interior, during a Parliamentary debate held in the evening of the 15th: "we believe that it is the duty of the Government to guarantee the safety of all citizens, with all the means and powers at the disposal of a democratic regime, and through using the laws and powers of the State, to re-establish order wherever it has broken down."²⁹

The fact that PCI and CGIL leaders were unwilling to encourage the protest movement meant that they were effectively paralysed. It appears that no national directives were issued on the 15th, and despite the three emergency editions rushed out the day before, it also seems that *l'Unità* was not even published. Sometime during the 15th the CGIL leadership decided to call the strike off, but probably delayed the announcement due to the strength of feeling amongst their members.

27 *Ibid.*, 29.

28 Cabinet document, cited in Di Loreto, 309.

29 Camera dei Deputati, 1 282.

The Second Day in Genoa and Milan

Very little of this was likely to filter through to people involved in a semi-insurrection; most protesters probably did not pay a lot of attention to parliamentary debates as they had far more pressing questions to consider.

In most northern cities there was an uneasy stand-off between demonstrators and government forces during the second day, with neither side trying to gain supremacy. Although the protest movement may have lacked leadership, the second day nevertheless gave the protesters time to organise some kind of structure to their activities, and to begin to feel the weight of their collective power.

In Genoa power had been cut overnight, and there were sporadic attacks on police barracks and Christian Democrat party branches in city suburbs, together with further disarming of policemen and soldiers. A mobile police battalion was halted by barricades on the city outskirts during the morning and the Prefect declared a state of siege at 1 PM.³⁰ Soon after this a joint meeting of Communist, Socialist, Trades Council and Partisans Association leaders decided to call on their members to abandon their road blocks. The Mayor then went to visit the major barricades to invite people to go home.

In this fashion the initiative which demonstrators had held the day before was dissipated; the police and the armed forces began to circulate again, but this was not because they had managed to impose their will but because protesters had been persuaded to stop their most militant activities and let them pass.

Furthermore, most workers understood that an insurrection could only be successful on a national scale, and urgently awaited information and instructions that were never to come. They began to realise that the protest movement lacked both a national leader-

30 R. Del Carria, *Proletari Senza Rivoluzione*, Vol. 4 (Rome 1975), 201.

ship prepared to strengthen the wave of protest, and any precise immediate objectives.

In Milan, the trajectory of protest was, if anything, moving in the opposite direction. The Prefect cabled Rome at 4.05 PM on the 15th concerning the *Motta* factory, where occupying workers had been evicted by police just ten days earlier: "About 9 AM several thousand workers from nearby factories gathered outside the *Motta* building, and after a bitter conflict with police forces who were stationed inside the factory, penetrated the factory and set up defensive measures."³¹ The Trades Council journal naturally describes the same event in a different manner:

workers, who know they are in the right, and who are getting tired of allowing themselves to be beaten up, surround the armoured cars not leaving a yard of open space. The police are immobilised: no more violence, no more tear gas. Trades Council intervention with the Prefect did the rest — the police withdraw and leave the occupiers in peace.³²

Another occupation, at the *Bezzi* factory at Lambrate, which had recently been terminated by the police, was also resurrected after a mass battle with the police.

A member of the *Volante Rossa*, or Red Flying Squad, recalled his impressions of the second day in an interview conducted many years later:

Driving around the city we checked on where police and army vehicles were stationed. I remember that we had contacts with army detachments who were ready to support us if the need arose ... Furthermore a meeting had been planned with the rank and file of the police, and one presumed that not all of them would have gone over to the other side ... Just imagine that even without needing to fight the major public buildings had been occupied: the

31 Cited in Tobagi, 41.

32 R. Fenini, "Due giorni di epopea e la lotta non è finita" in the Milan Trades Council weekly, *Battaglie del Lavoro*, 20 July 1948.

City Council, the Regional Council, the Prefecture, the radio station.³³

What is interesting to note at this point is that, according to the Prefect at a series of workers' rallies held at 11 AM, "Speakers stressed the theme of the Government's responsibility and the necessity of continuing the strike until its resignation."³⁴ Left-wing leaders in Milan had perhaps not yet realised the difference between calling for the government to resign, and insisting that the strike continue until the government resigned. The message from the PCI and the CGIL in Rome had consistently been the first of the two formulations, whereas in Milan it had been slightly, but crucially, altered into something different.

The Milan Trades Council met again in the afternoon, and unanimously passed a motion which "unconditionally approves the motion passed by the Trades Council Executive Committee on the first day of the strike, and demands that a government of national unity replaces the actual government."³⁵ Although such a position was far from that of supporting an insurrection — indeed it was basically a rehash of the Resistance alliance and the 1945-47 coalition governments which had involved the PCI — as regards the movement in progress on the street it gave demonstrators a clear demand to hold out for.

Yet as the hours passed this demand was seen to be less and less likely to be achieved, and was to become quite a sterile slogan. And, as was the case of the national demand being limited to just the

33 C. Bermani, "La Volante Rossa," *Primo Maggio*, 9/10 (inverno 1977/78), 100. There is no corroborating evidence to suggest that the Prefecture had been occupied, although it is not surprising that somebody could not recall with absolute accuracy a list of public buildings occupied thirty years earlier. The *Volante Rossa* group, as the name implies, were an armed group of several dozen men which existed on the margins of the PCI from 1945-49. Some of them were party members, most were sympathisers, and their activity was concentrated on militarily defending left-wing buildings or meetings, and occasionally attacking fascist buildings or individuals.

34 Cited in Tobagi, 42.

35 Milan Trades Council archives, b. 60, f. 2; the minutes of the *Consiglio Generale delle Leghe*.

government's resignation, the Milan Trades Council had also failed to seriously address any secondary or local demands.

Nevertheless, in the streets further confrontations seemed to be looming. The Prefect reported that at 5 PM, "passenger transport began with the use of fourteen vehicles set aside by the Civil Transportation Inspectorate and escorted by policemen. But this was terminated after a few hours due both to the lack of passengers and the fact that following several incidents drivers did not want to continue providing the service."³⁶

There were even more worrying signs for the Prefect by the evening:

At 6 PM three under-age women were arrested in the vicinity of the *S. Ambrogio* barracks whilst they were trying to give guards type-written strips of paper which called on police not to fire on workers. In the evening persons unknown positioned posters in *via Torino*, which were immediately taken down, inviting policemen to join with the workers.³⁷

As was the case in Genoa, in Milan workers were still solidly in control of many factories. Indeed, as is the case with the *Vanzetti* factory, participation seems to have even increased by the second night: "The number of comrades occupying the factory *increased significantly*, and organisation is more disciplined."³⁸

The Final Day

In Genoa the end of the strike occurred with very few incidents. Despite the fact that "when Spano came to Genoa on the third day

36 Cited in Tobagi, 43.

37 *Ibid.*

38 Archives of the *Istituto Milanese per la Storia della Resistenza e del Movimento Operaio*, b. 56, f. 3. A factory report written by "E. M.," emphasis added.

[Velio Spano was the PCI leader sent up from Rome] ... Everything had stopped here; from Sarzana to Ventimiglia not even a bicycle was moving.³⁹ The reality of an insurrection, and the difficulties involved, had been posed more starkly in Genoa than elsewhere, and perhaps this was why, even on the second day, a sense of disorientation had set in. Yet the number of factory occupations and the fact that the city had, in effect, experienced an indefinite general strike is clear evidence of workers' commitment to continue the struggle. But, they found themselves without any real political leadership prepared to raise more specific demands or to insist on the continuation of the movement.

In Milan, the Trades Council's intransigent stance of the 15th was suddenly transformed into farce by the use of a ridiculous justification to end the protest: "to get more precise information on the situation, and to be able to judge things in greater detail."⁴⁰ Union leaders in Milan must have suddenly realised that they were seriously out of step with other cities and hurriedly tried to fall in line.

So it is not surprising, therefore, to learn that in Milan the decision to end the strike encountered widespread disbelief and resistance. *L'Unità*, whilst also calling on people to end their protest, also acknowledged that: "throughout the morning the combativity of the working class has grown, such that they arrived at the time established for the end of the strike with *the movement even better organised than it had been on the first day.*"⁴¹

Many workers believed that the call for a return to work was the result of government disinformation; whilst others smelt a rat within their own ranks. Thousands marched on the Trades Council building to demand an explanation. Yet somehow the police had got to the building before them, making workers very angry: "You've called the police to protect yourselves against us" shouted

39 Pallante, 87. The two towns mentioned are at the two extremities of the Ligurian coastline, and are about 150 miles apart.

40 Cited in Caprara, 68.

41 *L'Unità*, 16 July 1948, emphasis added.

some *Pirelli* workers.⁴² Others shouted: "We've started and we want to finish it."⁴³ The Trades Council denied they had called the police; yet local PCI leaders refused to speak to the demonstrators, as did Colombi, the PCI leader sent up from Rome. For several hours the building was virtually under siege.

It was with a very heavy sense of irony that the hardline Minister of the Interior Mario Scelba could tell Cabinet on the morning of the 17th: "Last night in Milan the police 'protected' Alberganti."⁴⁴ Giuseppe Alberganti was the Secretary of the PCI Federation, who just two days earlier had thundered to tens of thousands of workers in *Piazza del Duomo*, "this is not a strike that will finish like others," and indeed for him it ended with police protecting him from angry workers who had taken him at his word.

This is also how the movement generally ended throughout the country; with workers resentfully ceasing their occupations and protests, and with the country taking two or three days to get back to normal. The movement had not forced any concessions from the government, and with the climate of Cold War now gaining pace, over the coming years hundreds of participants would receive prison sentences.

Having outlined the course of events over these three days, we shall now move on to examine why the protest movement had been so widespread and so radical.

Why it Happened

What needs to be explained is why hundreds of thousands of people spontaneously downed tools, stopped their trams and trains, occupied their factories, armed themselves and built barricades and so on — all without having read any newspaper or leaflet or listened

42 Caprara, 69.

43 *Battaglie del Lavoro*, 20 July 1948.

44 Cabinet minutes, cited in Di Loreto, 316.

to any of their leaders. Why had insurrection been such a widespread unitary focus for so many people?

There are three main reasons for such an angry and widespread response, in ascending order of importance.

The April Election Defeat

Communist and Socialist leaders certainly expected to get a high vote in Italy's first postwar election, whereas in public they triumphalistically told their supporters they definitely expected to win a majority and therefore form a government — and even printed victory posters shortly before polling day. In these circumstances, the defeat was a bitter pill for left-wing activists to swallow.

The campaign itself had been unprecedented in its anti-Communist hysteria, with its religiously-inspired attacks against Communist atheism. To win the elections the Christian Democrats had resorted to mass psychological terrorism, conjuring up images of Cossack hordes watering their horses in the fountains of St Peter's Square in Rome — which was only one of a whole range of images invented to create fear and uncertainty. In his 1947 Christmas message Pope Pius XII had warned that "Anyone who would want to engage in practical activity, or provide their services, their abilities, their help or vote to parties and powers which deny God, is a deserter and traitor."⁴⁵ Furthermore, local Church organisations explicitly called for a Christian Democrat vote, and the Italo-American community was mobilised to directly influence relatives back in the homeland — just one tactic in a general strategy of convincing Italians that the country could not really survive without U.S. aid.⁴⁶

45 Cited in E. Di Nolfo, *Le Paure e le Speranze Degli Italiani* (Milan 1986), 262.

46 The bibliography on the April 1948 elections is vast. Amongst others, see F. Catalano, *Una Difficile Democrazia: Italia, 1943-48* (Messina-Florence 1980); R. Faenza & M. Fini, *Gli Americani in Italia* (Milan 1976); S. Fedele, *Fronte Popolare. La Sinistra e le Elezioni del 18 Aprile 1948* (Milan 1978);

Not surprisingly, therefore, the Christian Democrat vote increased by 4.5 million compared to 1946, giving them 306 Deputies, and an absolute majority in a Chamber of 574. But what was more surprising for activists on the left was the fall in the Socialist and Communist vote; the two parties ran separately in 1946 but as a joint ticket in 1948, yet taken as a whole they lost nearly a million votes compared to two years previously.

Much of this loss can be accounted for by the formation of a Social Democratic party during the intervening period, but in terms of industrial areas there was an even more worrying trend:

the Democratic Popular Front's (Socialist-communist) major losses occurred in the industrial areas of the north, where two years earlier the total of Socialist and Communist votes had nearly always reached an absolute majority. Out of a sample of 141 working class areas in the north, the Front suffered a loss of 14.9% compared to a national average of 8.8%.⁴⁷

The reasons for this drop in support will be dealt with below, yet the memory and bitterness of both the election campaign and the left's electoral defeat was still very fresh in people's minds, given that it had taken place just under three months earlier.

The extremely polarised nature of the campaign, and the start of the Cold War, had created an atmosphere which many militants likened to the beginning of a civil war. Rumours circulated about the possible banning of the PCI, and following such a definitive electoral defeat many activists started to think that there was no future in a parliamentary strategy. As the author of a recent major study of the PCI during this period has argued, the 18 April election

A. Gambino, *Storia del Dopoguerra* (Rome 1978); M. Isnenghi & S. Lanaro, *La Democrazia Cristiana dal Fascismo al 18 Aprile* (Padua-Venice 1978); R. Orfei, *L'Occupazione del Potere: I Democristiani, 1945-75* (Milan 1976); P. Scoppola, *La Proposta Politica di De Gasperi* (Bologna 1977); S. Woolf, ed., *The Rebirth of Italy* (London 1972).

47 M. Legnani, *L'Italia dal 1943 al 1948* (Turin 1973), 206.

defeat had the effect of “often provoking the worsening of political differences, and providing ‘revolutionary’ tendencies with arguments which undoubtedly gained a hearing.”⁴⁸

A week later a *carabiniere*, trying to enforce a police ban on marches to commemorate Liberation day — 25 April — was shot and killed by demonstrators in Milan. It seemed that “one part of the party felt that the defeat was a kind of proof of the impossibility of gaining power through legal channels, thereby drawing the opposite conclusion of the need to ‘take up the machine gun again.’”⁴⁹ As one PCI worker in Milan has put it: “The idea that there ought to have been a continuation of the armed struggle was inside all of us ... It was a treasure we wanted to keep hold of just in case.”⁵⁰

Differences of opinion also emerged during a leadership meeting held eight days after the election, in which Velio Spano argued: “the fact is that after 18 April provocative propaganda and individual persecution have become more threatening than before. My view is that we have to respond to this with a similar level of violence.”⁵¹ Despite the “extremist” formulation given here, it should be remembered that no PCI leader ever argued consistently that the party move onto a more militaristic or insurrectionary footing — indeed as we have already seen Spano played a key role in defusing the movement in Genoa. However the fact that a leader of Spano’s calibre — born in 1905, member of PCI youth wing from 1923, imprisoned for five years under fascism, and a Spanish civil war veteran — could engage in such rhetoric was nevertheless a sign of deep disquiet.

48 R. Martinelli, *Storia del Partito comunista italiano*, vol. 6. Il “Partito Nuovo” dalla Liberazione al 18 Aprile (Turin 1995), 364.

49 *Ibid.*, 356.

50 Interview with Marcello Corinaldesi conducted by the author, 1988. Born in 1906, he joined the PCI in 1943.

51 Martinelli, 361.

The Moderation of the PCI in the Postwar Period

Workers had arguably played the major role in the Resistance movement, which in itself was a key factor in the defeat of fascism and Nazism in Italy. Indeed it has been estimated that by April 1945 there was a partisan army of up to 300 000 people in Italy, which forced the German and fascist forces to station fourteen of their 32 divisions behind their front line with the Allies.⁵²

Furthermore, many large towns and cities had successfully launched insurrections which forced the surrender of major German and fascist formations, an event which generally occurred a few days before the arrival of Allied forces, leading to a situation in which partisans briefly held direct power.

The sacrifices which had been made in this period, and the hopes which had been raised, were soon to be cruelly dashed. The Allies severely limited newspaper publication and mass rallies, and the trials of major fascists often ended with very light sentences being handed down. Furthermore, the tens of thousands of known fascists who had intimidated people in localities and workplaces, together with the fascist civil servants notorious for their corruption and hostility towards the general public, were by and large given amnesties. For example the release of the ex-prefect of Genoa, Carlo Emanuele Basile, provoked a widespread sense of outrage in August 1947. During the war he had apparently been responsible for the deportation of 6 000 workers to Germany and the execution of 689 anti-fascists, and the sentence of twenty years' imprisonment was felt to be far too lenient when it was handed down in June 1945. But he was released after serving just over two years of his sentence.

52 See R. Battaglia & G. Garritano, *Breve storia della Resistenza italiana* (Rome 1964); G. Bocca, *Storia dell'Italia Partigiana* (Rome-Bari 1977); P. Secchia, *Il Pci e la guerra di liberazione. Ricordi, documenti inediti e testimonianze*, in *Annali Feltrinelli*, anno xiii (Milan 1973).

The PCI took an active part in all these measures, as it was one of the major parties in the government coalition of 1945-47. Indeed Togliatti as Minister of Justice signed the amnesty decree absolving fascists of past crimes. Militants on the ground strongly disapproved of the PCI's moderation. One manifestation of this dissent, concerning fascists' evasion of justice, was the number of political assassinations which took place in the postwar period. In recent years there have been attempts to exaggerate and criminalise such aspects, renaming the Emilia Romagna region as "the triangle of death."⁵³ Yet these acts of violence — together with the brief and peaceful protest actions of partisans returning to the hills — were clear evidence that the rank and file believed that they had to launch actions regardless of the views of their party leaderships.

Whilst the political system moved towards a standard bourgeois democracy, economically the country began to develop into a conventional free market system, strongly dependant on the United States.

The high hopes that had existed in 1945 began to be transformed into passivity and cynicism by 1947, hence the left's bad performance in 1948. Furthermore, the PCI's response to the ejection of the Communist and Socialist parties from government in May 1947 was extremely muted. The following statement, made by Togliatti at a Central Committee meeting on 3 July 1947, also illustrates, in a rather incongruous fashion, the leadership's overriding concern of maintaining an alliance with the middle classes:

I believe that ... the most favourable element for us has been the fact that we left government without launching the slogan of an insurrection, something which has led to a growth in our party's prestige amongst specific social strata, and especially amongst the middle classes, which would not have occurred if we had declared a general strike as soon as we left the government.⁵⁴

53 See N.S. Onofri, *Il Triangolo Rosso* (1943-1947). La verità sul dopoguerra in Emilia-Romagna attraverso i documenti d'archivio (Roma 1994).

54 Cited by A. Agosti, "Il partito comunista italiano e la svolta del 1947," *Studi Storici*, 1 (1990), 59.

The price that the PCI had to pay for reassuring the middle classes was the demoralisation of the working class. The vast majority of the hopes and expectations which had arisen after twenty years of fascism had not been achieved. The Christian Democrat Prime Minister De Gasperi had freed himself of the PCI and PSI without suffering any significant setbacks, and both his party and big business now had far more room for manoeuvre in enacting the economic and political measures they believed were necessary.

The dissent which had been building within the party and amongst its periphery suddenly found a focus in July 1948; but this explosion was also the result of a more subtle and devious tactic employed by the PCI leadership in the immediate postwar years, that of *doppiezza*.

***Doppiezza* or Duplicity**

The following comments are a good illustration of the nature of *doppiezza*. After the events described above had ended, a PCI worker commented in Genoa: "At that moment people believed that the real party line was emerging, yet the central leadership of the party immediately fought against this line, circumscribing the protest."⁵⁵ And as a PCI trade union leader commented: "This was the situation in Genoa; there was a double line. Not one instruction was received ... There were two policies, also at a national level. Comrades' analysis was this: we are one step away from taking power — why don't we make the effort and take that step?"⁵⁶

The theory, which was never spelled out in public for obvious reasons, and only mentioned briefly by PCI leaders to selected audiences, was the following: parliamentary democracy was simply a Trojan Horse, which would be discarded when they gave the signal to take up arms again and resume the second-half of the class

55 Pallante, 84.

56 *Ibid.*, 86.

struggle, which had come to a halt in April 1945. In this fashion the PCI's moderation became acceptable to its more radical membership:

The party's caution over reforms and the line of national unity were both viewed as tactics to not exacerbate a situation in which the balance of forces should not be challenged. There was an enthusiastically positive evaluation of this policy as it was seen to be very clever, given that it confused class enemies who could then be attacked by launching the revolution at the most opportune moment. This is why there was a total lack of opposition as regards the general [party] line, whereas contrasts on aspects which were considered to be secondary or merely temporary still existed. This is also why positions which rejected the party's strategy, put forward mainly by socialist but also some anarchist workers, encountered such difficulties.⁵⁷

In other words a deliberate ambiguity was tolerated within the party as regards future intentions. Here is another useful description by Giorgio Galli:

In the PCI it is perfectly acceptable to believe that Togliatti does or doesn't follow Lenin; it is reasonable to think that he really believes in what he says or that he thinks exactly the opposite, or that Secchia agrees or disagrees with him, or that the party is or isn't aiming at a revolution in Italy; those who believe these things, however, must not express them publicly ... they can discuss these opinions with the Branch Secretary or maybe with the City Secretary or a member of the Central Committee, but they can not raise this in debate or discussion.⁵⁸

This enabled the leadership to attract and hold onto many of the most radical elements of the working class within the party, and these militants themselves were given some basis to hope that the time would come when the leadership would order an insurrection.

57 R. Anfossi, *La Resistenza Spezzata* (Roma 1995), 137-8.

58 Galli, 1978, 132.

In concrete terms, in July 1948 this meant that many people waited for the PCI to give the order to rise up in revolution, but the PCI leadership never had any intention of doing this.

In some ways it is surprising that there was such a widespread and naive faith in *doppiezza*; but this can largely be explained by considering the nature of party membership. During the twenty years of fascist rule the working class had had no opportunity for real political debate, but they had also had no opportunity to notice the evolution in the PCI's strategy. "Communism," as such, had never been defined or debated in any great detail and for many activists, given the twenty year lack of discussion which fascism had created, the dominant conception of communism was likely to be that of 1917 — that of an armed working class seizing power and creating a new form of government.

Yet the PCI leadership had abandoned this perspective in the late 1920s, when it had effectively become a mouthpiece for the Kremlin's foreign policy. The revolutionary internationalism of Lenin had been transformed into Stalin's "Socialism in one country," and in the postwar years many western Communist parties were to slowly and tentatively embark on their own "national roads to socialism." The nature of this evolution within the PCI during the fascist period only affected the leadership based outside Italy, as the party only had at most a few hundred isolated members operating in Italy during the fascist period. For example only 28 delegates came from Italy to the Fourth PCI congress held near Cologne in April 1931. Pietro Secchia has estimated that there were only about 30 PCI members active in Italy at this time, and to avoid arrest they operated according to strict conspiratorial rules.⁵⁹

Antonio Roasio, another key PCI leader in this period, later admitted that by the mid 1930s:

59 P. Secchia, L'azione svolta dal partito comunista in Italia durante il fascismo, 1926-32. Ricordi, documenti inediti e testimonianze, in *Annali Feltrinelli*, anno xi (Milan 1969), 375.

Throughout the country the party's organisations had fallen in on themselves, the main activity was distributing our publications, which often arrived late and carried arguments which didn't correspond with reality ... there was an attempt to cover things up by using extreme slogans, which had very little impact on the members working in Italy, and to shift the blame for problems through giving examples of opportunism and the scarce assimilation of Leninism and Stalinism amongst our members.⁶⁰

In other words, given the numbers involved the "Bolshevisation" or more accurately "Stalinisation" of the PCI occurred without the knowledge of the Italian working class.

Even during the Resistance movement, the PCI had either been unable to tell many sympathisers, or even to fully convince them, of their abandonment of working-class revolution in favour of the parliamentary road to socialism, or "progressive democracy" as it was called at the time. Nevertheless, the difference compared to the 1920s was now explicit, as deputy leader Luigi Longo argued at a clandestine conference in November 1944:

we are fighting today not for the dictatorship of the proletariat but for a progressive democracy, something which is distinct not so much for its democratic content, but above all for its social content. Progressive democracy doesn't radically damage the principle of exploitative capitalist property relations as the dictatorship of the proletariat does. On the contrary, it preserves individual peasants' private property and protects citizens' individual ownership of the income of their own labour, their own savings, and artefacts and assets of personal use, as well as the right of hereditary ownership of such assets.

Today we are fighting for progressive democracy because we believe that in the current political conditions in Italy, it offers the only situation in which it is possible to create national unity amongst all democratic and progressive forces, a unity indispensable and necessary for a successful prosecution of the war of liberation, as well as for reconstruction once liberation is

60 A. Roasio, "Note sulla teoria del partito dal '37 al '43," *Critica Marxista*, 2/3 (1972), 177-8.

achieved. Today the struggle for progressive democracy is the only national policy, because through the unity of the entire population in a constructive and positive effort, it permits the overcoming of the catastrophe into which fascism has thrust us, and allows a united and consensual Italy to present itself in the face of all those who would intend to threaten freedom and independence.⁶¹

The nationalist tones and parliamentary strategy outlined in such a speech were not only totally different to the Communist movement of the early 1920s in an objective sense, they were also totally new concepts for those workers who had recently decided to become members or sympathisers of a Communist party. And the pressing needs of the Resistance struggle meant that this anomaly was never resolved within the party. Much of this disagreement and confusion carried on into the early postwar years, as can be seen in the widespread habit of holding onto arms after Liberation, in the face of the PCI's call that all weaponry be handed in to the authorities.

The rapid growth of the party also made it impossible for the more experienced members to convince the rank and file. For example, membership of the Milan Federation rose from 15 000 at Liberation in April 1945, to 84 000 on 30 June and 110 000 in October.⁶² In short, in 1948 most industrial workers closely associated the party with armed revolution, and many party members still believed that the party would one day give the order to seize power. In any case, the hopes which *doppiezza* raised amongst many PCI members and supporters were revealed as a cynical deception in July 1948, one of the many employed by Stalinist leaders around the world for several decades.

61 Cited in Secchia, 1973, 673.

62 This is taken from a document entitled "Rapporto politico — organizzativo 25 Aprile — 30 giugno 1945," and held at the PCI's central archives, the Istituto Gramsci, 089.409. See also Vento, in F. Levi, P. Rugafiori and S. Vento, 117.

If such cruel deceptions were enacted, then the Stalinist nature of the PCI needs to be stressed, and there was no greater embodiment of Stalinism than the PCI's leader for nearly forty years, Palmiro Togliatti. Since his death in 1964 the PCI has successfully managed to create a myth about his supposed independence from the Kremlin, yet a brief examination of his activities reveals this to be an excellent example of a rewriting of history. During his long stay in Moscow during the fascist period, Togliatti was the Secretary of the Third International for nearly ten years, in a period which included the Moscow show trials.

His activities in Spain during the civil war have never been fully explained. In view of what is now known of Stalinist repression of anti-fascists, Togliatti's final dispatch from Spain in May 1939 makes for chilling reading: "Trotskyist agitation has recently changed in content: it has abandoned its pseudo-revolutionary demagogy and has been accusing the Communist party of being the only obstacle to the attaining of peace. At the same time arrests have revealed the reinforcing of the links between illegal Trotskyite organisations and the *Falange*."⁶³

Given the heterogenous nature of the PCI during the 1940s, and the easy availability of weaponry, it is not surprising to learn that the dozens of murders of Trotskyite and Bordighist activists are suspected to be the work of PCI members. The similarities with Spain are almost too superfluous to mention. It was only after the aborted insurrection of 1948 that the PCI leadership were able to instil some degree of ideological uniformity within the party and transform it into a fully Stalinist mass party — a reality which is often overlooked by most observers, who somehow project backwards the break with the Kremlin, which only began very timidly with the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.

63 Cited in Anfossi, 117.

Conclusion

So was a revolution possible in July 1948? We shall never know the answer to this kind of question. Any bid for power is a gamble whose result cannot be known in advance. What one can say is that the protest movement, which succeeded in paralysing the country, showed tremendous power. One then needs to imagine how much stronger such a movement would have been if it was coordinated and directed at a national level, rather than just being a series of spontaneous local explosions.

The notion that the PCI did not have the strength to launch an insurrection is contradicted by the fact that weaker forces, principally the Bolsheviks in 1917, gained power from a smaller base of support. Before the October revolution the Bolshevik party probably enjoyed about 25% support in electoral terms, whereas once it had gained an absolute majority of votes in the Moscow and St Petersburg Soviets decided to launch an insurrection.

In 1948 the PCI had over two million members, it also enjoyed roughly two-thirds' support in elections of a trade union movement of over six million members. The issue here is not so much whether all these members or supporters were necessarily in favour of an insurrection, but that the basis of support for insurrection clearly existed within the Italian working class. It is pretty much a rule that objective data concerning support for a revolution illustrate minority support *before* an insurrection, and that revolutions become movements of the majority of the working class in the course of the revolutionary movement itself. Apart from the Russian revolution, one can consider other examples such as the revolt of workers in Barcelona in 1936, the first protests in Budapest in 1956, the uprising in Timisoara in Rumania in 1989, and so on.

The rebuttal of an insurrectionary hypotheses automatically involves discussion of the likelihood of American intervention. Although this would certainly have been a distinct possibility, if a major country such as Italy had erupted in revolution then the Americans would have found themselves severely stretched, what with the civil war that was already raging in Greece, the Berlin

airlift, the impending war between Israel and the Arab states, the collapse of Chiang Kai-shek's army in China, and so on. A seizure of power in Italy would have also galvanised radical elements in other European countries which were experiencing severe social tension, such as Belgium and France. Yet these tactical discussions often miss the point, in the sense that the PCI had long rejected the perspective of a frontal assault on capitalism.

In many ways to define both the Resistance movement and the July 1948 uprisings as "betrayed revolutions," as much of the New Left did in the 1970s, is to miss the point, given that the PCI had never promised to launch a revolution along the lines of 1917. What the successful insurrection of 1945 represents is a kind of "interrupted revolution,"⁶⁴ which could only be successfully completed if large masses of people were guided by a large and influential revolutionary party.

In 1945 the PCI only wanted to destroy fascism and end German occupation, and it launched an insurrection to achieve those aims alone. In July 1948 those two objectives had already been achieved and for the masses at the barricades the enemy was solely bourgeois political democracy and a capitalist economy. The PCI leadership fully accepted to work within this framework and consequently disowned the challenge to state power; in effect the "betrayal" of working-class revolution which occurred had taken place around twenty years earlier, unknown to most of the protagonists. This was Stalin's long-term transformation of communism on a world-scale from an internationalist revolutionary movement into a nationally-based accommodation with capitalism.⁶⁵

64 See for example the title of one of the chapters in R. Del Carria, *Proletari senza rivoluzione*, "The war of liberation against fascists and Germans as an example of an interrupted revolution."

65 See D. Hallas, *The Comintern* (London 1985) for an account of the Third International, and J. Molyneux, *What is the Real Marxist Tradition?* (London 1985) for an analysis of the various strands of world communism during the twentieth century. See the relevant articles in *International Socialism* (London) 52 (Autumn 1991) and 55 (Summer 1992) for a discussion of Leninism and Stalinism.

The most important thought the events of July 1948 should leave us with is the necessity to distinguish between different kinds of communism, and the aim of this article has been to demonstrate the existence of *two* different conceptions of communism in Italy during this period: the communism which believed in parliamentary change and the communism which believed in revolutionary change.

The dissolution of the PCI in 1991 has placed the definition of communism under the microscope once again, with the creation of an openly social democratic Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) and the more traditional Communist Refoundation. And despite the pronouncements over the last few years concerning "the end of history" and the existence of a "new world order," the combined vote of these two parties is still not much lower than that of the old PCI. More important still, Communist activists were the backbone of a strike movement which constituted the rock which holed and sank Silvio Berlusconi's right-wing government in 1994.

For these activists the need for a "Refoundation" of communism has recently become quite stark. The election of a "left" coalition government in April 1996, in which the PDS is the largest party, and which is supported externally by Communist Refoundation, obliges many Communists to urgently re-assess their ideas. The reason for this is that the government is committed to public sector cutbacks and privatisations — not for nothing did the Italian stock exchange rise by 5% the morning after the left's victory. In other words the debate over what communism is and what it isn't, what has constituted communism and what hasn't, who has really represented it and who hasn't, is far from over.